

## **Rethinking the Humanities and Development in Africa**

**Best Ochigbo**

In this keynote address, I intend to trace humanities from our history, all of it and in every shade – our light and dark paths, our quest for discovery and regeneration. Humanities help the human race feel more connected to each other, more humane, more assuring. The term “humanities” was applied to a group of subjects aimed at the general and liberal education of a free man for manhood as well as citizenship. Etuk (2007:17) submits that its curriculum envisioned preparing man with appropriate knowledge that would raise him to the peak of his potentialities in all that is distinctively humanistic. Humanities are the education of man in human values, with the intent to make man more humane, primarily concerned with the development and preservation of culture. The key drivers of humanism can be attributed to altruism, self-sacrifice, love, humility and honesty.

It is appropriate to argue that as a contribution to undertake an exercise in reflection over the unifying cultural development such as shared languages, thought system, cosmologies, religions, as well as art forms – all of which are an invaluable social infrastructure on which humanism can be built and sustained, it is pertinent to state that such a reflection could provide a lasting ideological base for humanism’s goals. Man as he is today, is a direct product of these conjugated humanistic infrastructures. If he is humane, it is because some education happened along the way to make that possible. The development of man tells us what happened in the life of man in relation to perceived touch of education, this explains why man is humane.

Man, according to Ochigbo (2007:319) has been the preoccupation of any humanistic theory, hence its insistence upon a proper orientation of the relationship between God and man. When we talk about the brotherhood of man we are referring to the realm of human values – good human relationships where man does not lord it over another man. Banjo (2006:2) sees humanism as a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all super-naturalism and relies primarily on reason and science, democracy and human compassion. Humanism is therefore essentially human oriented, relying as it were, on secular variety, exclusively on the capacity of man to improve his lot in order to produce a happy and egalitarian society. Hence, the humanities place great confidence in man's capabilities, and laud his ability to challenge, dare and defy a promethean style. This is achieved by getting people to accept an ideology, a way of thinking and seeing the world as a set of social relationships that is inevitable in order to gain political power and cultural literacy, partly as a result of a people's development in this context, Africa.

I am here to speak about "Rethinking the humanities and development in Africa". The conferees and the papers to be presented cover a range of disciplines like; Literature, History, Religion, Languages, Philosophy, Theatre, Music and the Fine Arts. This relationship would be approached from different perspectives. Yet, notwithstanding these differences, the contribution of participants is expected to be defined by a shared preoccupation with the possibilities humanities can afford towards the development of Africa. It is expected that the papers being presented here today would explore the dynamic ways that humanities can bring about development to Africa. It is expected that each discipline, reflects a common interest in how the humanities can open up new ways of conceptualizing and practicing humanism as a means of rethinking the spatial interconnections – and tensions that link distinct disciplines with the material indices of development, and to contribute to ongoing discussions about the possibilities for Africa's development.

I have been invited to speak on humanities and development issues in Africa. We all know that humanism talk about human social and cultural life. Well, here is a problem, we've been trying to develop Africa all the while with all the knowledge gained, but the more we try, the further the setbacks. This is why we have all gathered here to

demonstrate what we can do to bring about the much needed development to our Africa. This brings to mind the question about development. Is development actually a continuous process or discontinuous? While continuous development is a process that consists of gradually adding on extant skills, discontinuous development is a process in which new ways of understanding and responding to the world evolve at particular periods or time. I would like to rely on the discontinuous perspective which favours development in phases. This affects qualitative changes in the way we think, behave, and feel according to each stage of development.

Juxtaposed with lifelong development which this conference seeks to address, one would submit that change occurs in the physical, social and cognitive, even though these domains tend to overlap. It is pertinent to note that evolving development is additive, even though development may come with new traits and complexes; it never relinquishes the traits of its precursor.

It is therefore not surprising to note that development as a continuum can never be static. It could discard old traits, pick up new ones, or just mixes both for a new acceleration. Development throughout history has been a series of adjustments and readjustments, of engagements and re-engagements, of adaptations and readaptations, to ever changing habits and cultural environments. Indeed this has been the African hospices in her developmental stride as it is obvious that Africa has witnessed a great deal of acculturation. For example, this is why we are here to proffer solutions to why Africa has remained underdeveloped or is developing.

Africans have always been knowledgeable in certain specific conditions, however, the greatest enemy of the average African nay Nigerian is not his ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge. Humanities evolve with informed active and engaged humanists like you and i. it is a continuous evolving development through change and adaptation to new circumstances. And I want to believe this is what you have all brought to the table today to address.

I may ask, are we really optimistic about Africa's future? What went wrong in Africa that development seemingly remained elusive? In Nigeria, the standard of living has fallen dramatically; life is bleaker and harder than it had been since independence. A chasm exists between the

life that most Nigerians actually have and the life that they want to live. In Nigeria today, tribalism plays a more noted part in its low development indices, especially when weighed against the poverty level that has ruined economic rationality and efficiency. It is evident that most African leaders have sacrificed long term development for short-term development as they spread development to areas that are not human friendly. This is why this conference must of a necessity rise up and addresses these concerns to argue for greater emphasis on raising the level of political awareness through education in the humanities in order to achieve people-oriented development programmes. Any policy enacted that is people-oriented will be more acceptable to Africans, and I think this conference is certainly going to address these issues as encapsulated in the sub-themes of the conference.

It would be an understatement to say that the humanities are expected to contribute towards Africa's development through the maximization of distinct disciplinary potentials. However, since conceptual, theoretical and contextual concerns are often primary in the humanities, the humanities move freely between different disciplines.

Nevertheless, specialisms tend to be more robust because they tend to be more defined by careers, but even so I think interdisciplinarity is apparently becoming the norm. I am of the opinion that a curriculum that promotes team work can be an effective way to stimulate the crossing of disciplinary boundaries. This can bring about the desired development – a knowledge that is all encompassing. If you look carefully at the humanities disciplines, they are all interconnected, but the issue has remained how this interconnectedness can be harnessed for a holistic development.

This conference I am optimistic is aimed at discussing differences in approach toward rethinking the humanities and development in Africa, for the promotion of the expected development, regardless of the boundaries marking out the disciplines. Participants at this conference will find a great deal of similarities in the development strategy being advocated for Africa, and regardless of the differences in the orientations of the externally derived institutions of the nation-states for an enduring nation-building. It is my understanding that your contributions will not be even in quality, but they are very thought provoking, depending on the prism through which they are viewed.

The conference on Rethinking the Humanities and Development in Africa was conceived at a time when there is considerable suspense and anxiety over the lack of development in virtually all of African nation-state. Hence this conference is perceived as a way of providing a valuable shift of focus from the phenomenal underdevelopment to a future development map for Africa as a base for the total development of African nation-states. The shared view is that Africans share certain common world views, that harps on ideas and philosophies of life that is common to Africans, such as in religion and morality, social organization, theology, music and engineering. This is encapsulated in their songs, folklore, art and craft.

African development, in a definitive term, can be equated to the sum total of identical elements and features found in the heterogeneous African society. These elements as I earlier mentioned are, however, dynamic and open to development. Accordingly, Olaoba (2005:36) posits that the humanness, moralism, beliefs and customs are the non-material aspect of culture that Africans are endowed with, and that is the personality that distinguishes them. That is the core of African development. Africa's development to my thinking rests squarely on their cultural identity which acculturation has purloined. The present situation calls for special treatment, to which you have come together to redirect a road map to ways this development will be achievable. Indeed, African development depends on what the humanities have to offer. It is altruism that as we rethink the humanities and African development, the strategies lies in our own hands. Is there any glimmer of hope in the horizon?

Let's consider again the relationship of the humanities as educational and cultural success. How is this relationship over determined? Remember, the very meaning of education for development is constantly being challenged and rethought. Could this be the focus of this conference? Does the totality of education acquired by individuals in the humanities raise intellectual advancement? Current discussions in this conference around African development will raise a number of crucial questions. I would like to leave you to ponder on this. Should the humanities be exposed to the broad range of culture, ethnicities, and histories in the world, to the extent that development in Africa is related to a whole gamut of other social factors in one's life that mediates its relationship to cultural development?

Once again, the concern of this conference is with what the Humanities, made up over the various disciplines like; English language, Literature, Visual arts, History, Linguistics, Music, Theatre, Religion and Philosophy can contribute to the reconstruction of the African-nation development paradigm. Like UdoEtuk (2007:20) affirmed, only true Humanism, nurtured by strong humanities disciplines, can development take place in Africa.

Thank you as you set the tone of this conference.