THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH IN AFRICA
DEVELOPMENT: THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE
A CODESRIA FORUM - DAKAR - 21st APRIL 1983
A KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Distributed for: Nine-Month Programme

Course: Agriculture

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APRIL 1983
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by

Professor K. TWUM-BARIMA

The precise definition of the term "development" continues to pose a problem with the world. To different people it means different things. Thus to Africa which happens to be at the receiving end of this nebulous and confused concept of development, a precise definition becomes urgent. For we have, to know what development means and what it is, and to what we wish to develop (for we have to develop to "something") before we can set out to plan for its achievement in Africa, African development is a very wide term indeed. It covers the totality of the process involved in the elevation of Africa: its people and environments, its customs and institutions, its attitudes from one plane of existence: physical, moral and cultural through various stages of progressive improvements toward her desired goals of well-being and contentment-happiness. Well-being and contentment-happiness cannot lend themselves to easy evaluation. They cannot be quantified, they are concepts in philosophy. One can possess the whole world and not be happy. On the other hand, one may have just the barest minimum of one's basic needs supplied and be the happiest individual in the world. Nonetheless, they are relevant, for to us, the ultimate of all human endeavours is his well-being and contentment, his happiness. It is a state of the mind rather than the possession of the material things in life. The "quality of man" rather than the "quality of life".

The "quality of life" and its enhancement is dependent on one's access to the material things of life. To some this may mean the availability of an extra bottle of champagne at meals, a more luxurious means of personal transport, accessibility to a kidney machine in the hospital or just good potable water, a simple housing unit. But there
is yet another side to life and development. This is not derivable from the material needs. It issues from the quality of one's education and how it succeeds to liberate one's mind, and bring to one an awareness of one's situation, a re-discovery of oneself and one's own potentiality. One is thus possessed of a leverage mechanism with which one lifts oneself to greater and higher levels of existence through one's industry, indigenous creativity and good neighbourliness. This, we believe, is development which focuses on the enhancement of the "quality of man" which we regard as the primary objective of development. It is like 'the head of the snake, which once held, leaves nothing but a piece of rope' as the Akan proverb says. The European concept of the "quality of life" follows as a logical consequence, for one then is enabled to develop oneself and one's environment in the process to enhance one's quality of life which otherwise remains unattainable.

The "quality of life" is usually a preferred goal in the social science. It can be measured by the possession of material goods as "economic and social indicators" - not so the "quality of man".

But as we push social studies more and more into the realms of science and mathematics, we lose touch with the real purpose of life which we reduce to mere heads or hands which we count occasionally, all the world over, or mere work units engaged in productive activities. Education, itself, for instance, becomes manpower development or skill-formation. Thus we put man into different categories of tools to be used and discarded as necessary. In European societies when the tool becomes too old and worn out - that is not productive, it is placed in what my old friend Hegenzieker of the Netherlands described as the "Old Peoples' Museums" to await its end. "Whatever you do, Professor," said Her Excellency, Mrs Wright, the Danish Ambassador to Ghana in 1969, "see that you people do not lose your regard and care for your old and aged which we have done in Europe." Some development, Northern heartless materialism!
It was in 1939, in the month of August, that I started reading economics. My teacher told me in the second or third lecture that in economics morality and ethics had no place. I decided there and then that it was a bad inhuman science. I have had no reason to change my mind. The New International Economic Order, however, I see as a bold attempt to introduce some morality and ethics into economic thinking. It marks the dawn of an era to re-write the New economics which I called for at a meeting of what O.E.C.D. Development Centre called 'Senior Development Experts' held in December 1980 in Paris. This is Africa's chance to exercise her thinking on this innovative idea which is vital to her well-being. But I must not preach for this is supposed to be a Scientific Forum where Man himself, Humanity, Life, Morals and Happiness become mere platitudes, as if society which the Social Sciences are concerned with is not of man. Indeed, all of man's activities in this life are ultimately directed towards his happiness.

To return to development then, we see that the most powerful financial house, the World Bank, sees development as productivity, and rural development as raising the productivity and not primarily the well-being of the rural poor, the peasant, smallholder, the landless in the countryside. His well-being is pushed on to the periphery in the name of development. Applied on a country-wide basis this is simply a rise in the Gross National Product with, as it has been lately discovered, an equitable distribution of income, whatever the term means. This is economic growth with development, we are told. To others, development means "modernization". Some people equate this, erroneously, with "westernism". To them modernization is synonymous with westernization and the two words are interchangeable. Others there are, who believe that a people can have "modernization" without "westernism". Indeed, I personally consider modernism as a legitimate desire and aspiration of every people in the world. It is, in short, progress. Europe is now going to the Orient, and America may be constrained to follow suit, shortly, to look for modernization in Japan; while they keep their westernism, their peculiar culture. Westernism, I regard,
as a disease of the mind endemic in Africa where it is rapidly assuming epidemic proportions. The contagion is within our educational process in Africa. John Wilber Blyden of West Indian extraction who lived and worked in the field of Education in Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone said in the middle of the last century that the Europeanizing influences in our education warp the African brain. And Casely Hayford of the Gold Coast in his book "Ethiopia Unbound" published in 1911, proposed that his Mfantsepin University, conceived as a model for Africa, its culture, its hopes and its aspirations would be sited not on the coast but away, presumably, from the Europeanizing influences, in some "pleasant suburb of Kumasi" in the interior. His university would draw inspiration from the best universities in the world for its attainment of excellence and he emphasized the need for a close look at Japan. This was in 1911. Casely Hayford did not look for exact copies of institutions from metropolitan Europe or from Japan in the Orient. He saw in them sources of inspiration for his concept of the African University.

I am of the opinion that the Japanese development miracle is due largely to the fact that they were able to absorb, through what one might call "the ultra-fine meshes of their Japanese culture filter", that very illusive concept of modernism from western technology when they came into contact with it. Westernism or Europeanism was rejected in the process. This "culture filter" is developed only in the matrix of the indigenous culture of a people and its strength and efficacy are dependent on the degree to which the people are really steeped in their own culture. In Japan, the filtrate, the essence reacting with Japanese indigenous cultural creativity produced that peculiar vigorous Japanese technology which, in quality, surpassed the original western technology.

Economics, itself, as a Western science is sure to emerge, some day, somewhere, not in its form as a sinister science which had found justification for slavery until the practice ceased to be economical for those who indulged in it, for colonialism while it lasted, and for all forms of exploitation, but as the New Economics after it has passed through the ultra-fine meshes of a native cultural filter to interact with some strong native culture to purge it of its western materialism.
I think it is pertinent just to note that whereas the North and Africa develop Centres of Development Economics or Development Studies, Japan has an Institute for the Study of Developing Economies - there is something in a name. This may hold better hopes for the evolution of instruments of African and Third World development. But this Forum is not one of culture. It is on the Social Sciences and research in their areas. And Social Scientists are apt to sweep under the carpet, all considerations of culture, cultural creativity, indigenous creativity, happiness and well-being, humanity and things of real lasting value. Their concern is rather more with the transitory material economic aspects of life. They have not developed the means to measure the philosophical concepts with they brush aside as platitudes. Theirs is a Northern Science. But I have said enough to emphasize the need for a clear and precise definition of development itself - what Africans mean by that word and not necessarily what the North presents to Africa as development. The danger is that it might be construed as westernism - a development of a kind.

African Social Sciences' first call for research will be for a sustained study of what they mean by development, their goals of development and a most critical investigation of westernism and where it is taking our world of today. It will be for African Social Science to indicate to us what our options might be: to choose westernism or reject it and accept modernization and chart our own paths to our own desired goals of development.

In this exercise the Northern theories of Western capitalism or Eastern socialism may well be found to be irrelevant with their models and formulae, their so-called laws of universality to our African Social Science, within the framework of African under-development. African Social Science must find out, through its own sustained and massive researches, its own definitions, theories, models and formulae for its own salvation. If their findings succeed to work in Africa they become universalities for us, even as the Northern pundits working through two centuries, on their own peculiar situations in their place,
and time have had their ideas and findings applied to us and our world in which we, the non-Northern members of the family have persistently been disadvantaged.

We have to discover or fashion the tools for our own self-discovery and our development and elaborate measurements for monitoring our own paths to our goals of development. This is the only way we can add to the world fund of universalities which make the world of knowledge richer. So far, our social science research endeavours have been aimed at confirming the universality of the northern concepts.

Whether the Social Scientists working on the problems of Africa be Africans or Europeans or North Americans they are all produced in systems of education with the same northern tradition. They are the products of the same system involving a protracted and rigorous training in the principles, theories and practices of the northern social sciences. The tools acquired on these courses are all fashioned in the North and are elaborated for the treatment of northern problems from which they were originally derived. In conditions of dissimilar nature and situation the same tools which are effective in the North, and for the North are applied. When they do not fit, the scientist has three alternatives open to him: (i) to adapt his tools to fit the situation, (ii) re-fashion new tools for application to the new set of circumstances, (iii) to alter or modify the local situation itself, or to simulate northern conditions in the local situations in order to apply to them the tools acquired in his long apprenticeship. We would suggest that the quality of their training would be measured by the ease and dexterity with which they can modify their tools or re-fashion new ones for the treatment of the local problems. But more often than not the temptation to simulate the situation to make it pretend to look like a Northern situation so that the old tools may be applied to them becomes more attractive. In fact, we are enjoined to do so if we must qualify for acceptance to the community of the northern brotherhood of social scientists. The problems we set out to solve are therefore simulated
problems, distorted, not real problems. And when the solutions are applied to the real situations they fall apart. It is tempting to conclude that this may account for the failures which the carefully worked out development strategies, the United Nations Development Decades, the economic development models—all emanating from Europe and America—have proved ignominious failures in the Third World and continue to do so. May it not be due to the fact that in the North's desire to make what they have called the behavioural sciences, social studies, too much of an exact science, which they are not, and the fact that we have followed the scientific principles of strict rigidity and compartmentalization in our training in the social sciences, that we have so very often caught the shadow and not the real substance of what we set out to find? In our over-anxiety to reach for extreme sophistication, we are likely to overlook the simple solutions which may be most effective in our situation. This is the same as in medical practice, when Africa goes in for kidney machines, and expensive sophisticated equipment in the name of development, when good drinking water, mosquito eradication, tsetse control and sanitary conditions of life, in other words, public health and its education, may most likely yield the greatest and most valued dividends in the health status of the nation. Thus in the programme of education in the social sciences and in social science research, the old anthropological approach and methods may be more productive of practical solutions to our problems of under-development than the rigid pursuit of strictly compartmentalized and atomized units of disciplines, so characteristic of Northern disciplines. It is again tempting to believe that it is due to the rather belated realization of this fact that we are now calling for interdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving in the social sciences. Even the North accepts this now. Perhaps, even the discovery of this was made by the North and accepted by the South.
It is proposed that the very study of the process of education and training in the Social Sciences and their research methodologies will be a significant and fruitful research endeavour in the African institutions of Social Science, if social science practitioners and their research orientations are to benefit Africa’s development aspirations.

Social Science research is not new in Africa. Early in the colonial days, after several errors of judgment by the colonial administrators, some of which resulted in wars against the British by the indigenous local kingdoms, the need for a better understanding of the religions, customs, beliefs, institutions, traditional political structures and traditions of the subject peoples was felt. Some institutions and study centres were set up in metropolitan institutions to conduct studies into these problems. Later, with the introduction in Britain of Colonial Administration Cadet courses in some of their universities such as Cambridge, Anthropology and Social Anthropology featured very prominently in them. In the African colonies, themselves, anthropological researches were encouraged. A spate of books ensued which became the vade mecum of the Colonial Administrators. On the Gold Coast, such titles as the Religion and Art of Ashanti and Ashanti Customary Law, both by Captain Rattray, came out early in this period. You will perhaps remember that the Yam Asantawaa War had been fought by the Ashantis against the British in 1900 when the British Colonial Governor had demanded at a durbar in the Ashanti Capital that, as a representative of the British Crown, the sacred Golden Stool of Ashanti be brought out for him to sit upon. A greater insult to the Ashanti nation could not have been uttered; and particularly, so soon (four years) after their King Prempeh I had been exiled by the British to the Seychelles. Such errors were very expensive, indeed. And they could be avoided through their thorough knowledge of the people. Such knowledge will also facilitate their access to the wealth and riches of the colonies. Thus in the search for the right ownership of land in one of the states of the Gold Coast an administrative officer of government was given a new concept of ownership of land by the chief. "Land", he said, "belonged to the millions of the people who had departed this life, the many millions of people now living and the multitudes yet unborn". In the pre-independence period, therefore, institutions were established in which sustained studies proceeded in the vital aspects of colonial life. All these researches constituted an unfailing and valuable efforts for
successful colonial administration and for the control and exploitation of colonial products. It was never a neutral scientific activity - the quest of knowledge for its own sake. But they did lay valuable foundations for essential pure and applied research to be inherited and pursued and directed to serve the purposes deemed necessary by independent African governments to service their policy-making machinery.

The period between 1950 and 1970 saw the establishment and development of university institutions in Africa and a period of social science teaching and research was ushered in with some seriousness. Some colonial research bodies were taken up by the universities and had their scope expanded to meet the needs of research in the young independent countries. European and American universities established and expanded their researches on problems of the African continent and directed great attention to the study of the social sciences and other problems of African development. There was no aspect of African life that was not combed by these European and American institutions by the hordes of their graduate students and professors who were unleashed on Africa and her university institutions. The agencies of the United Nations: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and several others joined in. With masses of apparently inexhaustible funds behind them they combed Africa for information, occasionally supporting local institutions which provided the infrastructure to facilitate their access to information from government, private and individual sources. They were found everywhere, as advisers to government agencies, as extension officers promoting agriculture in the remotest areas and working as technical aid personnel in every field of African life and endeavour. This was, indeed, the greatest period of Data Espionage in the history of the world.

With this data the new science of Development Economics was nourished throughout the North - both the East and the West. And from the Institutes of Development and of African Studies that mushroomed in Europe and North America prescriptions for our development ills came to us. One might say that genuine African or indigenous research was, indeed, minimal. It was starved of funds because of the magnitude of the total development burden on the young and fragile shoulders of our African governments. And so it has been, till today. African Social Science is indeed grateful for what its national governments have striven to make available to it for its development and work. It is aware of the governments' preoccupations with the vital problems of life of its peoples.
But, the effectiveness of the prescriptions most carefully elaborated from the Northern Institutions for application in the South has been beautifully summed up by Professor Adedaji, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, in 1978. May I repeat it here:

"Africa more than the other Third World Regions, is thus faced with a development crisis of great portent. In spite of the region's ample natural resources, of a favourable population to natural resources ratio, in spite of the generous and even indiscriminatory incentives of foreign private enterprise, in spite of our participation in numerous conferences, both regional and inter-regional, and in spite of our adherence to orthodox theories and prescriptions — in spite of all these neither high rates of growth nor of diversification nor an increasing measure of self-reliance and dynamism seems to be within our reach."

Professor Adedaji, dare we ask ourselves whether we have been led up the garden path? For nearly half a century since the early beginnings of the development of the science of development economics we have been made to apply prescriptions from the North to our development ills. The patient still lies bleeding. Professor Adedaji, does the patient in your care continue with the treatments prescribed by the same source? There might be a limit to which the guinea-pig, the laboratory black mouse, can cope with experimental medication, and live. Professor Adedaji, may we turn to traditional herbal medicine for change, as seriously suggested and advised by a past President of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences in his presidential address three years ago — himself a celebrated surgeon and the first African Dean of our Medical School in Ghana, to whose knowledge, skills and administrative genius we owe that institution? Professor Adedaji, please ask the United Nations, ask the North—our benefactors, ask Africa — your bleeding patient: "WHAT NEXT"? The patient has the right to know. The only patient who does not seem to have that right is the veterinary patient, our mute brother.
I wish I could have brought in at this stage the cultural dimensions of national development—a vital aspect of development. I have made a brief mention of it in connection with developments in Japan. I have even suggested that into their institutes for the Study of Developing Economics, Northern Economists, which continues to fail us, may enter through their culture filter and emerge from it as the New Economics, Japanese Economics, Third World Economics—Third World Social Science which may have better potential to deal with our problem of underdevelopment. But I have said that my subject is African Social Science and not Culture. This is to be regretted as Senegal and its first President, Mr. Leopold Sedar SENGHOR, have played such a leading role in African cultural revivalism.

African Social Scientists would like to participate in this search for the New Social Science. They realise, however, that they have all, as we have said earlier, been trained in the Northern traditions and are in possession of the same knowledge, techniques and tools for investigating the social phenomena. Our own African institutions have been nurtured into existence and eventual maturity by metropolitan European institutions. There has come therefore to exist between them and their Northern counterparts very strong links. Research interactions have therefore been in the South to North direction and vice-versa, almost to the total exclusion of lateral relationships—South to South. But we now, more than ever, acknowledge the fact that the North, through their own concatenation of circumstances and conditions, their history, civilization and culture have built up their own social sciences which we have acquired during our period of education. We would like to take this opportunity to remind ourselves that Adam SMITH lived through the British Industrial Revolution when Britain began to have a new vision of her power and unchallenged leadership in the industrialization of Europe. Europe, her neighbours, were people with similar histories, institutions, traditions and culture in spite of her own insularity. Far out in America, Africa and India and in the British Dominions and indeed in Europe itself, markets were developing for the manufactures of her growing industry. In the far-flung dominions and growing empire sources of cheap raw materials for tapping for her industry by cheap local labour or through the diabolical slave trade which enriched many an English house were identified. Who can seriously suggest that Adam SMITH's Wealth of Nations did
not have its roots in his observation of his environment and local conditions? If he had lived in another place and time this epoch-making book might not have been written. Or it might have been written differently. David RICARDO might have formulated different fiscal laws if Britain had not entered into war with France and lost her very important French markets for English manufactures. And if the war had not plunged Britain into debt for which she was forced to resort to issues of paper currency by her banks for the prosecution of the war, for the running of her government and for the continued development of her economy and industry. And if Karl MARX had lived today in a world where the whole of human survival is delicately poised on the tips of two fingers, dangerously hovering over two buttons—one in Moscow and the other in Washington D.C.—his preoccupations might not have been labour and its relationships with capital but humanity and humanism. He might have found a ray of hope for the world in the Quaker Humanism in their pioneer industries which was very visible at the time. And, but for the Great Depression in the 1930s, Keynesian Economics which appear to have been resurrected in Northern thought on Southern development might not have been born. All these Northern pundits were all very serious students of their own times and, more importantly, their place—their social, economic and cultural conditions and problems; and, resulting from their studies, were the formulations of their ideas. We would therefore like to submit that it might be preposterous to assume that their findings are necessarily true of all times and of all places. We would like to refute, with all due deference, that in the realms of the intellect "It is only Europe or occidentality that are carriers of universality". We have had to accept this intellectual and cultural imperialism because we have not applied ourselves to the study of our own problems and conditions with the meticulous care and detachment with which the Northern pundits, named above and others did apply themselves to their study of their situations. Even when we in the South have done this it has been through Northern spectacles, acquired in the process of our education, and we have seen through them, only darkly. We have used Northern tools fashioned for us to work on our conditions. We have tried to use their technical language, quite unintelligible to any reasonable person except those who profess to be Northern Social Scientists. We have sought to communicate not with Africa, not with our policy-makers, not with our own general African readership but with the Northern Social Scientist who alone can say "we have arrived".
We can therefore merely trail behind the North in our research institutes and in our universities, using their knowledge, their tools, their models and formulae, their technical language. And we wonder with the North why we fail. And we, the African Social Scientists, wonder why our governments do not support us with the funds we think we need to make us effective. The question is — effective to whom — to our governments or to the select and exclusive Northern readership?

May I humbly direct your attention to where Japan is today, when her scientists, engineers, mathematicians, philosophers, social scientists took the decision not to address themselves to Europe but to the Japanese in the language that they all understood? It was a great fortune that they all had one language - Japanese. It is interesting to note that the North immediately set to work to learn the language of the Japanese in order that they may understand what they were thinking, planning and doing. It was the North which took the trouble in their oriental studies institutes to translate the books and papers of Japan for the benefit of their own readership. While Japanese scientists, social scientists, philosophers, artists and all addressed themselves to their own countrymen and shared their thoughts, their dreams, hopes and aspirations with all and sundry in their society — the peasants, the farmers, the factory workers, the housewives, their maids, the street sweepers.

African governments, through their national universities have established social science research institutions. Their universities teach the social sciences. They must value social science research otherwise they would not have spent scarce funds on their establishment and running. If they have not made use of research findings then either we have not been tackling problems they regard as relevant or important to their work or that the very language in which we express ourselves has not been intelligible to them. We have, so far, in our attempt to get our writing accepted by so-called International Northern or learned journals addressed ourselves to the readers, editors and publishers of those journals and not to our own people who need our findings for their policy formulations at home. This is a serious fault with us, particularly those of us who work in our universities, and whose very progression in their careers has been made to be conditional on publications in international or learned scientific journals. It seems to me that we need research in the whole sector of communications and how best we may communicate with our own people whose
efforts keep our institutes running and who, believing we have a role in African Development, did set us up to assist them with required data and information and every form of scientific service to better serve African Development.

Since our research institutes have been founded by our governments to work on national development problems their programmes will naturally be parochial in scope. But efforts even in this direction will be enriched and enhanced by research collaboration and research cooperation on sub-regional or regional level. This is where CODESRIA's role is really pertinent and vital. It is in its various programmes, including the provision of valuable information on who is working on what problem and where, that African corroboration and collaborative research is encouraged. By these activities and other vital programmes, it is performing a yeoman service to African Research.

It is the role of African social science research to apply resources to the identification of new theories, new models, and new methodologies for the effective solution of African problems. Most of our research endeavours have gone to aid Northern institutions to formulate what they think should be the strategies of our development. The great funding agencies and international bodies have generously funded the application of their prescriptions. They have all failed. Our African governments and policy-makers are aware of this. The role of African Social Science research must therefore be the identification of the development processes which will help Africa arrive at her own desired heaven of development.

The time is overdue when Africa conceptualized her own port of development and charted her own route to it the North cannot help us. The North of the International Agencies may help us to arrive safely in that port which is designated by ourselves through our own researches and investigations using our own methodologies.

Africa may well discover, soon enough, that she cannot go the way the North has gone to their haven of development. Their observations of their own conditions and even of ours which have resulted so far in the full development of their Development Economics for Africa and the Third World cannot be made to apply
to our peculiar problems. We cannot trail behind them and hope to catch up with them. They do not wait for us. Therefore, common sense has it, that we should strike off on our own to re-discover ourselves — our real selves, first and foremost, re-discover our own potential and through self-application strive to arrive at self-reliance and complete self-fulfilment — which is real DEVELOPMENT. This will be found to be different from the shape and form of development which the North thinks we should have and has forced down our throats all these years without any results except an impressive catalogue of failures, and which Africa has, so far, accepted.

Social Science research for African development, in sum, will be required to help us discover the true meaning of development; it will have to enable us re-discover ourselves and our own potential and assist us chart our own course to development, noting and describing the pitfalls, the dead-ends, the "no through roads" in the way. It will have to communicate this to our governments and peoples, in a way, and in a language which they can understand and provide the encouragement to urge Africa on to her development destination. The journey will be difficult and long and fraught with dangers but social science research should goad us on. This, I think, is the role of social science research in Africa.