

**The Imperative of Sustainable Development in Africa:
Anyiam-Osigwe's Sage Philosophy as an Applied Example**

By

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PREAMBLE: THE AFRICAN CONDITION

Our experience in Africa presents us with a janus-faced situation. First, we have a continent that is blessed with so many resources: human and material. However, when one considers the progressive changes taking place in other parts of the world which are not so blessed, but which were formerly grouped with Africa within the awkward title of 'Third World' and how these changes shine too brightly against the dull African background, one then realizes, not only the acuteness of Africa's problems, but the need to find urgent solutions to them. This brings us to the other face of the African situation and it is that despite her numerous blessings in human and material resources, the continent has over the years remained not only unproductive, but also scientifically, economically and even politically backward.¹ In other words, despite Africa's abundant human and material resources, the continent has continued to trail far behind less endowed regions of the world which in recent times have recorded significant strides in development. Whereas citizens from most less endowed regions continue to enjoy better quality of life, the African lives in penury and life generally on the continent has remained one long nightmare. This has been the paradox of the African reality that presents it as an absurdity that abdicate the right course of social action.

Against the background of the foregoing, scholars of African descent and even political office holders have at various times come up with perspectives that articulate fundamental guiding

principles for repositioning the continent to meet some of the challenges confronting it. In this respect, we have had Julius Nyerere, *s Ujaama*, Kwame Nkrumah, *s Conscientism*, Obafemi Awolowo, *s Democratic Socialism*, and Leopold Senghor, *s Negritude* amongst others. In this essay, we examine Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe's perspective which he captured with the term *introspectionism* as one of the latest additions to these developmental efforts. Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe (1921-1998), herein after referred to as Anyiam-Osigwe, is an African sage-philosopher, whose views are just being unearthed and brought to the academic domain by the Africa Institute for Leadership, Research and Development, South Africa, the Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe Foundation, Nigeria, and the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Anyiam-Osigwe's views transverse the various compartments into which the human quest for self understanding and development could be pigeonholed. The diversity of his views notwithstanding, Anyiam-Osigwe presents them in a very systematic manner, synthesizing them into a coherent whole in achieving what he described as 'a holistic approach to human development'.

This paper discusses Anyiam-Osigwe's view on the onerous task of achieving socio-economic transformation for the continent of Africa in the face of her seemingly intractable problems of development. Specifically, it examines Anyiam-Osigwe's treatise which draws attention to the benefits of exploring the inherent attributes and values possessed by individuals and societies as premise for evolving effective responses to human challenges. This thesis, for Anyiam-Osigwe, applies at the different levels of human existence, that is, at the individual, community, national, and even international levels³; this is because Anyiam-Osigwe is of the view that enormous resources and potentials reside within, at the different levels, which can be effectively harnessed for humanity's socio-political and economic well-being.

Anyiam-Osigwe's approach, which can be described as very systematic, though starts with the individual, that is, how we as individual can gain access into our innate endowments and apply same for our holistic development, he however advocates a wider social expression of this principle as equally efficacious in addressing human problems within the context of the larger society, state or nation: As man is immensely endowed with resources that are inherent in human nature that can be tapped for his or her development, so also are states and nations endowed with internal attributes and potentials...that are fundamental and readily available for their development. Within the context of the African predicament, Anyiam-Osigwe calls on nation states in Africa to conspicuously look inward to identify and evaluate their values, and

resources as embedded in pristine African cultures, as well as their potentials, with a view to developing them towards the socio-economic and political transformation of the continent. Thus, canvassing for “an Africa-based, Africa-led, Africa-focused and Africa-owed development initiative”⁵ The African predicaments result as it were and persist partly because of what Anyiam-Osigwe described as self-inflicted alienation from those internal substances that define our essence as Africans and that this itself results from our overt sensitivity and susceptibility to foreign development initiatives. The first step therefore towards the socio-political and economic advancement of the continent is to deplore those energies which we have hitherto “dispersed for outer probing” into exploring those innate endowments that lie within. The take here is, as Edgar Cayce pointedly notes: The more each relies upon the force within, the greater, the farther, the deeper, the broader, the more constructive may be the result.⁶ What is being suggested here by Anyiam-Osigwe is not a new energy source or base for individuals and states, but a proper rechanneling of our already existing strengths and energies to identifying and developing those values and potentials requisite for our development. This further heightens the prospects Anyiam-Osigwe’s perspective holds for addressing the socio-political and economic problems presently confronting the African continent.

While admitting the universal character of problems confronting modern societies, the paper notes most importantly, the peculiar angle such problems have taken on the African continent, given the cultural peculiarities of our societies in Africa. What is needed to complement Anyiam-Osigwe’s effort, the paper concludes, is a fundamental restructuring of the socio-political and economic structures in modern African states to make them more receptive to some of the laudable ideas being suggested by Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe.

PERSONAL VALUES, SELF MASTERY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

For Anyiam-Osigwe, the human person has imbue in his nature, certain values which when properly harnessed can bring about the all round development of the individual. In other words, the multifarious problems confronting the individual stand a chance of being lifted, provided that the individual is able to draw insights from his natural values which can serve as impetus for appropriate motivation in his response to various challenges.

Anyiam-Osigwe’s idea of personal value is in the positive, moral, connotative sense and can be likened to what the Greek philosopher Aristotle describes as the *arete*, by which he means those good qualities of the mind by which men live rightly.⁷ It is these qualities according to Aristotle

that make its possessor good and his works also. Now, the list of what constitute personal value is indeed an unending one. Such a list would include honesty, dedication, simplicity, selflessness, justice, prudence, temperance and courage or fortitude. The mere possession of these qualities does not however translate automatically into an overt physical or spiritual development of the individual, it is a mere indication of certain inclinations which are latent and thus in a state of potentiality, only waiting to be activated. Such inclination or tendency does not in itself translate into actual development for the individual.⁸

The need therefore for the individual to develop the necessary dexterity of ‘looking inward’ not only to discover the abundant values he possesses but also how these values can be harnessed and made relevant to daily life, for the encouragement and overall betterment of the individual. This dexterity is our understanding of what Anyiam-Osigwe describes as ‘self- mastery’ and the idea of ‘inward looking’ is what he captures with the term ‘introspection’.

Introspection for Anyiam-Osigwe does not only describe a view of the inside or the gaining of access to man’s innate endowments, it also encompasses the process of critically self examining these innate endowments and applying same for man’s holistic well being or development.⁹ Introspection serves therefore not only to awaken man to the benefits of looking inward for the resources and potentials that can be effectively harnessed for his overall development, it ensures also, a careful and conscious harnessing of these values in the direction that would yield overall positive development.

The benefits of looking inward to harness our personal values and the possibilities they provide for our overall development are auspicious. Studies have revealed that major breakthroughs in most Western and key Asian nations today were brought about by individuals who were able to harness their innate resources, potentials and capabilities in bringing themselves up to a level where they could positively impact on their societies.¹⁰ For Anyiam-Osigwe, these values:

hold the solution to the many and varied challenges in all spheres of human existence and have through the ages provided man with the inventiveness, knowledge and understanding with which to conquer, subdue and establish dominion over the continent.¹¹ The more, therefore, man relies upon these values within, the greater, the further, the deeper, the broader and the more constructive he is likely to be. Man, of course, in order to bring himself to a certain level of physical and spiritual development would require those values earlier mentioned. For

instance, prudence is needed in order to develop the capacity for large scale planning, while temperance is required for a man to be focused and not be deflected from long term goals. Courage of course is needed to persevere in the face of setback and weariness, while justice is needed to secure mutual trust among members of the society in which man lives. The underlining challenge for man according to Anyiam-Osigwe, is to regenerate man's cognition of the benefits of looking inward through introspection as a means of advancing his development.

A major challenge for Anyiam-Osigwe's position is not with the inward looking journey into unraveling our innate values or with the critical and systematic harnessing of such for the overall development of man. The challenge comes by way of how his prescription, which is still at the level of intellectual abstraction, can be brought down to the level of praxis. This transition is important because of the nature of the human person whose duty it is to harness these values. As Kant rightly points out, "intelligence... courage, resolution, perseverance... are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them and which therefore constitute what is called character, is not good..."¹²

Leaders like Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Saddam Hussein and Idi Amin certainly possessed certain innate endowments which they harnessed in evolving their own quality of being. What is the nature of these endowments? Values we know are ideals that people believe in, hold on to, propagate and are ready to die for. Most of these leaders had such ideals which they believed in, propagated and for which some even died. Or do we want to conclude that these leaders were all bundles of vices?

Even if we are to agree with Socrates and Plato that man possesses the natural capacity for right behavior, we all know too well that man does not act rightly by nature. A man's life according to Aristotle consists of an indeterminate number of possibilities. "Goodness is in man potentially" says Aristotle, "but unlike the acorn out of which the Oak will grow with almost mechanical certitude, man must move from what is potential in him to its actuality by knowing what he must do, deliberating about it and then choosing in fact to do it".¹³

Also, it is possible for a particular quality that would result in positive self development for some, to result in the development of negative trait in some others. For instance, honesty is a value that can be harnessed for the positive development of the self. However, it is also possible

for someone to develop this quality to the point of being tactless and thereby always revealing sacred and important information even in situations whose accidental circumstances make knowledge of such information most unsuitable.

However, Anyiam-Osigwe, like Immanuel Kant, seem to have anticipated this problem by noting that the right thinking man would subscribe always to the maxim of acting all the time, in accordance with the dictates of right conscience. Anyiam-Osigwe seems to re-affirm his commitment to this maxim with these words, describing it as the first principle of personal well-being:

The first principle of personal well-being is to direct our thoughts towards positive, progressive and harmonious ideas.¹⁴ In line with this principle therefore, and since man is always seeking his own well-being, it follows then that man would always cultivate his values towards positive self development.

ANYIAM-OSIGWE'S PERSPECTIVE ON TRADITIONAL VALUES AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF MODERN AFRICAN STATES

For Anyiam-Osigwe, the principle of applying the methodology of introspection to gain access to man's innate endowments and apply same for his holistic well-being is equally applicable and efficacious in addressing wider human problems within the context of the larger society, state or nation. Anyiam-Osigwe believes that just as man is immensely endowed with innate qualities that can be tapped for his development, so also are states and nations endowed with potentials that are fundamental to and readily available for their development. He therefore extrapolated his analysis of the practice of introspection by the individual to the state and nation for wider social manifestation.

Anyiam-Osigwe acknowledges the existence of diverse capabilities and attributes within the domain of the various nations of the world, but with particular reference to Africa, he locates these endowments within the primordial cultural frameworks of indigenous Africa. This is because for him, the crises of Africa's underdevelopment is "culture-based and culture-driven".¹⁵ Anyiam-Osigwe contends that just as the individual can fail to achieve his full potentials and thereby make no significant strides in development because he failed to explore

his innate attributes and natural potentials, so also have most modern states that are plagued with diverse problems failed to explore their internal attributes in resolving their problems. He therefore urged affected states in Africa to adopt a paradigm of development that begins with exhaustively exploring, harnessing and applying their internal attributes and potentials towards their developmental needs, arguing that the reason most developing nations have so far failed to surmount their problems of poverty and underdevelopment is because they lost sight of their natural endowments and inherent potentials that would have been instrumental to resolving these problems.

For him, since no two communities can be assessed on the basis of identical socio-political and economic indices, the solutions to the problems of communities or nations must encompass the specific underlining elements and peculiarities of the given community or nation.¹⁶ The reason, Anyiam-Osigwe avers, foreign development paradigms have so far failed in addressing Africa's socio-political and economic problems is because they not only fail to encompass or take on board, elements that are peculiar to the African realities, they largely undermine these innate endowments and capabilities. Anyiam-Osigwe encapsulates this development in what he terms: The imposition of a non-contextual value that relegated, negated and even denigrated hitherto sacrosanct African values.¹⁷

In taking the African cultural heritage as his source for the paradigmatic reconstruction and repositioning of the continent, Anyiam-Osigwe identified, in their undiluted form, those endowments-ideas, precepts, principles and practices in pristine African cultures from which modern African states could draw in their attempts at constructing an authentic development paradigm requisite for Africa's socio-political and economic conditions at this crucial moment of her history. Anyiam-Osigwe shares the view with many others that Africa had workable systems and structures before the advent of colonialism¹⁸. In the area of financial administration he made allusions to the traditional savings and loans scheme variously called 'akawo', 'ajo', 'njange', 'tontin', and 'esusu' in different African languages. In the area of agriculture, he pointed to the indigenous food processing and preservation techniques/technology as well as the know-how applied in such areas as irrigation and animal husbandry. In the area of education, he referred to the hieroglyphics, hieratic and demotic scripts of the Egyptian civilization from which modern writing borrows enormously. Not left out also is Africa's indigenous capability in the fields of medicine, geometry, metallurgy and building technology.

In the area of governance, there were animating principles of good governance that formed the fabric of most traditional African societies. In Yoruba traditional society for instance, there was a plethora of ideas, concepts and principles, which conveyed the people's beliefs regarding how a society should be run. These ideas and principles ranged from those that reflected the virtues of justice, equality, accountability, prudence, temperance, courage, mutual trust to cooperation.¹⁹ In the traditional Egyptian socio-political setting, the idea of justice as represented by *ma'at* also constitutes a valuable criterion for good governance. Acts like dictatorship, corruption and other forms of injustice were contrary to the injunction of *ma'at*.²⁰ Generally in the area of governance, Africa, according to Anyiam-Osigwe, had primordial institutions that reflected qualities like participation, accountability, tolerance and respect for human rights, qualities that are today the hallmarks of successful governments. In addition, primordial African systems functioned within inherently regulated mechanisms of checks and balances that were more efficacious than any regulatory mechanism associated with modern systems of governance. Such regulatory mechanisms draw their support not only from the social institutions of society as we have in modern states, but from the abstract metaphysical or divinatory institutions of cultural and religious systems. In other words, leaders in traditional African societies were not just checked by the institutions of society, but were also restrained by their acute consciousness of the ancestors and deities and their capacity to mete out instant punishment on those who contravene the rules conventions and prescriptive traditional order of society.²¹

Unfortunately however, this rich cultural heritage and the dimension of progress which it engenders were carefully eroded by the Europeans through colonialism. This was achieved through an imposition of: A pseudo-foreign culture that in the final analysis was an amorphous hybrid Euro-Afro culture as a replacement for the systematized and coordinated indigenous cultural perspective of pristine African societies.²²

The consequences of this went far beyond altering the political and social institutions of societies; it had profound negative impact on the psyche of the African as regards their spiritual, cultural, socio-political and economic components of life. The evolving mindset from this onslaught resulted in a situation in which: The African sees and admires his culture from a distance, discussing it with a sense of nostalgia, yet is unable to relate it with the institutions that he considers or perceives relevant and critical to his development and success in life.²³

While the African has broken faith with his culture, its traditions and values as suggested from the passage above, he is nevertheless unable to garner the desired degree of faith by which he could wholesomely attune to the counter culture that has been imposed on him, thereby remaining in a limbo of ambiguous and amorphous identity that lives him in a deft of two realities: The past to which he belonged and which has been subdued by his new realities, and a present that is alien and somewhat impossible to completely comprehend, absorb or repose faith in²⁴. This ultimately results in a loss of capacity for purposeful and independent action on the part of the African. To begin to address the socio-political and economic problems presently confronting the continent, Anyiam-Osigwe therefore calls for the restoration of Africa's vastly rich cultural, economic, scientific and philosophical heritage, potentials and capabilities that have been destroyed, stolen or suppressed through colonial encounter.

Anyiam-Osigwe had unwavering faith in the ability of the modern African to achieve this goal: We are an intelligent, talented, creative and resilient race and can indeed offer the world the very best there is in all spheres of human endeavor. The responsibility to define, identify and harness Africa's abundant resources lies with no other group of people than Africans.²⁵ Not oblivious of the fact it is good individuals that begat a good society, Anyiam-Osigwe recommends that the quest for the development of the African continent should begin with the individual. Africa's development he says, should begin with developing the individual "personality that is nurtured with faith in the self, faith in his antecedents, faith in the community and a competitive intellect."²⁶ The aim here is to form or create from the present amorphous pseudo-modern African personality, a distinct and authentic Africa personality that would embody the appropriate mindset' needed to achieve this task of enculturation. "We" that is Africans, he says, "have it in our power to begin the world over again."²⁷

ANYIAM-OSIGWE'S APPROACH TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Anyiam-Osigwe no doubt has a lofty vision for Africa, and it is to see Africa evolve from its present condition as a region over-whelmed by a myriad of crises that has left it dogged by skepticism and hopelessness, into one that is built on renewed hope, assurance, self confidence and the attendant self esteem that engenders the requisite vision and energy to propel its potential and capabilities to the realization of a viable and prosperous continent.²⁸ But there are few critical issues that need buttressing to further complement Anyiam-Osigwe's effort. In the

first place, Anyiam-Osigwe's embrace of traditional values and practices should not be interpreted to suggest a one-to-one carryover of these practices from pristine Africa to modern times, as this would amount to pretending that everything about traditional African values was good and therefore desirable. A major aspect of traditional African values has become, to use Wiredu's description, 'anachronistic'²⁹ and, therefore, no longer existentially relevant to modern concept of development or progress. Anyiam-Osigwe's reference to, and reliance on these traditional practices, has to do with the 'spirit' or operational principles behind these practices. Certainly, the traditional savings and loans scheme (*ajo* or *esusu*) will no longer work in modern societies given their population sizes and other administrative paraphernalia, but the principles behind the practice such as 'trust', 'honesty', 'integrity', 'frugality', and 'cooperation' are what can be harnessed to improve modern practices in the area of financial administration.

Again, like other ideas on development, Anyiam-Osigwe's prescriptions would require for their concrete implementation, socio-political institutions and apparatuses. Otherwise his effort would remain an exercise in intellectuation. But the socio-political structures on ground in most African states today are still those inherited colonial structures of Western origin which were originally put in place by the colonialists, not only to displace local cultures and values but to sustain neo-colonial interests. These structures therefore remain unsuitable and inadequate for any vision of development that will take traditional African values and practices, which they originally came to displace, as its core.³⁰ The existing socio-political institutions presently on ground in most of the states in the continent need restructuring.

Anyiam-Osigwe made some significant move in this direction, especially with his Mission for Democracy in Africa (MDA) project and his subsequent adoption of the Congress of Town Union as an avenue for disseminating the MDA messages to households within given communities. The Mission for Democracy in Africa (MDA) project has a ten-point citizen action guide which consists of practical steps to be adopted by each individual in order to entrench the values and principles of genuine and sustainable democracy in the national psyche. And in line with his belief in the efficacy of indigenous structures, Anyiam-Osigwe adopted the Congress of Town Union as the platform for direct, timely and effective dissemination of MDA messages, thereby challenging the existing pattern or structure of disseminating political messages within the society. But, what we are suggesting here is a more fundamental systems or

structural re-engineering to make them better adaptive to the kind of approach being suggested by Anyiam-Osigwe.

Finally, Anyiam-Osigwe's approach to resolving the African predicaments and his insistence on an "Africa-based, Africa-led, Africa-focused and Africa-owned development initiative" does not in any way suggest that the problems confronting us are basically peculiar to Africa. Now, what is the nature of these problems? They are problems of hunger, insecurity, infrastructural decay, social order, political and economic mismanagement, deprivation, human rights abuses, corruption, and so on. These are universal human problems that transverse national boundaries. Virtually all the nations of the world have suffered and some are still suffering from these problems. The realities of the present globalization phenomenon have made this even more apt. The state today is "increasingly trapped within webs of global interconnectedness"³¹, says Held. Consequently, "no nation, given the reality of the unfolding global interconnectedness can exclude itself from the international system (including its problems)."³² But wherever any of these problems afflict a society, it takes on a particular dimension, depending on the specific underlining elements and cultural peculiarities of the given community or nation. It follows therefore that any development paradigm for addressing a problem within a particular society will only prove effective when such a paradigm draws heavily from the cultural and institutional frameworks of the society in which it is to be applied. It is in this respect that Anyiam-Osigwe's perspective becomes most relevant to the African situation.

"Wisdom" as Anyiam-Osigwe rightly notes, "consists of understanding the cause and source of things".³³ The cause and source of Africa's predicaments have been rightly identified by Anyiam-Osigwe. But his recommended perspective which emphasizes not only the primacy of traditional values as important ingredients for development but also the commitment and positive disposition of Africans, does not preclude the possibility of borrowing aspects of other culture that are existentially relevant to achieving socio-political and economic transformation for the continent. This is because *introspectionism* for Anyiam-Osigwe does not "mean or imply self seclusion or isolationism".³⁴ Given therefore the peculiar socio-historical and cultural circumstances of the African continent on the one hand, and the unfolding realities of the globalization phenomenon on the other hand, the fundamental challenge for modern African states becomes that of evolving a viable development paradigm through a synthesis of traditional and modern development models. This way, a strategy of development that is founded on local experience and knowledge, but interlinked with the global arrangements³⁵

would have been put in place. Such a paradigm will present the continent as dynamic and open to development, without necessarily eroding those fundamental cannons that scholars like Anyiam-Osigwe have labored so hard to protect. In all, the insights of this great African philosopher and political theorist need to be commended, and in a rendition of J. D. O'Connor's accolade, we insist that 'if all the stars were to form in the sky of history, a conspicuous part of the constellation genius, the star of Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe will in centuries to come, not be outshined'.

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