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Music, Technology and National Development: Rethinking Some Preliminary Assumptions

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Abstract

The question of National development involves the integration of all aspects of the national life into a synergy of vision, focus and commitment. Even the phrase 'national development' presumes that the components of nationhood are intact in Nigeria and that development is both possible and happening. There is equally the tacit acceptance of the importance of the role of technology for music in particular and development in general. This paper examines the background assumptions that set in motion the conference

theme, to find out what music can genuinely contribute to national development, given the trajectories which our development philosophies followed in the past. It also examines the proper way to indigenize technology to serve as means and not an end in itself. National development might suffer in the face of uncoordinated fusion of visions and uncritical borrowing of development strategies, which do not accord with the natural and cultural aspirations of the people whose common good, should be the object of music, technology and development itself.

Introduction

There is no doubt that in the quest for national development, basic components that propel societies are summoned through various means and strategies, into a philosophy which translates into praxis affecting national consciousness and manifesting in areas like the arts and technology of the people. But this cannot be done without plan anymore than a pilot can fly without the compass or a ship can sail without the rudder. Genuine concerns about national development will demand the simultaneous advancement of every facet of people's life, language, dressing, arts, economy, music and of course technology. But often, more attention is given to technology and economy. But experience has shown that the lack of coordination in the area of national development is more of the problem of our fundamental presumptions about these aspects of the national life in particular and the meaning of development in general.

Music and the Nigerian society

All those formal definitions of music usually given in music education classes are not the primary interest of this paper. However, holding that music is organized arrangement of sounds in time could serve as a general idea. But how these sounds are organized, understood and interpreted depends on people and culture. The normal musical understanding of a person in England will no doubt contrast with that of another in Nigeria but both have valid ideas about music.

There are over four hundred different languages in Nigeria. Some ethnic groups exist in more than one country. Onwuejeogwu (1975) holds the view that about one thousand ethnic groups live in Africa, each having its culture. Communalism has been used by thinkers including Ekei (2001) in describing African political organization. In Nigeria, people live together and they value living together. This is without prejudice to the creeping Western

individualism. The worst form of individual punishment in most Nigerian communities takes the form of ostracism. So much is owned in common, land, forest, farms, trees, dance groups, schools, shrines and so on.

Music is owned more by groups, communities, age grades, women, youth, and so on, than by individuals. It therefore becomes a central force of social cohesion. Music brings people together and Nigerian cultural calendars have so many occasions that involve music making. Music is employed in a wide range of activities like naming ceremony, puberty rites, initiation ceremonies, title-taking ceremonies, religious events, marriages, burials and coronations, masquerading, competitions, and so on. The social life of the people revolves around these events and music does the work of reinforcing the ontological bonds (consanguinity) of brotherhood which keeps the societal equilibrium.

Nigerian traditional musics, especially the vocal form, employ Nigerian languages. They ensure the survival of communal idioms. Language is a well known element of cultural identity, especially with the tonal structure of many African languages. The individual composers know this much. Bebey (1975) captures this essential social function succinctly:

English and French have been adopted as official languages in most modern African states but although they may eventually replace African languages in many walks of life, they will never be able to do so in music – unless a deliberate decision is taken to deform the art of traditional music. The tendency to neglect the study of vernacular language is another of the crises facing the African musician (p.122).

Bebey does not stop at describing the situation; he goes beyond it by highlighting the greatest danger facing all African victims of colonialism – “the tendency to neglect the study of vernacular language”. This is an evil which faces not only the musician but also his audience – the different African communities. Music has performed well as a custodian of African languages. This is true of Nigeria.

Nigerian musicians had in the past played or danced or sung to entertain or perform other religious, or cultural functions, but not principally to make money. Technology has made it very easy for many artists to produce recorded work in a very short time without going through the rigours earlier associated with recording. The existence and performance of this art has

always remained at the highest aesthetic level in Nigeria. This is an African attitude to arts. This gives immense insight while evaluating African sense of value vis-à-vis the Western commercialization of art which has, like many other things, made inroads into the Nigerian entertainment industry.

Music enforces or reinforces a sense of belonging in the community. Every member of the community is a shareholder in the communal music. Every spectator is a potential participator. No one is outlawed. This sense of communion is an essential element in the survival of Nigerian communities.

Generally, African music has a way of representing African view of reality, an African philosophy. It may be simple in style, melody and lyrics but very complex in rhythm. These characteristics combine naturally to the surprise of a non-African who, at first contact with African music, is likely to dismiss it as non-music. The simple reason for this uninformed bias is the lack of the requisite faculty or category of understanding in the westerner's intellect. But he gradually begins to develop this dormant faculty with time and patience through an interiorization process.

The fact that some genres of music come under the general umbrella of African music is not in doubt. It is an independent and, in itself, complete brand of music. Every element in African music is unique and, for this reason, African music should seek its essence, not in the imitation of Western style analysis, which abstracts musical data from its cultural setting. In fact, there seems to be a total lack of the sonic-visual milieu which makes African music transcend over mere music. The attributes of African music are attributes of African culture and both are mutually reinforcing. This means that music can open the door to a more comprehensive understanding of the African peoples, their cultures and their philosophies.

The place of dynamic education

Omibiyi-Obidike (2002) gave a broad division of musicians into two, namely; traditional and non-traditional. But she derives from these two broad categories, six classes of music in Nigeria as follows.

- a. traditional music
- b. neo-traditional music
- c. church music
- d. popular music
- e. African art or contemporary music

f. Religious music

In all the classifications by the different musicologists above, traditional music show a marked consistency and continuity.

Many Scholars have given useful insights into Nigerian music but the vast and robust musical life of Nigerians is an experience deeper than all the insights can give. Yet, in talking about music, technology and national development, it seems a natural order of things to think of them in relation to education. The type of education which can bring together the beneficial values of the ancient art of music and combine them with the needed culture of development in both technology and socio-economic life of the nation is what is here, described as dynamic education. It is education which does not merely rush into inventions and novelties, for their sake, while losing all the gains of long years of experimentation and consolidation. It is education which does not simply draw a line or worse still, erect a Berlin Wall between both traditional informal or non-formal education system and formal Western approach to it. It is education borne out of a national need to integrate all the resources available for the realization of their ends or purposes. What this translates to is a careful harnessing of the various gains from all the approaches. Thus, an educational culture which promoted African music is likely to include the advancement of the curriculum of studies, the making of instruments and the lively appreciation of such indigenous music. Rather than understand music as merely the musical culture of the West, this form of dynamic education will ultimately show the relationship which the study of African or Nigerian music has with the economic life of the nation. It will be ready to arm students with empowered sense of self-reliance and create job opportunities and job satisfaction. The obvious implications of the music, technology and national development in education will come to the fore. This is the realistic conception of functional education – education that works to aid man, nature and to address the psychosomatic, spiritual, environmental, cultural and socio-economic needs of man.

Essential features of Nigerian music

It is impossible to single out any one element which makes any music Nigerian. In fact, it would appear that all that go into the making of a Nigerian tune, ensemble, dance and so on, display some inherent Africanness which is easy to recognize in African music in general. It may not, therefore, be simply the language, or instruments, the dance steps or the rhythm but all

of them acting together in a natural blend that has baffled every single Western musicologist.

According to Bebey (1975), the first thing that marks African music out is its **vitality**. This refers to the liveliness that is associated with it. He reports how the non-African is initially startled to discover that funeral music in African societies can be as tumultuous as a marriage feast. This shock occurs because he is accustomed to mourning his dead in reverential silence or with very quiet music. African vitality is a quality that does not hide in the musical life of the people. Such lively response to life is only natural to people who receive full blast of the elements. The blazing sun, it does appear, even in regions of the world that experience the winter, brings about more outdoor activities generally. What remains to be investigated is, therefore, the nature of the relationship between the weather conditions of a people and the liveliness of their music.

Language has a natural connection with Nigerian music. Most languages are tonal. This means that there is always the relationship between meaning and pitch. A word can, therefore, have several meanings depending on the stressed syllable.

Communal participation is also an element in Nigerian music. Most music groups are communally owned. Participation is equally communal so much so that almost everybody is a musician of a sort. In the words of Kamien (1998) concerning African music, “music is a social activity in which almost everyone participates. It is usually performed outdoors, and there is spontaneous music making as well as performances by social and music groups at ceremonies and feasts”. (p.388)

Music in Nigeria does not depend on notations. There are no known musical notations as found in Western music. The musical tradition of Africa in general does not thrive on papers. Like African folklores and history, music is passed on from one generation to another through **oral** means. The insistence on notation which is very important in Western music is unknown in African music, yet it does not diminish its essential nature or function.

Another essential feature of Nigerian music which is more widely recognized is **rhythm**. What it means exactly is hard to define but very easy to feel and understand: Some think it is the repetitive joggling of up and down beats through musical phrases. A few thinkers find African rhythm hunting and

cultic and associate it with magic. It is the heart of African music. It is the soul. Without it, a great element is lost.

It is worthy to note that the habitual attempt to categorize and distinguish things is purely a moment in western scholarship. It is alien to African living. Africa is Africa and its cultural logics are unique to the Continent. In Europe, harmony is the soul of music. In Africa, it is rhythm.

Many sub-Saharan musical features illustrate a higher application of interlocking. One other feature of Nigerian music is the aesthetic preference for dense **overlapping** textures and **buzzy timbres** that contribute to a dense sound quality.

African music has the cyclical and open-ended **repetition** of melodious or rhythmic patterns called 'ostinatos'. This is the basic foundation of performance. The repetition can go on for a very long time and the result is that communal participation is the essence. It is easy for everyone to participate since the rhythms and melodies follow a repetitive cycle. Nettl's (1983) earlier view corroborates these facts. African songs have short units and are sometimes antiphonal. There are solo performances but the most characteristic African music is done by groups. Techniques vary. But, there is an element that keeps the African art alive. This is the element of **improvisation**, spontaneity. It can apply to the melody or the instrumentation. The dance technique admits Nigerian music bears all the marks of African music and so much more.

The idea of technology

Technology means the employment and knowledge of tools, techniques, and crafts. It equally refers to systems or methods of organization. In some sense, it is understood as a material product (such as clothing) of these things. The word *technology* is derived the Greek *technología* (τεχνολογία) — *téchnē* (τέχνη), 'craft' and *-logía* (-λογία), the study of something, or the branch of knowledge of a discipline. The term can either be applied generally or to specific areas: examples include "music technology", "food technology", "construction technology", "medical technology", or "state-of-the-art technology".

Our planet has been undergoing gradual evolution and revolutions on account of technological advancements. These advancements have both improved human condition and endangered it. This means that technologies significantly affect human as well as other animal species' ability to control

and adapt to their natural environments. The great technological sophistication that we see today started with the compelling necessity of satisfying basic human needs by adapting available natural resources to simple tools. The human species' use of technology began with the conversion of natural resources into simple tools. The early man discovered tools for hunting animals and for making fire. This guaranteed his survival. Other discoveries followed in succession including the making of the wheel which made it possible for him to move around more easily in the bid to explore his environment. The discovery of gunpowder, the gramophone, the radio and much later the television, all revolutionized our world. The telephone, computer and the internet further altered the inhibitions that were previously associated with information sharing, interaction and distances. These have equally affected the way music is enjoyed, taught, learned, recorded and marketed. The advancement in general technology has equally recorded milestones in music technology too. But everything has not been cozy and positive about technology. Technology has equally evolved into a monster in the hands of humans. The sophistication of weapons of warfare has strained world peace and constantly threatened nations with total annihilation. The 20th century was notorious as the bloodiest in human history witnessing two world wars and several other costly wars.

Technology remains the architect of industrialization which changed the traditional approach to trade and general economy. Industrial revolution has brought with it the great disequilibrium in our planet through industrial emission and pollution. These have untold repercussions on human life. The use of robotic technology in industries and other work places has seen the displacement of humans and heralded the era of mass retrenchment and layoffs.

These advancements and their consequences have been the centre of all kinds of debates about the ambivalent nature of technology. Technology has provided us with the good, the bad and the ugly depending on which side of the divide you are standing.

The use of the term *technology* has shifted significantly over the years. Before the 20th century, the term was uncommon in English, and usually referred to the description or study of the useful arts. The German language and other European languages even differentiate between the use of the words *technik* and *technology*. This differentiation is not found in the English language.(2007). The shift in the use of the word equally came to be applied

in exclusion. The term was often connected to technical education. In the process, the concept of technology became associated if not restricted to the worlds of science, big business, and engineering, implicitly excluding workers, women, and non-Western peoples. In 1937, the American sociologist Read Bain wrote that "technology includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices and the skills by which we produce and use them." Bain's definition remains common among scholars today, especially social scientists. But equally prominent is the definition of technology as applied science, especially among scientists and engineers, although most social scientists who study technology reject this definition. More recently, scholars have borrowed from European philosophers of "technique" to extend the meaning of technology to various forms of instrumental reason, as in Foucault's work on technologies of the self ("techniques de soi").

Development re-defined

Development is currently a household concept among the committees of nations. But what it means is not always self-evident. However, the idea of development leaves us with the impression that it has everything to do with economic well being and technological advancement. The nations of the Northern hemisphere have arrogated to themselves the prestigious and enviable phrase "developed nations" giving the erroneous impression that they need not further their development; that the economy and technology are the principal criteria for joining the league of developed countries. While economic growth may be an important component of development, is it the only one? Is development a purely economic phenomenon? Must it begin and end with the material and financial aspect of people's lives? Even when Todaro (1980) declares that development is a multi-dimensional process, he still gives the erroneous impression of its overwhelming economic connotation by asserting that it involves;

the reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems. In addition to improvements in incomes and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures, as well as in popular attitudes and sometimes even customs and beliefs (p. 87).

Almost immediately, Todaro begins to use development synonymously with economic development. He distinguished two major development models (a)

The 'Linear stages' model of the 1950s and 1960s which was replaced by the (b) intensional-structuralist models which view third world countries as being caught in a carefully designed web of institutional and structural economic rigidities and their dependence on rich countries. This model is subdivided into the 'neo-colonial' dependence model, and the 'false paradigm model'.

From all indication, the term 'development' has been undergoing gradual evolution of meaning pioneered largely by its economic sense. The reason is offered by Todaro:

development in the 1950s and 1960 was nearly always seen as an economic phenomenon in which rapid gains in overall and per capita GNP growth would either 'trickle down' to the masses in the form of jobs and other economic opportunities or create the necessary conditions for the wider distribution of the economic and social benefits of growth (p. 95).

There followed the unfortunate turn of events when the rise in GNP could not explain the worst standard of living. There was need to shift the emphasis. 'Redistribution from growth was the common slogan. But it was professor Dudley Seers who made an impressive remark during the eleventh World Conference of the Society for International Development, (1969) when he said that if poverty, unemployment and inequality have been growing worse, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if per capita income doubled. Again, the arbiter is economic benefits. But this pervasive economic approach is not entirely shared by all. According to Nnoli (1996):

Development is a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments transforming them for their own benefit and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process (p. 264)

The issues raised by this view are serious enough. There is dialectics; there is the individual interacting with society; there is a gradual diffusion of relationship from human to the human environment; then and only then comes the issue of benefit not simply for selfish individuals or unpopular regimes but for humanity at large. Here is again the development of man who

gets transformed in the process of transforming his environment. Nnoli did not simply stop at what development is. He said what development is not:

it cannot be the assembling of artifacts like high-rise building, esoteric wears or flashy limousines, particularly when these are not the end-products of a people's sweat in the production process, that is when they are not produced locally by the people but are brought from outside (p. 264).

But unfortunately this is the erroneous idea of development shared by many even among the elite. They merely forget that the so-called economic policies are simply well thought out ideas by some, for controlling what others do, ideas to thrive on monopoly and exploitation. In fact, the blind acceptance of Western development model seems to suggest that many think that development is all about Westernization. Nothing even gives the impression that they are coterminous. The laughable measures of development like the Gross National Product (GNP) and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capital income have been definitively laid to rest by the critique of Hoogvelt since as statistical average, they do not measure income distribution. By ignoring the wide dispersion of income within nation, they offer dubious statistical result. For Rodney (1990) "Development... is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being" (p. 9).

Rodney knows that some of those categories pertain to areas that may be difficult to evaluate like morality but he equally understands that "the achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole" (p. 9).

This is the issue. When we say that development is a process, should it exclude a gradual movement from the developed individual to the developed society and environment at large? Development used exclusively as an economic term is grossly misleading. It is "rather an overall social process which is dependent upon the outcome of man's efforts to deal with his natural environment" (p. 12).

Preliminary considerations

On face value, there seems to be nothing connecting music, technology and national development. But technology has aided, improved and connected

cultural musics across boundaries. Being a basic component of culture, music has equally served to carry political and nationalistic ideologies. In Nigeria, music is alive and functional. Can it contribute adequately to national development? Yes. But how? The nation has to redefine the road to development as well as what development consists of. For years now, the Nigerian nation has relied on concepts and ideas derived and often drawn up by the Western nations. The consequence is that the prevalent idea of development goes no deeper than shoring up the economic muscles of nations. But the economy is not enough to substitute for development.

When leaders speak about development of the nation, what they end up addressing is the provision of basic infrastructure, houses, roads, schools, power and so on. They have done this for the past fifty years and we are still not developed. And this is why it is important to review the faulty approaches so far employed in addressing development issues. Provision of infrastructure should occupy the lowest rung of the development ladder. The development of the human person and the potentials locked inside him seems to receive little or no attention. Inviting multinational companies and foreign investments take pride of place over the need to indigenize technology to serve national and cultural needs. I think this is where technology comes in handy. Let us look at music and consider the aspects through which technology can aid the practice of music in the country. Little has improved in the way that musical instruments have been made for the last two hundred years. The drums, the gongs, the kakakis, the xylophones, are still done in the crudest fashion. There is no apparent coordination between the physical sciences and the arts in this direction. But the truth that cannot be brushed aside is that technology becomes a culture wherever it is allowed to evolve according to the needs of the given environment. But the attempt to ape the West in lifestyles, language and cravings without adequate foundation to provide the basic necessities of life is nothing but an investment in illusion. Technology is not a goal but a means to a goal. Again, the ability to record music is thanks to technology. Today, the music industry has employed thousands of creative artists, musicians and dancers. Studios are springing up in virtually every city. And this has buoyed the economy in no small way. Thanks to technology and the media, Nigerian music has been placed on the global map by very many artists and promoters. But all the technological support to music has remained largely borrowed. Genuine and real national development has to be built on a foundation that is homegrown. And music is a natural place to start.

Instead of investing the scarce petrodollars in importing technologies that we cannot maintain, it is possible and more important to invest in technologies that will be so down to earth that it could be taught in primary and secondary schools. In this way, technology will become a culture and future generations will grow with it.

Development requires a lot of planning by those who run the affairs of nations. The idea of governors claiming that they have brought 'development' to their states just because they have awarded contracts for the asphaltting of abandoned roads and for building other non-functional edifices is, to say the least, very misleading. National development is bigger and deeper than mere environmental face-lift or in some cases defacement. National development should involve all the aspects of human life, cultural, historical, religious, educational, spiritual, legal, and psychological. These ought to be integrated into a unity of consciousness and be taught and supported at every level.

Conclusion

Technology can and indeed should be at the service of music in the quest for national development. But the time has come for the erroneous impressions of development to be corrected. The man-in-the street idea of development as the provision of basic infrastructure and the building of high rises as well as the provision of information technology is simply not enough. Both in the school teaching and practice of music, technology is a sine qua non. But we need to evolve these technologies or copy by imitation and then make them ours. Some are even of the opinion that we can steal them since stealing is one of the ways of transferring technologies. The criticism of preliminary considerations is nothing more than the review of the faulty steps surrounding the concept of development in general and the approach to technology in particular. Technology can aid development and of course bring a whole lot of collateral damage to both man and environment and we should not lose sight of the demerits of technology even in its minutest appearance. Even the advancement in music technology and recording can at best depend on the artistic knowledge of the operator more than by the level of sophistication in the hard and software often employed in production.

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