

## EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS INDUSTRIES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW

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### Abstract

*This review focuses on the imperatives of indigenous industries to Nigerian economy and the concept of national development. It also examines the role of indigenous technology and the successful application of this concept on the overall growth of the Nigerian economy. Rural industries act as impetus to social change and development; this is exemplified in the relationship that exists between the industry and the communities as well as the benefits accruing to them. The Indigenous industries, which mainly depend on local resources, open job opportunities for the rural populace thus curbing the incidence of rural-urban migration and the burden of unemployment. It further examines the alternative strategy of enhancing the utilization of local resources by using, as well as improving upon the knowledge and technical expertise of rural people to bring out local self-reliance now that the Federal Government of Nigeria is laying greater emphasis on entrepreneurial acquisition and development. This effort is predicated on the possibilities of reducing rural poverty and backwardness, especially as empirical results in several studies have shown that conditions of rural people worsen as a result of the alien development strategies often imported from the industrial world.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous, development, industries, reforms

### Introduction

The effort of the past and present administration in Nigeria to redirect the country's economic policy reforms and technology is yielding very little result. This is because of the country's over-dependent on imports; even the least household items are imported. Okigbo (1992) noted that "the dependence of Nigeria on imports for a great part of her consumption expenditure and all her capital expenditure has been total". Nigeria cannot be weaned from this dependence on imported goods over-night. In such an import bound economy, creating a self reliant economy becomes a project of longer duration than is suggested by the platitudes often proclaimed by our policy makers. Technology from virtually every part of the world has been imported and applied in an effort to develop African continent. The key, as it often agued, lies in the development of local industries, equipment

making activities based on our abundant local raw materials. The development of local industries and equipment making are elements of national level technological capability, but our position today is over-dependent on importation of foreign goods and services. It is a well known fact that technological advancement divorced from its cultural context, is destined to grow without a soul. However, what we need is to acquire the capabilities necessary for efficient production although some countries in Africa have over-emphasized the drive for technological self-sufficiency and paid a high price in poor productivity. What actually makes the best economic sense is to combine foreign and local technological elements by balancing the two for a better result. In fact this is the best to progressively develop local capabilities in areas where they can be more efficient (Dahlman et.al., 1985).

### **Indigenous industries and colonialism**

The issue of the imperatives of indigenous knowledge is crucial for the sustenance and propagation of our country's cultural heritage as a basis for technological advancement and economic reform. Let us agree that Nigeria was purely an agrarian economy in pre-colonial era, today, with over ten universities of technologies in the country we should be able to forge a major breakthrough in technological development. We have meticulously identified several strategies of disinformation embedded in euro-centric colonial and post colonial education, including the selective omission on non-European achievement, inventions and technologies; distortion of data and several other strategies of colonization and re-colonization, yet no attempt to remedy the surreptitious naming by the colonial master over forty (40) years after independence. The present under-development and technological backwardness in some parts of Africa including Nigeria is attributed to primarily the primitive exploitation of our peoples and resources for the benefit of the Arab and European world. Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was afflicted by two major externally derived economic models of exploitation, namely, the colonial model and neo-colonial models of exploitation aimed at re-colonization. The strategy was a paradigm of the evil and destructive side of human nature. Colonialism ensured that Nigerians lost the sense of pride and confidence in their own culture. Consequently, the technical superiority of the traditional culture vis-a-vis the technical superiority of Europeans largely accounts for the high esteem in which the dominant Europeans were held. "Nigeria lacks a viable "culture compass", and an ideology rooted in culture. It is therefore imperative that we re-create a worthy polity based on the culture and traditions of her people specifically tailored to her peculiarities, "in rational interaction with the dynamics of globalization" and on the underlying principles of the twenty-first century technologies. Nigerians are ultimately concerned with the political

economy and the need to organized production, distribution and exchange of services of societal harmony" – T. Babawale (2006)

### **Indigenous knowledge system**

Indigenous knowledge system (IK) has to do with conceptual issues associated with indigenous technology, and has specific implication for community empowerment and nation building. It also has implication for sustainable development, capacity building and intellectual development in African in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indigenous knowledge has come a long way to challenge local talent and to encourage as well as develop them to the fullest. The young graduates of our technological institutions in the country have been encouraged to development our indigenous technologies through entrepreneurship acquisition skills introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the tertiary institutions in the country. The growing concern of indigenous industries is about the conservation of cultural heritage which has become a profound issue of global imperative. As a matter of fact, local industries have been widely acknowledged as the spring-board for sustainable economic development. The future of Nigeria depends on the rural communities and that is why it is important to have indigenous industry improved. The indigenous industries evolved over a period of time and are molded by the environment. They are not alien industries and are not financed by foreign capital. According to Hoogvert (1976) export of capital from the "centre" to the "periphery" was much a dominant feature of the colonial period, and one which helped to tie the colonial economy to that of the mother country. He further noted that this phenomenon still continues in contemporary third world economies. The indigenous industries could be better off if the emphasis on importation of foreign goods and services are minimized. Indigenous industries are not inferior, according Rodney (1974) the 15<sup>th</sup> century European technology was not totally superior to that of other parts

of the world including Africa because the Europeans relied on India Cloth for resale in Africa, and they also purchased cloths from several parts of the West African Coast for resale elsewhere. In essence, they were not manufacturers at the period, but primarily traders, yet by the time Africa entered into the colonial era, it was concentrating almost entirely on the export of manufactured cotton cloths. This remarkable reversal is tied to technological advancement in Europe and the stagnation of technology in Africa owing to the trade with Europe. Cloth manufacturing in the world went through a stage of handlooms and small scale craft production up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that was the general pattern in Africa, Asia and Europe. At the end of it all, the European Traders eventually succeeded in putting an end to the expansion of African cloth manufacturing. Developing countries must free themselves from technological arrest and stagnation and look back to their past technologies and make frantic effort to develop them.

#### **Other countries' experience**

The European and Asian countries have built modern nation while China and Japan have taken over modern technology especially in the electronics industry. They have adopted their own local tools based on their indigenous technology. Chinese success story revealed that the rudiments of an industrial base were built on culture and traditional practices that are still being exploited today. It is noted that before the break up of USSR, this country had built a modern nation in two generations by making peoples with a nomadic and pastoral way of life to operate an industrial economy based on industrial machines. China in 1200 BC came out with first Chinese dictionary and in 1250 BC had manufactured silk fabric. Consequently, the United States of America have also created a civilization based on the most up-to-date innovation in science and information technology and unparallel development in all spheres of human endeavours. Africa was not left out in manufacturing and other spheres of

technological development in the past; for example in 2500 BC Egyptian discovered papyrus and ink for writing and built the first libraries. They also used irrigation to control Nile floods, spoke wheel invented in ancient Near East, horse used to pull vehicles while in Babylon Mathematician had already understand cube and square root (Bruce B. Barton 1988). Some of these technological breakthrough and discoveries earlier recorded by most African nations including Nigeria (Nok culture, the earliest iron working tradition in West Africa) pre-dates European and Asian civilizations and yet very little achievements have been made on technological development in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. It is interesting to note that before the Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Milling was built and commissioned few years ago in Nigeria, iron smelting tradition had been established in Nok culture. Professor Khan (2006) in his inaugural lecture series, delivered in the Federal University of Technology, Minna, pointed out the potentials of early metal working tradition in the middle belt of Nigeria through iron smelting during the NOK culture yet, for centuries now such local potentials had not been fully tapped for the development of the nation. Furthermore, archaeological evidences has also shown that other culture areas in Nigeria such as Benin with the popular lost wax casting, Ife art as well as Igbo-Ukwu cultures were the earliest centres for iron smelting and metal casting (Inwa, 1995). Unfortunately today little or nothing is heard of this great ancient technological institution in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, there has been complete neglect of, and destructive prejudice against everything indigenous in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

#### **Types of indigenous industries in Nigeria**

Small and medium size industries have been widely acknowledged as the springboard for sustainable economic development. Most of these indigenous industries are rural based and are capable of transforming the economy of the third world countries and making them

very vibrant if adequate attention is paid to this informal sector by the policy makers. Some of the indigenous industries listed below are on the verge of extinction:

- a) Traditional Soap making industry
- (b) Blacksmithing
- (c) Fishing industry
- (d) Wood carving
- (e) Traditional Medicine
- (f) Weaving/Dying
- (g) Wood/Calabash carving
- (h) Small scale farming
- (i) Brewing/Distilling industry
- (j) Glass and Bead
- (k) Pottery

These industries could be empowered to turn around the lives of rural people. The rural people are among the poorest of the poor in the world, but there is lack of adequate data to address the issue. One of the major reasons for high rate of employment and rural poverty is the neglect of these indigenous industries by the policy makers. It is generally believe that agriculture is the only viable and suitable industry for the rural people because an average rural dweller engages in subsistence farming. The local farmers are still depending largely on archaic farming implements such as hoes, knives and sticks etc. The corollary to this is that, it is not everyone who wants to go into farming that has access to land and capital. Therefore the only way to create job opportunities in the rural areas is by empowering the indigenous industries.

#### **Indigenous industries and Nigerian economy**

For both developing and developed countries, indigenous industries play important roles in the process of industrialization and economic growth. Indigenous industries create employment opportunities, enhanced regional economic balance through industrial dispersal and generally promote effective resource utilization considered critical to economic development and growth.

Indigenous industries are categorized under small scale industry which requires limited capital outlay to commence business. It also has a simple management structure resulting from the fusion of ownership and management by one person or very few individuals as well as revolves around the owner-manager, rather than as a separate corporate entity. Informal employer-employee relationship is one of the characteristic features of this all important industries. As a matter of fact these industries create employment opportunities for rural dwellers and mitigate rural-urban migration and resources utilization. It also serves dispersed local markets and produced goods with low scale economy for riche markets, and is widely dispersed throughout the country because of accessibility to raw materials.

Finally, it fosters development and the promotion of self-reliance through the utilization of local talent.

#### **Problems associated with indigenous Industries**

The pivotal roles of indigenous industries notwithstanding, there are certain factors militating against their development and continuous survival in Nigeria. Such factors are:

- (a) Limited access to financial capital
- (b) Dominated by import dependent processes and factors
- (c) Subjectivity in decision taking and prevalence of largely informal employer-employee relationship.
- (d) Inaccessible rural roads
- (e) Lack of encouragement by the government through various policies on rural development.
- (f) Continuous emphasis on the importation of foreign goods and services

#### **Some instances**

In Cameroon, the US National Cancer Institute reportedly signed a contract with the government following the discovery of a

forest plant species with a potential anti-AIDS chemical. Cameroon provides plant samples in return for payments which are used for community development projects - (Posey and Dutfield, 1996).

### **Traditional healers response to HIV/AIDS in Tanzania**

In Pangani District traditional healers have treated the opportunistic diseases of over 2000 HIV/AIDS patients, using medicinal plants. Some terminally ill patients have reportedly lived longer by five years. The regional hospital has dedicated a ward to these healers to treat and counsel patients. The IK Program supported an exchange of experiences between healers, people living with AIDS and staff working with patients with similar groups across the country. A critical challenge is to leverage local and global knowledge systems to effectively resolve development challenges.

### **Local exchange and adaptation in South Africa**

The Rooibos tea-growing farmers of Wupperthal in the Western Cape Province were successfully exporting their tea to Europe. An NGO, EMG thought that other tea-growing communities could benefit from their experience. In June 2000, over a dozen small- holder Rooibos tea-growing farmers of Suid Bokkeveld visited their neighbors for discussions on crop quality, processing and marketing. The outcome: the visiting farmers went back to their communities, shared what they had learned, set up a farmers' cooperative, improved their post-harvest processing and secured a \$15,000 order from an European importer.

### **Strategies for enhancing indigenous industries**

Empowering indigenous industries is helping communities to value their own knowledge and appreciating what they can do for a living. It also affords them the opportunity to learn and expand their horizon as well as reducing income inequalities and to rectify other social inequalities of the majority of the

rural people. Indigenous knowledge is an integral part of the culture and history of a local community. We need to learn from local communities to enrich the development process". The federal government of Nigeria should encourage the development of entrepreneurial skills by the teeming jobless youths all over the country to reduce employment problem currently facing the country. If the resources are harnessed properly, unemployment problem will be a forgotten issue in Nigeria.

### **Future prospects for indigenous industries**

Technology can be grouped into two broad headings, namely traditional and modern technology. Indigenous or traditional technology may be referred to machines, tools, equipments developed by the indigenous people locally whereas modern technology referred to foreign imported machines, tools etc. Technology can be classified as indigenous (endogenous) and foreign (exogenous). While the former refers to the internally generated methods of learning and expressing grass root initiative in technology, the later deals with the transferred (imported) or foreign input in the technology of a nation. The fusion of the relevant of both indigenous and modern technologies is what is popularly referred to as "Appropriate technology". According to Bhagavam (1979), "Appropriate Technology stresses the socio-cultural and environmental importance of both indigenous and foreign technologies. He further stressed the need to blend the two technologies together for a better result for future development rather than depending solely on foreign technology. Onwuejueogwu (1999) also noted that for Nigerian economy to make any meaningful progress technologically, we have to adopt what he termed cultural hybridization. This, he said is a situation where indigenous knowledge and skills could be developed to work hand in hand with modern technologies. He frowned at over-dependence on foreign technology after many decades of freedom from the colonial masters. As a matter of fact, economic

growth and human progress in Africa since independence can be judged mainly from basic infrastructural development and the improvement of the standard of living of the people. The living standard of an average Nigerian is below expectation.

### Conclusion

Nigeria and indeed other countries in sub-saharan Africa have rich technological heritage manifested in diverse spheres of life. The productive practices in the past, for example in the fields of food production and preservation, medicine, architecture and even knowledge of science among others were so unique and can still be harnessed to meet the needs of our contemporary society. Traditional technology and knowledge laid emphasis on the quality of life as measured in human cultural and spiritual terms rather than in purely material terms (Andah 1992). This is contrary to European conception of materialist approach to progress. The traditional African concept of development assumed that economic and social activities can be mutually reinforcing and therefore requires that all natural, technical, economic and social institutional interrelationships are properly harnessed.

The rural populace should be empowered through micro finance scheme by giving loans to jobless youths to financed indigenous industries in different parts of the country. The indigenous industries are in various locations in the country, e.g. Brewing, Distilling and Fishing are located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, weaving and dying in South-west Nigeria, wood carving in South-south Nigeria, blacksmithing in Bida, Middle belt and the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria. If these indigenous industries are developed and properly harnessed, Nigeria will no long depend on foreign technology as the only source for rapid socio-economic development.

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