

## A Discourse on the Perspectives of Development and Underdevelopment: The Case of Nigeria

**Halliru Sani Balarabe**

PhD. Candidate, Department of Sociology, Bayero University Kano, Kano State

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to raise a discourse on the concepts of development and underdevelopment and discuss them based on the theories of development and their perspectives. The terms have been evaluated using modernization and dependency theories. The former theories see development as synonymous with the western models. The latter theories argued that the backwardness of the underdeveloped countries is an outcome global economic inequality and exploitation. The study adopts literature/desk review, in secondary data were reviewed to address the study objective. As a multidimensional concept, development is conceived as any significant change that involves economic, socio-cultural, political and even environmental aspects of a country. Issues of gender and economic wellbeing and equality, political inclusion or participation, social justice, and peace and stability are all important when it comes to the subject of development. Underdevelopment, on the other hand, is the antithesis of development represented with backward indicators, such as low per capita income/GDP, low level of literacy, and low level of technology, weak economic and political institutions, political instability and fragile statehood. In view of this, the paper concludes that development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin.

**Keywords:** Dependency Theories; Development; Modernization Theory; Nigeria; Underdevelopment.



This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license

### 1.0 Introduction

Development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin. The practical link between the two concepts is crystallized in the manner through which the development of individuals, groups and nations is largely dependent on the degree to which they liberated from elements of underdevelopment in space and time (Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2022). During the period following the First World War a massive scale struggle for national liberation began to spread widely among the colonial and semi-colonial areas. In a number of places, these nationalist struggles led to the emergence of independent political units during the interwar period. For the most part, however, the colonial areas have been decolonized since the Second World War; becoming Independent

countries largely on the basis of their colonial heritage –without regard to ethnicity, language, or other aspects of cultural homogeneity (Kim, 1975).

Since the Second World War, the newly Independent countries have consciously tried to construct some basis for national autonomy and eliminate the legacy of imperialist domination. While some of these new states took to the path of socialist reconstruction, others have been shaping their economies and social structures on the basis of “free market economies”. These newly independent countries are described popularly as the “Third World” or simply as the “new states” (Kim, 1975: 1). They are also characterized as “underdeveloped countries” and have been recently, in a more diplomatic sense, called “developing countries” or “less developed countries” (Myrdal, 1968: I, as cited in Kim, 1975: 1).

Rostow’s widely read book *The Stages of Economic Growth*, underscore that economic underdevelopment is only a stage that nations pass through on their way to becoming rich. But the data we have at hand tell a different story. The income gap between rich and poor countries has grown dramatically since World War II and shows few signs of shrinking (Seligson, 2014). For this period, then, there is clear evidence to support the old adage that “the rich get richer.” It is not true, however, that the poor get poorer, not literally anyway, but this would be a perverse way of looking at the situation (Sani, Mukhtar & Muhammad, 2015). Whatever the case, there is the division of the world countries into developed and underdeveloped. Some scholars blamed the underdevelopment of the third world countries to some internal problems like lack of motivation and other socio-economic and environmental challenges (Kim, 1975), while other scholars view their underdevelopment from the perspectives of exploitation and global hegemony (Jamri, 2009). There are scholars who view that problem of underdevelopment in countries like Nigeria is the fault of their leaders (Radda, 2008). Thus, to address the challenges of development in Nigeria, the leaders should be credible leaders with accountability fairness, sincerity and vision.

In view of this background, this paper will provide a discourse on the concepts of development and underdevelopment and discuss them based on the theoretical perspectives of development and underdevelopment using Nigeria as a case study.

## **2.0 Development and Underdevelopment**

**2.1 The Concept of Development:** Development is a concept that went through various interpretations over time. According to Rodney (1972: 9), development refers to expansion of the economic capacity of a country and of the state of society and its institutions as whole. In simple terms, development signifies progress in human well-being, used to be equated with economic growth, but it is now widely acknowledged that this is a very inadequate characterisation. As long noted, average per capita incomes are one important means to achieve such progress, but not the only one. Not only does average income fail to capture distribution across households, but it also may not be a good indicator of many important aspects of human well-being, such as people’s health, education or their security (Jamri, 2019).

One of the earliest development indices that provide alternative to the above definition is the PQLI (Physical Quality of Life Index). Sen has suggested that the development objective should be the enhancement of people’s capabilities, or the opportunities open to people of being and doing a variety of things. UNDP’s Human Development Report defined the objective succinctly as enlarging people’s choices in a way which enables them to lead longer, healthier and fuller lives (Stewart, as cited in Jamri, 2019). The UNDP developed the concept of ‘human security’ to encompass not just the achievement of minimal levels of material needs, but also the absence of severe threats to them of an economic or political kind: ‘Job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime – these are the emerging concerns of security all over the world’ (Sani *et al.* 2017).

In a seminar paper, Dudley Seers (as cited in Augustine, 2018: 1) conceives of development as not only involving economic growth but also conditions in which people in a country have adequate food, jobs and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. According to Seers, the questions to ask about a country's development are threefold: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to inequality? What has been happening to unemployment? Seers noted that if these three aspects: poverty, unemployment and inequality have witnessed significant decline, then there had been fundamental development for the country involved. In a post-thesis review eight years later in 1977, Seers asserted that he had left an essential element which must now be added: 'self-reliance' (Augustine, 2018: 1). In a nutshell, development is any significant change that involves economic, socio-cultural, political and even environmental aspects of a country. Issues of gender and economic wellbeing and equality, political inclusion or participation, social justice, and peace and stability are all important when it comes to the topic of development.

In fact, Mukhtar, Mukhtar, Muhammad & Abdullahi (2014) contended that, development is an evolutionary concept. It can take the form of biological, social, physical and even structural changes or transformation. Development in this context is the national development in terms of political, economic, and other aspects related to social existence like the peace and security. This is because the political economy of any nation owes much to the peace and security. Without the peace, it will be difficult for country to achieve progress or development

**2.2 The Concept of Under-Development:** Underdevelopment, according to Rodney (1972), is a term only meaningful in comparison to levels of development; when one group appears to become wealthier, it happens with a contrasting outcome. Another crucial component of underdevelopment is a dimension of exploitation of one country by another (p 21). Acheoah (2018) conceptualizes underdevelopment as the antithesis of development manifestly in backward indicators: low per capita income/GDP; the preponderance of rural and agricultural populations; low literacy levels; the predominance of inferior technology; weak economic and political institution; underdeveloped political culture; the prevalence of a ruling class that stresses and rationalizes values that are incompatible with socio-economic and political development as well as fragile statehood (Acheoah, 2018).

Characteristics of underdevelopment include extreme poverty; disparity in delivery of social services including formalized education systems, medical facilities, and safe drinking water; poor or lacking infrastructure and governance capacity; and an environment of physical insecurity. All of these factors can collectively lead to a poverty trap, in which poverty is widespread, cyclical, and intractable. The combination of these challenges contributes to a vicious circle of underdevelopment and fragility, which can overwhelm a state's operational capacity to deliver services and hinder long-term economic growth (International Peace Institute, 2009).

Over the past two decades, global economic integration and growth have contributed to poverty alleviation and higher living standards around the world. Trade, capital flows, foreign aid, technological improvements, and idea-sharing across international borders have enhanced human development and economic prospects in many developing countries. Yet, too many countries continue to suffer from widespread poverty and underdevelopment (International Peace Institute, 2009). Progress towards reaching the globally endorsed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been uneven. With notable exceptions like China, most countries are predicted to fall short of meeting most MDGs by the target date of 2015, with fragile states lagging furthest behind. At the regional level, sub-Saharan Africa is behind on all eight goals, while South Asia is struggling to meet the MDGs that concern human development.

### **3.0 Theories of Development**

A litany of theories and perspectives have been propounded and formulated to explain the factors behind the development of some regions and the underdevelopment of other regions and proffer solutions to addressing the underdevelopment crisis in Third world Countries for which virtually all Sub-Saharan Africa fall into (Augustine, 2018). These theories include Modernization Theory, the Dependency school, the Third World Analysis and the Globalization Perspectives (Augustine, 2018). For the purpose of this paper, the theories of modernization and the third way and the dependency perspectives will be reviewed.

#### **3.1 Modernization Theory**

Modernization theory presents the Western models of economic development as the quickest and surest way of taking underdeveloped countries out of their underdevelopment crisis. Its postulations interpose the Western societies as a 'mirror' reflecting before the underdeveloped societies a future they should aspire (Augustine, 2018: 2). Modernization Theory is amongst the earliest theories of development and remedies to underdevelopment. The theory emerged as a response to growing concern on the subject of development. That is why the origin of modernization theories is usually traced to the aftermath of the Second World War (Rapley, 2007), yet Harrison (2005) believed that, the beginning of modernization theory can be traced to antiquity, when the notion of evolution was first used with reference to human society, however, it was not until the eighteenth century that the evolution of societies was studied in a systematic way (Jamri, 2019).

As observed by Sani et al. (2015), intense concern about the subject of development around the world is the main reason why the modernization represents the buzzword of the global agenda from the period immediately following World War II. The post-World War II was the period in which Western world began to be confronted with the challenge of rebuilding countries, especially those that had been shattered by war. To successfully face this challenge, international institutions, such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, later called World Bank, were established to accomplish the objectives of industrializing backward or less developed and war stricken countries.

#### **3.2 Third World and Dependency Theories**

This section covers the contributions of scholars who have sentiments of the Third World and underdeveloped societies largely of the Latin American origin who emerged as a radical and offered counter perspectives to the Modernization School. A leading exponent of this School of Thought was Raul Prebisch who enquired into the dialectical growth in wealth between the developed and under-developed, Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, Immanuel Wallenstein and Samir Amin. They argued that the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) covering Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in Asia and Latin America did not witness underdevelopment until their coming into contact with the Western Societies (Slave trade and Colonialism) this altered their development trajectory in their course of nation building, thus, they began to experience arrested development (Augustine, 2018).

They argued that incorporation of third world economies into the international capitalist system orchestrated a structure of inequality skewed disproportionately against the Third world (Frank, 1981). They argued that the poor nations provide the resources, cheap labor and consumer markets for the wealthy nations which ensured the development of the developed nations. The trajectory of this relations is that development becomes two sides of the same coin; one side develops, while the other under develops. Challenging the Linear model of Modernization Theorists Immanuel Wallenstein in his World System Theory argued that not every nation can develop simultaneously. The World System theory argues that the development of underdevelopment is a simultaneous phenomenon in a character of one regional development and

surpluses produces it's under development and deficit counterparts elsewhere in another region (Augustine, 2018).

The Guyanese Marxist historian Walter Rodney with reference to his magnum opus “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, nostalgically asserted that the decisiveness of the period of colonialism and its negative impacts on Africa sprang from the fact that Africa lost power -economic and political (Rodney, 1972). Rodney (1972) argued that when one society is forced to relinquish power entirely to another society that in itself is a form of underdevelopment. Prebisch considering the contradiction in the trade relations between developed and underdeveloped nations began to question the notion that countries can benefit equally and that mutual profitability in trade between developed and developing nations. Examining the relationship from the standpoint of balance of payment rather than resource allocation, he asserted that there is a tendency for the terms of trade to shift against agricultural product and its impact on balance of payment far outweighs its benefits with respect to the efficient allocation of resources (Thomas, 1994). Using this argument as a parameter, Prebisch formulated a number of hypotheses which came to be known as the ‘Prebisch Doctrine’ (Thomas, 1994).

Inspired by the world economic crisis of the 1930s and his experience as ECOSOC for Latin America and UNCTAD, Prebisch became concerned with two distinct but interrelated issues:

- The first deals with the transfer of the benefits of trade from the developing to the developed countries because of the adverse terms of trade being experienced by the former;
- The second relates to the balance of payment effect of differences in the elasticity of demand for agricultural and mineral products vis-à-vis secondary products and the fluctuating earnings and foreign exchange shortages it induces for developing countries.

Advancing the arguments, Prebisch declared that:

International division of labor is governed by an asymmetry in which developed nations dominate the dynamic industries from the center while the developing countries are impoverished because their exports of agricultural and mineral raw materials from the periphery by extension while these produce of developing countries are bought at under quoted prices, those of developed countries of the center are sold and bought at over quoted prices thereby allowing the latter to take advantage of the differences (Quoted in Augustine, 2018: 3).

According to Prebisch, the phenomenon is cyclical in character. Corroborating Prebisch, notes that not only is the system sustained by unequal levels of technological acquisition, but also, progress and the distribution of the benefits accruing from science and technology (Augustine, 2018: ). The development of the means of production determines of the state and patterns of development experienced by any society.

#### **4.0 Development and Underdevelopment as Pendulum of a Clock: The Case of Nigeria**

There is a basic assumption on a dialectical relationship between development and underdevelopment in some parts of the world. Kim (1975) described these underdeveloped countries with certain characteristics which distinguish them from developed countries. These characteristics, as described by a number of scholars include the observation that less developed countries are technologically having a predominance of human and animal power over inanimate power (such as steam power, electricity, or other sources) as a means of production. Secondly, these countries are economically having low levels of labor productivity and per capita Income, a predominance of the primary sector over the manufacturing sector and relatively low development of organized large-scale machine based industry (Kim, 1975).

Ecologically, also, the third world nations are having a low level of urbanization. Where they have the urban areas, the development of the cities is characterized by urban sprawling, disorganisation

and insecurities (Jalingo, Baba & Mukhtar, 2017). Barau (2006) observes that the challenges of urbanization in Africa are obviously more burdensome because, according to him, Africa is the most urbanizing global region. African cities are characterized by plethora of ironies. One of them is that slums have engulfed and outnumbered the core planned areas of its cities. The second is that, many formal cities in Africa lack essential infrastructure and services. Thirdly, slums by their characteristics hold numerous number of potential electorate population. Like in many developing countries, Nigeria's urban population has expanded rapidly over the years and will continue to grow relatively fast in the coming decades, although the rate at which the urban growth takes remains a matter of debate (Bloch, Monroy, Fox & Ojo, 2015).

Socio-demographically, the less developed African countries have low level of living standard for the mass of people as is manifested in specific deficiencies (insufficient food-intake, bad housing conditions). In other words, there inadequate public and private provisions for hygiene and medical care, and inefficient educational and cultural facilities, massive Illiteracy, low level of health and nutrition, and rapid population growth due to high fertility rates (Kim, 1975). However, these problems are faults of the leaders. Nigeria is one of these countries in which corruption and mismanagement lead to increasing low living standard for the vast majority the citizenry (Radda, 2008).

Lastly, socio-culturally and psychologically, there is a prevalence of low levels of work discipline, a lack of punctuality and orderliness, superstitious beliefs and irrational attitudes, and fatalism (Kim, 1975). However, the reason why these countries are less developed is the influence of the capitalist nations, who for centuries have been exploiting the former (Rodney, 1972). In other words, Frank (1975: 10) mentioned that "development and underdevelopment are two different sides of a universal historical process". This assertion is trues because many scholars (Frank, 1975; Alaye, 2019) believed that what causes underdevelopment in third world is as a result of what brought about development in Europe and America. These so called developed countries are just dominating the less developed and thereby perpetuating global inequality.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The paper has traced the evolutionof the concepts of development and underdevelopment as two sides of the same coin. The key terms: development and underdevelopment have been conceptualised and to address the question, the definitions of both terms (development and underdevelopment) was accompanied with explanations based on the theories of development and their perspectives. These theories are modernization, on the one hand, and third world and dependency theories, on the other hand. The modernization theory argued that the Western models of economic development are the ideal models for the development of underdeveloped countries. Third world theories on the other hand, argued that incorporation of third world economies into the international capitalist system has created a structure of inequality, obviously in favor of the developed countries and against the economic prospects of the Third world. Third world theorist argued that the poor nations provide the resources, cheap labor and consumer markets for the wealthy nations which ensured the development of the developed nations. The trajectory of this relations has substantiated the claim of this paper that development is two sides of the same coin; one side develops, while the other under develops.

## References

1. Acheoah, A. O. (2018). *The Crisis of Underdevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Multi-Dimensional Perspective*. Department of Political Science, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria.
2. Alaye, (2019). Dependency and underdevelopment of Nigerian economy. *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*,7 (1): 9-28

3. Augustine, A. O. (2018). The Crisis of Underdevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Multi-dimensional Perspectives. *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs*, 6 (4): 1-9.
4. Barau, A. S. (2006). *An Account of the High Population in Kano State*. Research and Documentation Directorate, Government House, Kano.
5. Bloch, R., Fox, S., Monroy, J., & Ojo, A. (2015). *Urbanization and urban expansion in Nigeria*. Urbanisation Research Nigeria (URN) Research Report. London: ICF International.
6. Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike CC BY-NC-SA
7. Frank, A. G. (1981). *Crisis in the Third World*. Heinemann Educational Books, Holmes Etmeler.
8. Harrison, D. (2005). *The Sociology of modernization and development*. London: Routledge.
9. International Peace Institute.(2009). *Underdevelopment, Resource Scarcity, and Environmental Degradation*. IPI Blue Paper No. 1 www.ipinst.org .
10. Jalingo, M. U., Baba, A. & Mukhtar, J. I. (2017). Urbanization and employment in developing countries: A glance through some Nigerian cities. *Dutse Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2 (2): 205-222.
11. Jamri, B. (2019). Modernization Perspective: A Review of Nigerian Development. *Abuja Journal of Economic and Allied Fields*, 10 (5) ISSN: 2467-0950.
12. Kim, S. (1975). Reconsideration of underdevelopment and problems of development: an application of an alternative model of change to the Third World countries. *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 5487. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/5487>.
13. Mukhtar, J. I. & Abdullahi, A. S. (2022). Security-Development Nexus: A Review of Nigeria's Security Challenges. *Journal of Contemporary Sociological Issues*, 2 (1)18-39 doi:10.19184/csi.v2i1.25815
14. Mukhtar, U., Mukhtar, J. I., Muhammad, M. H., & Abdullahi, M. A. (2014). Effects of Hurricane and Tornado on Socio-economic Development. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*. 4 (4) 417-428
15. Radda, S. I. (2008). "Towards Optimum Resource Management by Governments". *NSASA Journal*, 2007/2008, p. 6-14.
16. Rapley, J. (2006). *Understanding development: Theory and practice in the third world* (Third edition). Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
17. Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Lagos: Panaf Pub.
18. Sani, I., Mukhtar, J. I. & Muhammad, G. I. (2015). "Insecurity and the challenges of national development -Nigeria in perspectives". Being a paper presented at International Conference of Social Sciences and Law (ICSSL), Africa. organized by Nigerian Turkish Nile University, 7-8 May, 2015.
19. Seligson, M. A. (2014). "The Dual Gaps: An Overview of Theory and Research". In Mitchell A. Seligson & John T. Passé-Smith (eds.) *Development and underdevelopment: the Political Economy of Global Inequality*. USA.
20. Thomas, L. J. (1994). Neoclassical development theory and the Prebisch doctrine: A synthesis. *The American Economist* 38: 75-81.