

## Social Progress as a Complement of Sustainable Development: A Perspective from the Well-Being of the Average Nigerian

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### Abstract

Going by simple syllogism, justice and fairly are the precursors to peaceful coexistence in any given society and this constitutes the basis for any meaningful cooperation, collaboration and partnership among citizens, nations and even globally. It stands to reason therefore, that these three variables lie on a continuum. This paper examined the roles of social justice, peace and partnership in the quest for the well-being of the average Nigerian citizen. Data was obtained from secondary materials which include books, journals, periodicals, magazines, the internet, etc. The theory of Justice by Rawls (1971) was adopted as its theoretical framework while the mode of analysis was content analysis. The paper conducted quite an extensive review spanning from the conceptual through the empirical review. Results of the data analysis revealed that for any meaningful partnership and cooperation to be attained amongst Nigerians, the basic tenets of social justice must be applied in guaranteeing a level-playing ground for all its citizens. This certainly ushers an air of equality, egalitarianism, happiness, cooperation and partnership towards the well-being of the citizens. The paper therefore, suggested a serious rethink of the government in power towards social justice and fair play in all aspects of nationhood.

### Keywords:

Social Justice, Peace,  
Partnership,  
Nationhood,  
Egalitarianism, Well-  
being

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### **Background to the Study**

There are instances of the emergence of new political movements even among the most prosperous nations of the world such as France and the United States. Also, the Arab Spring provides evidence of uprisings resulting from citizens' demand for better lives while in Africa, there is a plethora of demands for improved livelihood through agitations for resource control, state/local government creations (Nigeria) and outright separatism. These protests are synonymous with the demand for social justice, peace and better living standards which can only be guaranteed by good governance enthroned on the basis of sustainable democratic tenets. It is against this background that social justice has turned an increasingly critical agenda for leaders in government, businesses, and the civil society. It needs be underscored that progress on social issues does not automatically accompany economic development. Rising income usually attracts major improvements in access to clean water, sanitation, literacy and basic education. However, too many people regardless of income, live without full rights and experience discrimination or even violence based on gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Such discrimination constitutes major hindrance to social cohesion, peaceful co-existence, partnership and genuine effort towards sustainable development, in addition, social justice becomes elusive on the altar of discrimination. This is because the dimension of social justice encompasses several factors relevant in maintaining the social fabric of a nation – such as income distribution and social exclusion – i.e. state of origin, religion, etc. Many states in Nigeria do not employ non-indigenes and where they do, it is usually as contract staff. This paper is premised upon the fact that justice and fairplay are the precursors to the peaceful co-existence among citizens in any given society and constitute the basis for any meaningful cooperation, collaboration and partnership even at the global level.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Social progress is synonymous with social justice. As the society begins with the individual, justice and progress will remain elusive in any society in which the individual has not been touched positively. Emerging from a four-regional structure in the sixties, Nigeria assumed a twelve (12) state structure in 1967 under the watch of General Yakubu Gowon. Today, the nation boasts of thirty-six (36) states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) – all in an effort to achieve justice, progress and development of the country. Unfortunately, these measures have not translated to a greater well-being for the average Nigerian as agitations for more state creation, equal employment opportunities, livelihood-enhancing opportunities, resource control, outright separation, etc. are still widespread. The failure of several measures by the successive administrations in Nigeria to launch the nation on the path of sustainable development but rather stimulating agitations for more state creation and opportunities, forms the problem this study seeks to examine.

A study by Odinioha (2014) on social justice and sustainable development in Nigeria which examined the nexus between the two variables observed that despite the plethora of developmental plans initiated by present and past administrations to tackle myriads of

problems confronting the nation, much is still desired in the bid for sustainable national development. The prism of six dimensions of social justice include-- poverty alleviation, access to education, labor market inclusion, social cohesion and non-discrimination, healthcare, and intergenerational justice to advocate a sustainable development agenda. The paper concluded that both justice and injustice possess negative and positive effects respectively, and these conditions eventually predict the attitude of many towards either doing good or bad to the nation. Social justice is a creation of government in power.

Schraman (2014), father of communication studies cited in media development investment fund, observed that: by making one part of a country aware of other parts, their people, arts, customs, and politics; by permitting the national leaders to talk to the people, and people to the leaders and to each other; by making possible a nation-wide dialogue on national policy; by making the national goals and national accomplishments always before the public; thus modern communication, widely used, can help weld together isolated communities, disparate subcultures, self-centered individuals and groups, and separate developments into a truly national development.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to assess the extent to which social progress can enhance the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to;

- a. Examine the relationship between social progress and social justice in the human society.
- b. Ascertain the extent to which social progress can facilitate sustainable development.
- c. Explain how sustainable development can enhance the well-being of citizens in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

Three questions will be addressed in this study. They include;

- a. What is the relationship between social progress and social justice in the human society.
- b. To what extent can social progress facilitate sustainable development in Nigeria?
- c. How can sustainable development enhance the well-being of citizens in Nigeria?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Social Progress:** The Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness (2016) in its social progress index, defined social progress as “the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential”. The social progress imperatives mission is to improve the lives of people around the world, particularly the least well off, by helping government, the private sector and the non-profit sector to collaborate more effectively

and make better use of the resources available to solve pressing social and environmental problems. To understand social progress, one requires a slightly deeper insight into the term, 'Progress'. Progress can be defined as an improvement in the well-being of human beings. Progress requires change. This does not mean that change is the same as progress. Mankind has made progress; improvements in society are indispensable and almost inevitable; and economic growth and progress are vital goals.

Progress means more than the economic growth. It means longer and better quality life for a larger proportion of people. A society that reduces the number of men and women who must lead lives that may be described by Hobbes as, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” is achieving progress. A country or population realizes progress when change results in any of the following” longer lives, reduced infant mortality, decreased in morbidity, increases in people's options, greater equality, more freedom or a reduction in fear of other people or of their own rulers.

One major component of progress is improved life expectancy and diminished maternal and infant deaths. “Moreover, greater life expectancies lead people to report that they are happier with their lives”. (Veenhoven, 1984: 152), cited in Mencken (n.d).

**Sustainable Development:** *Our common future*, the Brundtland commission report published in 1987, Sustainable Development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). This concept of sustainable development although somehow vague, aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long term value of the environment; it “provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987).

**Well-being:** According to Gasper (2002), “the category of well-being seems to be used to refer to whatever is assessed in an evaluation which is focused on the person's 'being'. The term 'welfare' can mean how well people live, or what is done by others to help the needy; these are the two Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) meanings. In the former usage, 'welfare' is typically treated interchangeably with well-being; the OECD defines it as 'well-being; happiness; health and prosperity'. Thus, Travers and Richardson (1993), believe “The concept of well-being is best seen as an abstraction, that is used to refer to any of many well-evaluated aspects of life”.

### **Empirical Literature**

This section presents past and current works by researchers in a tabular form as follows:

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of Justice (John Rawls, 1971)

The theory of Justice is a work of political philosophy and ethics by John Rawls in which he attempts to solve the problem of distributive justice (the socially just distribution of goods in a society) by utilizing a variant of the familiar device of the school contract. The

resultant theory is known as “Justice as Fairness”, from which Rawls derives his two principles of justice. Together, they dictate that society should be structured so that the greatest possible amount of liberty is given to its members, limited only by the notion that the liberty of any one member shall not infringe upon that of any other member. Secondly, inequalities – either social or economic – are not only to be allowed if the worst off will be better off than they might be under an equal distribution. Finally, if there is such a beneficial inequality, this inequality should not make it harder for those without resources to occupy positions of power – for instance, public office. The above theory was first published in 1971 and revised in 1975.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is a descriptive analysis of the extent to which social progress predicated on social justice can go in enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria. Data sourced from secondary materials are synthesized using the technique of content analysis. The analysis runs in the following order:

**Research Questions One (1):** what is the relationship between social progress and social justice?

An understanding of the relationship between social justice and social progress requires a higher philosophical background. Beginning with the observation by Wilkinson & Pickett (2009), “at all stages, creating a more equal society involves people speaking their minds, making the case, organizing and campaigning”. Using social justice and community development as a reference point, social justice is one of the five values upon which community development is founded. The practice of a more just society starts in the personal everyday experiences that shape people's lives. Community development is about people questioning their reality and working together to bring about change. “Collective action grows in strength as individual's form groups; groups identify issues and develop projects, and projects form alliances that have the potential to become social movements.” (Ledwith, 2010).

To make the changes that are truly transformative, we must ensure that our practice identifies and tackles the root cause of inequality and oppression. Ledwith believes that failure to do this means that our practice “floats on the surface dealing only with the symptoms of injustice”. The implication is that it is only through social justice that the society can attain genuine progress. Thus, there is a strong relationship between social justice and social progress.

In view of opportunities that education provide, we acknowledge the fact that we live in a rapidly changing world where governments and their citizens are facing simultaneous challenges of demographic shifts, employment migration, cultural diversities, social cohesions, health and nutrition, scientific and technological advances, climate and human insecurity among others (European Union, 2013).

These challenges portend serious exclusionary setbacks to widening access, guaranteeing equity and sustaining social justice in the enterprise of educational development particularly in developing countries.

In the context of the objectives of this study, social progress is synonymous with sustainable national development which may be defined as, “an idea which embodies all attempts to improve the co-ordination of human existence in all ramification” (Gboyega, 2003). Naaomi (1995) also averred that, as such, “development involves economic growth, some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services”. Charismen (1984) in Guga (2014) viewed national development as, “the process of societal advancement where improvements in the wellbeing of people are generated through strong partnership between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society”.

**Research Question (2):** To what extent can social justice facilitate the sustainable development in Nigeria?

Coninck, Culp and Taylor (2013); explained social justice as a political concept, “as it deals with nature and structure of the state, an economic concept as it is concerned with equal distribution of goods and services within a society and again as an ethical concept because it is grounded on ethical framework.

Social justice is a creation of the government in power. Ihejirika (2013), recalls that “at independence, most African leaders pledged to develop their economies, democratize their political systems and promote social justice amongst their citizens”. For Gils (1998), “value dimensions which differentiate socially just from socially unjust societies constitutes an indispensable tool in this analysis”.

**Table 1.**

<b>Just Societies</b>	<b>Unjust Societies</b>
Equality of citizens	Inequality of citizens
Liberty of citizens	Domination and exploitation
Just societies	Unjust societies
Individuality of citizens	Selfishness and individualism
Collective orientation and mutualism	Disregard for community
Cooperation	Competitors

**Source:** Gil, D. (1998). *Confronting Injustice and Oppression*: New York: Columbia University Press.

Based on the classification by Gil (1998), one can easily understand where Nigerians belong. In his definition of development, Chavismen (1984) in Guga (2014) viewed the concept as “the process of societal advancement where improvements in the wellbeing of people are generated through strong partnership between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society”. Naomi (1995) feels that “development involves

economic growth, some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services”.

### **The Nexus between Social Justice and Sustainable National Development (SND)**

According to Abraham (2012), “countries or institutions seeking development that would be sustainable must ensure there is equity, social development, inclusiveness, human environment harmony and cooperation”. All the principles outlined are vital in the process. However, they require social justice as a stimulant.

**Poverty Alleviation:** Poverty points to a situation of deprivation which is inimical to growth. Infact, poverty makes it impossible for people to co-exist and contribute meaningfully to the growth process.

**Access to Education:** In Nigeria today, education has become a status symbol. A socially just society is distinguished by the presence of equal opportunities in education for all. The situation in this regard is pitiable.

**Labor Market Inclusion:** The Problem of unemployment in Nigeria has remained so intractable that it is the bane in Nigeria's development project. Social justice is thrown overboard in issues of employment where whom you know is what matters.

In the areas of health, social cohesion and non-discrimination, intergenerational justice, etc., the concept of social justice is a non-starter. The study by Gabriel and Odimioha (2014) on social justice and sustainable development in Nigeria, provides a strong empirical evidence to the fact that social justice goes a long way in determining sustainable development in any country like Nigeria.

**Research Question three (3):** How has sustainable development enhanced the well-being of citizens in Nigeria?

Ans: The well-being of Nigerians following effort at sustainable development between 2002 and 2012 is hereby presented in a table below:

**Table 1:** Social Pillar: Guaranteeing the well-being and productivity of Nigerians (multiple sources including NPC, 2009).

Indicator	Year 2002	Year 2012
Total population		172 million (Estimate at 3% growth rate)
Urbanization rate (%)	48.2 (2005)	49.8 (2010)
% of population living on less than \$1 per day	65.5	69.1
% of underweight children under the age of 5	29 (2002)	
% Of population with sustainable access to improved water source	Urban: 72 (2002) Rural: 48.9 (2002)	54 (2008)
% of population with sustainable access to improved sanitation	Urban: 48 (2002) Rural: 30 (2002)	
Life expectancy (years)	Male: 45 Female: 46	Male: 48 Female: 49
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	201 (2003)	157 (2008)
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	100 (2003)	75 (2008)
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	800 (2000)	545 (2008)
Literacy rate (% aged 15 and above)	66.8	63
% primary school enrolment of children aged 6-11		30
Ratio of female to male enrolments in universities %		38.62
% of urban population living in slums		
Human development index	0.462 and ranked 147 out of 147 out of 173 countries in the world	0.459 and ranked 156 out of 187 countries in the world (2011)
HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (% of population)	5.8 (2001)	4.1 (2010)
Knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention (% of population)	68.7 (2007)	51.95 (2010)

**Source:** NPC (2009)

The table above presents the extent to which effort by relevant Nigerian authorities have enhanced the well-being of Nigerians using sanitary (health) indicators as reference point. The table shows mixed trends to the extent that these efforts have not come far enough.

In other spheres of human endeavor like human settlement, Nigeria ranks among the most urbanized countries in the world. However, the pace of urbanization increase has been such that maintenance of modest environmental standards inevitably had to lag behind. Basic services such as piped water, electricity, roads, improved sanitation and health care are acknowledged to be still insufficient to meet the needs of these densely populated settlements. A desk review by the water and sanitation programme (Losp, 2012) revealed that about 70 million Nigerians use unsanitary or shared latrines and 32 million have no latrine at all and defecate in the open. The picture about poverty and inequality is no different from other sectors. For instance, whereas the economy grew at an average of about 6.2 percent annually between 2002 and 2011, the government is concerned about the apparent disconnection between Nigeria's economic growth and human development. "Nigeria currently ranks 156 out of 187 economies" (UNDPHDR, 2011). This position underscores not only the limited choices of Nigerians, but also defines the critical development challenges being faced by government. According to the 201 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report, "about 69.1 percent of the Nigerian populations or approximately 100 million people are living below the poverty level" (NBS, 2011).

A study by Daramola and Iben (2010) titled "Urban Environmental Problems in Nigeria: Implications for a Sustainable Development", observed that Nigerian cities are witnessing high rate of environmental deterioration and are rated among urban areas with the lowest livability index in the world. It points to an estimate of between 20 and 30 percent of urban population which enjoy decent urban life in the country. It suggested economic, legal, institutional as well as educational tools to address the situation. In a related study by Ojo (2016), titled "Drivers and Challenges of Sustainable Development in Africa", the researcher observed that in terms of sustainable development, Africa's tale is that of mixed good and bad, poverty, inequality, malnutrition, youth unemployment are the highest in Africa. The paper maintained that Africa is a land of superlatives and the continents sustainable development is constrained by corruption, infrastructure deficit, insecurity and reliance on primary products. The study recommended increased and monitored investments in infrastructure. Also, efforts at reducing insurgency and corruption should be intensified.

### **Findings**

Flowing from the analysis in this study, some revelations have been outlined:

1. Social justice is one of the values upon which community development is founded. There is a strong relationship between social justice and social progress.
2. To make changes that are truly transformative, we must ensure that our practices identify and tackle the root causes of inequality and oppression.
3. Social justice is not only a political concept but also an economic concept as well as an ethical framework.
4. Against the background of the principles of classification provided by Gil (1998), Nigeria is an unjust society

5. Social justice provides an inevitable springboard to sustainable development. To show commitment to the lofty ideals of sustainable development, Nigeria first has to embrace social justice.
6. Nigeria is yet to show serious commitment towards sustainable development. Hence, the well-being of the average Nigerian has not been enhanced through her efforts at attaining sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

Social justice and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. Studies have shown that justice and fairplay are the inevitable pathways to egalitarianism which offers the best platform for mass participation, transformative change, social progress and sustainable development in any given society. Any effort towards development that is not rooted on social justice can be likened to pouring water on a lame duck. This is the situation in which Nigeria finds itself today. Justice, fairplay, social progress are all premised in insincerity and cheating to the extent that the average Nigerian does not benefit positively. The issue of restructuring is the first step to show sincerity of purpose by any administration. There can be no social justice and progress in a situation where people cannot control their own resources and destiny. Sustainable development will continue to be elusive in a country where one section of the community continues to be favoured at the expense of another or others. The rankings of Nigeria as a country with bad human development indices, human right rewards, poverty, etc., all point to the extent to which the absence of social justice can go in determining the fate of a nation and her citizens.

### **Suggestions**

From the analysis of literature above, the study suggests as follows:

1. Nigeria must improve on her records on social justice for the country to be in a position to initiate steps towards positive transformation for the society to progress.
2. The classification of Nigeria as an unjust society should not be taken for granted. The country must do all it can to come off this tag.
3. Any administration that comes into power must show commitment to the course of sustainable development by tackling the root causes of inequality and oppression in the country.
4. Government in power must begin with the issue of resource control and mass participation which are the basic tenets of democracy and good governance.

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