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**Democracy and Development: Is to Democratize the Same as to Develop?**

**Nnamdi, Basil Sunday, PhD**

Department of Philosophy

Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt

Phone: +2347038482828

E-mail: [docgurubeennamdi@gmail.com](mailto:docgurubeennamdi@gmail.com)

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**Agbanusi, Arinze, PhD**

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

E-mail: [agbanzechris@yahoo.com](mailto:agbanzechris@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract**

In the 1970's the popular western perception was that for the so-called Third World to develop, they must modernize in what came to be known as modernization theory. This, in effect, was seen by most developing or emergent states to mean that to develop nations had to Europeanize. From the 1990's to date the democratic theory of development has seemed to have superseded the modernization theory by demanding that to develop nations have to democratize by which democracy has to meet European conception of it. The latter has led to various uprisings in some nations as there are demands for regime change and attempts at toppling governments perceived by the West to be undemocratic. This paper sought to establish that democracy is not intrinsically linked to development and that though democracy can prove a catalyst to development, the extent it does so depends on the development variables. Such variables include the human capital and capacity, natural resources or endowment and the level of socio-cultural attainment of the citizenry. The paper concluded that democracy guarantees freedom and participation which can make or mar development depending on the aforementioned variables and their proper interplay. Above all, it avows that development can be without democracy and there can be democracy without development much as there is no internal relationship between them.

### Introduction

The contention whether or not democracy equals to development remains an on-going and keenly contested debate or argument among socio-political scholars, economists and public analysts. In fact, this sustained argument commenced since the early 1970s and continues till the 1990s when Americans assert that in order to develop, countries must modernize and democratize. Herein lies the justification of modernization as a veritable tool for development, albeit economic development. However, evidence has since shown that real and concrete development goes beyond democratization, that is, development in which humans can attain and realize their full potentials can be thought of without recourse to the practice or non-practice of democracy. Therefore, scholars have been polarized over those who assert that development can only birth in a country if and only if they democratize forming the first school of thought; and those opposed to it on the ground that there is no intrinsic connection between democracy and development constituting the second school of thought. For the first school, democracy brings about economic development and this assertion is premised on the fact that most democratized societies in the world are developed. But, one flaw associated with the position of the above school of thought is that they erroneously equate economic development *per capita* with concrete development forgetting that economic development is only but an aspect of real development. Also, a second flaw associated with the above school is the issue of inequality and something quite more than marginal poverty that is still noticeable in the so-called developed countries of the world despite being democratized.

On the other divide are scholars who strongly oppose any link between democracy and development. For them, democracy cannot and can never equal to development as both concepts can stand on their own without depending on each other. Therefore, this school of thought used the example of countries like present China, and Libya under Gaddafi which was not democratic, but was developed to buttress the fact that it is a hoax to say that democracy is a *sine qua non* to development. Highlighting a lucid illustration of both schools concerning the debate, while expressing his position, Sikuka (2017) asserts:

The nexus between democracy and development... has been one of the most contested issues in recent years. Those in support of the linkage argue that the two – democracy and development – are intertwined and depend on or lead to the other. However, opposing views claim that the two concepts are independent of each other, and can easily be achieved without necessarily depending or leading to the other.

Sikuka further maintains that several explanations have been adduced by both schools to justify their claims. For instance, he posits that the former used the assumption of economic and social maturity, as well as the view that all developed nations achieved the feat of development based on being democratic to demonstrate the nexus of democracy and development. But the latter school of thought holds that there is no inter-connectedness between democracy and development as development means something beyond which democracy can achieve. He sums up by positing that the belief that an intrinsic affinity exists between democracy and development such that the practice of democracy is invariably a prerequisite for development is faulty, erroneous, misleading, which rather stems from an improper understanding of the real meaning of development.

The above analysis therefore raises vital questions such as: Why are there still huge economic injustice or unfairness, palpable lack of employment and measurable poverty in many democratized countries of the world? Does to democratize really lead to development, if so why are some democratic countries still struggling with development under lower growth rate and lower GDP despite their practice of democracy? In other words, can development not be thought of without democracy? Can economic growth and development amount to a total and holistic development rather than being a fraction of development indices? The foregoing questions inform the bases upon which this paper sets out to examine whether or not an ontological nexus exists between democracy and development.

### Conceptual Analysis of the Terms: Democracy and Development

For the sake of clarity and for a profound understanding of the relevant concepts of democracy and development, let us engage in a brief clarification of them and their lineaments. Such clarification is intended to, not only afford us the proper meanings of the terms, but also the criteria and indices of the terms as they really obtain in real civil or political states.

#### The Conceptual Review of Democracy

Democracy is one concept that has enjoyed a multiplicity of definitions. In its aboriginality, the term is said to be derived from two Greek words “*Demo*” meaning people and “*Kratia*” meaning “*rule or government*”. This shows that the root meaning of democracy simply implies peoples’ rule or government. Democracy, in other parlance, can be etymologically defined as people’s rule or government/governance. This can largely underscore why Abraham Lincoln describes democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Sikuka (2017) conceives democracy as a political form of government that entails the equality of all citizens in participating actively in the state decision making process. For Dibie, (2003) democracy is a governmental system in which the citizens partake in the affairs of governance through representatives elected by them either directly or indirectly. This also implies that democracy denotes a system of government that affords the citizens an ample of opportunity for participation in governance of the affairs that concern them the citizens. It is principally about self-rule where the citizens are their own rulers through representatives. No wonder why the British John Locke considers democratic governance as a government of “trusteeship” as those who are at the helm of affairs function in representation of the citizenry that holds them in trust. The representative governance associated with democracy is occasioned by the fact that all citizens cannot be directly involved in the day to day running of the state affairs hence the representativeness and indirect democracy which is a variant of the original Greek model of direct democracy. Ghali (2003) on the other hand, defines democracy as “a system whereby the whole of society can participate at every level, in the decision-making process and keep control of it”. Ghali considers the citizens’ participation as the fundamental element of democracy that actually makes it real. However, given the encumbrances and virtual impossibility of all really and practically participating directly, representative governance becomes a democratic ideal.

Schumpeter (1942) advances a lucid definition of democracy as a political system with strong and efficient “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”. Schumpeter’s conception of democracy accentuates the very important role of the citizens’ participation in democracy in choosing their representatives through free, fair and credible elections. It is against this backdrop that democracy can be conceptualized as a political cum governmental system that guarantees and protects the rights of the citizens, as well as that which promotes popular participation, accountability and transparency.

The fact that democracy is principally about freedom and participation may account for erroneous assumption that democracy can be equated with development or that both have intrinsic relationship, probably due to the fact that freedom aids development. Elucidating this fact, Alina (2007) asserts that:

Much of the answer to the question about the link between democracy and development will of course depend on how one defines ‘development’. If one...adopts a definition of development as ‘freedom’ – a suitably broad definition that incorporates not only economic indicators but also freedoms like human and political rights, social opportunities, transparency, guarantees and protective security, then by definition democracy must lead to development.

In agreement with the above passage, if freedom means development, it could rightly be argued that democracy is synonymous with development or that one necessarily entails the other. We cannot but

agree that freedom can aid development and that as a matter of fact, true development comes out of freedom, yet not every freedom and more so not every person or persons can develop under freedom, for freedom only provides the necessary enabling environment for development potential to a person, persons or people to be actuated. After all said, freedom demands deep seated responsibility and, as such, it requires a profound wisdom to manage. Development entails a movement from potentiality, mediated by capacity or by vital accessories, to actuality and as such where necessary potentiality is lacking freedom cannot provide alternative and in such case no necessary actuality will result. Above all, whatever develops does so from its present state of actuality to what is potential to it, and no one gives what one does not have and it is obvious that nothing begets nothing and something begets something.

### **Prerequisites of Democracy**

As already observed above, democracy cannot in the present day politics be perfectly or absolutely practiced to the letters as “peoples’ rule or governance” just as it was in Greek original model of direct participation of eligible citizens. This is due to certain restraining factors which range from the extant of the civil societies or states today, the economic necessities of the citizens to engage in diverse professions and occupations so engaging as not to afford the greater proportions of the citizens with the required spare time for politics and governance, to the huge populations that cannot actually all engage in the real serious business of politics and governance. Hence, the necessity for a number of principles and practices that approximate to a total practice of democracy known as democratic ideals for their being the best way to approximate to a total and full practice of democracy. In this connection, we have to make a brief excursus into such democratic ideals that characterize the real practice of democracy today, all in a bid for clarity over the role of democracy in state or national development.

### ***Supremacy of the Constitution***

First and foremost, democracy must be built or founded on enduring people’s constitution conceived, designed and approved by the good majority of the citizens. By Constitution here we mean a document by which the citizens constitute themselves into citizens of a specific state or nation state. Constitution is a fundamental document constituting the entire state or nation state which among other things defines the state geographically and ideologically. It is a ground norm of a state or nation state, which regulates the relationship among the citizens and the authorities, as well as among the institutions, physical and infrastructure. Above all, constitution spells the geographic space and as a document that precedes the real existence of the state, it gives birth to the state or nation state by launching or inaugurating the same into existence. Such a document known as constitution which, by all intents and purposes, should be the ground norms of the state or nation state and one that is above all in authority is fundamentally and essentially for democracy.

### ***Periodic Elections***

This is one central feature of democracy that promotes the citizens’ participation in the governance of the affairs that concern them. Periodic free, fair and credible elections enable the citizens to renew their mandate to those they elected previously to represent them in taking important decisions that determine their lives and existence in the state or nation. Where such elections can be truly adjudged credible in the sense of being authentic expression of the citizens will, they demonstrate the citizens’ participation and freedom that democracy fundamentally means and stands for. They enable the citizens to pass practical judgment on their representative leaders or governors with the result that those who largely or reasonably satisfy the majority of the citizens gain majority votes to continue representing them, but those who fail to satisfy the majority lose opportunity of continuing to be part of government business by direct involvement. Frequent or Periodic Elections where credible are a desideratum for, or the determinant of democracy.

### ***Independent Judiciary***

For democracy to flourish, the principle of separation of power need be upheld to avoid an absolute power which, as it is often said in socio-political analyses, corrupts absolutely. According to the principle of separation of powers, three arms of government exist with well delineated spheres of power and authority which amounts to devolution of sovereignty amongst the three arms of Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. The beauty of separation of power is underscored in the Shakespearean dictum which states that: “To offend and to judge are two distinct offices and of opposed natures”, which underlies the principle that “nobody should be a judge in his own case”. Independent judiciary guarantees equality before the law which is the essence of the doctrine of rule of law.

### ***Vibrant Press***

Another important element of democracy is vibrant press which serves multiple interests of a true democracy. Press which in Nigerian society has come to be widely regarded as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm”, after the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary for their vital importance as an instrument of a true democracy is actually a necessity for both the governors and the governed, hence it can rightly be described here as a common good of the commonwealth, state, nation state or the polis. The press serves the government in reaching out to the citizens on its policies, intentions and activities, that is, for communication and dissemination of information; and it serves the citizens for expressing their feelings, understanding of government policies and actions as well as their opinions on them. Given the importance of the press, a free and vibrant press is a *sine qua non* for a veritable democracy much as it serves as a two-way channel of communication for both the governors and the governed.

### **Conceptual Review of Development**

Development is one of those concepts in politico-philosophical lexicon that lend themselves to much controversies based on varied indices, perspectives and paradigms on which its consideration and or analyses are often based. Despite varied perspectives on development, it may be difficult to deny that development of the people or nations’ citizens demands certain basic standards of living that stem from the basic necessities of primordial life such as food, clothing and shelter to contemporary luxuries that add meaning and joy to life. Yet it may be relevant here to point out that humans who are the subjects and objects of politics in general and democracy in particular are not merely of physical and materialistic bodies to be provided with mere material food, clothing and shelter. Humans are also made of minds and are of spirit with the result that they also have immaterial needs of joy, happiness, peace and tranquillity. Hence, much as development is about advancement of the human persons that transcend physical existence, development that truly appertains to them has to be holistic, integral, as to take care of both the body and soul needs of humans. This is the philosophical angle from which our analysis of development here assumes. In the foregoing light, development is not restricted to mere material development of physical structures like skyscrapers, sophisticated high ways, and other benefits of modern technology, but more importantly the real standard of living in terms improved living condition, and public and private happiness based on what promotes life of human dignity.

In Egharevba and Chiazor (2012), development denotes “people’s freedom to live a better life...it is all about people which are a nation’s most important resource... it makes it possible for a large portion of the people to live up to their potential through unhindered access to education, healthcare, better nutrition or food, shelter and infrastructure”. The necessary implication of this is that development should be measured on the basis of the citizens’ capacity to assess good life in a way of improved living conditions adequate for human survival and advancement. The foregoing definition of development implies, among others, availability, affordability and sustainability of certain basic amenities that make life worth living. For Egharevba and Chiazor, a developed state or society should harbour the ability to ensure that its socio-economic and political institutions judiciously utilize available resources in such a

way that it brings about a corresponding and positive transformation in the life of the people in the given society. It is only in so doing that the meaning of development becomes clear. As Nnamdi (2010) reiterates, development is basically about the people, that is, enhancing their capacity to live a life in which their well-being and welfare are not compromised. Therefore, he posits that “development is not only people-centered but also of and about the people (citizens) as well as by the people”. In his view, development only makes meaning or sense when the individuals or citizens living in the society (country) are the direct beneficiaries of the said development; otherwise the concept loses its meaning. In partial agreement with Nnamdi, Egharevba (2007) and Lawal (2007) asserted that:

Development connotes the process of bringing about fundamental and sustainable changes in society. It encompasses growth, embraces such aspects of the quality of life as social justice, equality for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the democratization of the development process.

From the above, it is glaring that though different from growth, development could be engrossed in economic growth, and in furtherance of this position, Stiglitz (2003) defined development as the positive transformation of the economic and social aspects of society. This means that for Stiglitz, development encompasses economic growth which is concerned with economic progress or advancement in a way of increased productivity which with equitable distribution ensures even development. For Nnamdi (2010), “Development can be defined as a process of unfolding, evolving, or maturing that entails a movement from a lesser stage to a greater one. Therefore, to develop is, in some cases to increase in dimension, to mature, and in some others, to come out full and perhaps complete.” Further, Nnamdi maintained that growth which is often confused with development is essentially different from development, and trying to elucidate the glaring difference, he asserts that:

Growth as differentiated from development is increase in quantity without similar increase in quality, while development is increase in quality which may not entail any increase in quantity. Development in other words can be described simply as qualitative increase, an improvement in quality, or a process of maturation or advancement in qualities.

In the above passage, it is evident that development is concerned with increase in value, importance, significance, utility and benefits, while growth is largely about enlargement in quantity and dimension. There can therefore, be a big increase in size, quantity, without actually a commensurate increase in quality, value, significance or importance. Ghali (2003), however, conceived development as “the whole range of economic, social and cultural progress to which all peoples aspire...it provides all the factors that help individuals fulfil themselves”. For Ghali, the proper meaning of development is comprehended in the fact that it provides people with a plethora of opportunities and choices to overcome poverty: satisfy needs and fulfill potentials. Peet (1999) defined development as the “improvement in the material conditions of many people which also entails “economic, social, and cultural progress”. Seer (1977) also presented a definition of development in terms of enhancing and improving the quality as well as the living condition, welfare and well-being of humans. Thus, he saw development as surpassing the accumulation of capital and promotion of economic growth and rather concerns the process by which the citizens achieve food security and full employment opportunities with a drastic reduction in inequality of social opportunities and income. Seer believed that development enables humans to meet their needs, overcome hunger through a wide range of choices and opportunities it makes available to mankind.

From the foregoing, the paper maintains that development, which is all about the people, promotes full employment, alleviates poverty and seeks the guarantee of equitable distribution of national resources. Ultimately, the indices of development consist in improved standard of living of the citizens at large, as well as food security, serene environment, and all round good living that promotes good health and longevity.

### **The Relationship between Democracy and Development**

It cannot entirely be denied without contradiction, nor justifiably be proved that no possible connection exists between democracy and development. However, it is the position of this paper that such possible connection is not inherent in democracy as a prerequisite of development. This means, in effect, that democracy can be a catalyst to development depending on certain variables that range from natural and human resources, through the caliber of the citizens, to the level of socio-cultural development of the state or nation state. In this connection, considering such external connections between democracy and development, we have to first observe the possible connection between them, and second, demonstrate how there can be development without democracy in order to debunk the fallacy of the insistence that unless a state democratizes it cannot develop. The aim is to illustrate that though democracy can prove a veritable asset to development, that development can actually be achieved without democracy.

### **The Role of Democracy in Aiding Development**

As we have observed earlier above, the beauty of democracy is freedom and participation of all eligible citizens as prescribed by the law of the state. It is somewhat unfortunate that in the modern day politicking, much are expected and attributed to democracy which actually are not native or inherent in the concept of democracy. Such artificial attributes which constitute the myth of democracy are welfare provisions, social amenities, and their likes which in Nigerian political lexicon have come to be referred to as democratic dividends for the expectations that democracy must result in affluence and improved standard of living. Such line of thought seems to neglect the fact that economics is a specialized area distinct from politics and democracy. Democracy as peoples' rule or governance means that it is the human capacity to harness and utilize the natural resources that brings about much or less development to the state. It is the people of developed capacity, of great potentials and of harmonious coexistence that can pilot a meaningful and sustainable development. The developed states or nations should be the function of the citizens' development in minds and spirit which in effects spell great potentiality and real capacity for development.

The role of democracy therefore is that of providing the atmosphere of freedom, equality of opportunity and fair play which when put together can be a veritable catalyst or promoter of development. A free society of free men and women living in harmony and under mutual respect and regard will, no doubt, tend to maximize its potentials and its outputs. But when the society is backward-minded and socially retarded due to unprogressive culture, development will elude their democracy which cannot function properly without enlightened citizenry. In the final analysis, democracy is undeniably a great asset to development for the people who are mature in mind, with necessary natural and human resources with a claim of the adequate socio-cultural attainment. Freedom which democracy entails demands responsibility and as such only responsible people can benefit from freedom while it can be destructive to the irresponsible, uncultured people who have not got the necessary capacity to manage the said freedom. Hence, democracy is not for every society for it can be destructive and retrogressive for unprepared society, state or nation. Above all, if democracy is considered in Abraham Lincoln's expression "as government of the people by the people and for the people", does it not follow that if the people are backward in culture, spirit and frame of mind, their democracy will be government of backward people, by the people and in their backwardness. Democracy with the freedom it entails can only activate what is potential in the people, for no one can give what one does not have. Freedom inherent in democracy can aid development where there is necessary wisdom, but where the necessary wisdom is lacking, freedom can ensue irresponsibility, chaos and untold hardship.

### **Development without Democracy**

Given the foregoing discourse so far, it is grossly evident that there can be development without democracy or democratization of non-democracies. In other words, to democratize does not amount to

development as there are countries in the world whose democracies cannot even be classed among the least in the world, yet they veritably lay claims of development. Examples abound in such nations as in Peoples Republic of China in Asia, Seychelles and Libya of Gaddafi. Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are far from being democratic and nonetheless they have more than reasonable claim of development. Corroborating this fact, Sikuka (2017) asserted thus:

...democracy and development are not necessarily dependent on each other. One classic example to support this point is China. Despite being considered as one of the least democratic states in the world, in the last few decades this Asian nation has managed to experience impressive economic development, at a much faster rate than most democratic countries in the world. The process of democratisation has not really been associated with, or led to, economic development in most countries. This assessment is particularly true in most African countries, which have taken extensive efforts to democratise their political systems but have achieved very little progress in terms of economic development.

In view of the above passage, it is enlightening that development cannot come by mere democratizing as evidence abounds of countries which have taken time to democratize without appreciable or meaningful development. Chan (2002) re-echoed this position that development can be achieved without democracy when he reiterates that countries like Japan, Taiwan and Singapore did not follow the path of democratization but recorded tremendous development. This goes to show the fallacy inherent in the conception that democracy as a matter of natural necessity actually brings about development.

Regarding the practical consequences of real practice of democracy, Chan (2002), while interpreting Taylor in terms of outlining the shortcomings of democracy *vis-à-vis* its inability to engender development, maintained that democracy is only pre-occupied in promoting private interests while at the same time neglecting the promotion of the common interests of all. No matter the huge claims of development through democracy, and somewhat equal claim of popularity of democracy, the fact remains that every democracy retains a dominant elitist group that propels affairs of the state who cannot deny not only monopoly of powers but also the monopoly of the economy. Highlighting a cogent reason for the inability of democracy to sometimes and in some cases promote development, Taylor (1989) posited that; “the central concern for democracy is to promote private interest and private property, and this not only denies the social but lead away from the public sphere toward a life dedicated to the pursuit of private interest with little regard for the common good”. Hence, Taylor demonstrated that development does not necessarily depend on democracy because, for him, democracy often caters for the private interests of the elites.

Lotherington and Elkington (2008) buttressed the inappropriateness of equating democracy with development by asserting that renowned development scholars and civil right groups have reached a consensus that “democracies seem currently unable to adequately manage and deliver sustainable development”. Though, the duo did not adduce any reasons for the conclusion, the fact remains that it lucidly illustrates the unsuitability and wrongness of placing democracy as a constant for achieving development. However, Westall (2015) was quick to pin-point the reasons why democracy cannot bring about development. These pit-falls, as he outlines them include; “policy incoherence, the inertia of democratic structures; and distrust of politics and the political process”. He summed up his position by maintaining that the current reality on ground reveals that no essential nexus, whatsoever, exists between democracy and development.

To sum up this discourse on states’ or nations’ development, it may be pertinent to emphasize the fact that freedom and wider participation democracy entails can actually encumber development especially in a variegated society with disparity in the level of enlightenment and with large population of uninformed illiterates. In this connection, an enlightened and benevolent dictator versed in statecraft



who has the necessary good will can catapult his or her nation to accelerated development in what can be considered benevolent dictatorship while at the same time respecting human lives and development. Some world leaders have proved to be ahead of their times who tried to engage in development projects their contemporary could not appreciate which later proved real progress and development. Some nations of the world actually had their solid foundation for development under benevolent dictators under some sort of political paternalism. What is more, some progressive leaders who were quite ahead of their times were stifled and prevented from taking their peoples to the promised land of development due to the currents of ignorant populism that worked against them and their efforts to uplift their peoples. Citizens of certain nations may have to mature to benefit from true democracy for true democracy cannot flourish without educated citizenry, and when the citizenry is largely ignorant and lack certain level of awareness, despite democracy, development remains elusive.

### Conclusion

It is very clear from the foregoing analysis that no intrinsic connection exists between democracy and development. Granted that both share certain basic characteristics such as freedom and mass participation, it does not follow that democracy is a *sine qua non* to development. There are several countries in the world as demonstrated by this paper which attained development without democratizing, while so many others which bought the false impression that democracy ultimately leads to development have democratized with no signs of development. This paper, therefore, concludes that development remains a process that ensures the progress of humans in terms of enhanced freedom to access better health care services, portable water, affordable education, employment and housing with a corresponding transformation in quality of life, well-being and welfare. The progress which comes with development can be achieved whether or not a state or country/society democratizes. In fact, the multiplicity of opportunities and choices that come with development can be explored by humans to better their lot without recourse to democracy. However, democracy remains a veritable catalyst for development where other development variables such as necessary human capital and capacity; natural resources or endowment; and the necessary socio-cultural attainment in civility and enlightenment present themselves in the right proportions.

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