



Rethinking Progress And Social Justice In The Philosophy Of Development

Abstract

In a time when Nigeria stands at the crossroads of broken dreams and emerging possibilities, the need to rethink what truly counts as progress and justice has never been more urgent. This paper explored the philosophy of development by asking hard questions about whose progress we are pursuing and at what cost. Moving beyond mere statistics and economic growth charts, it dug into the heart of what it means to live well together socially, politically, and morally. In a country where skyscrapers rise beside slums, and high-tech innovation thrives in the midst of hunger and poverty, development cannot simply be about GDP or infrastructure. The paper argued that any true philosophy of development must include a strong commitment to social justice where dignity, equality, and fairness are not optional ideals but foundational goals. Drawing on African communal values, as well as critical reflections from both Western and indigenous philosophies, this paper called for a new way of seeing development not as a race to modernity, but as a journey toward shared human flourishing. It questioned the inherited assumptions of past models and challenges Nigeria to create a future that honors both her cultural roots and the demands of justice. Finally, the paper is both a critique and a call to leaders, scholars, and citizens alike to stop mistaking movement for progress, and instead possibly build a nation where development encompasses justice.

Keywords: Development, progress, social justice, African communalism, humanism

Solomon Ojoka Ojomah, PhD

Federal University of Lafia

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3042-0714>

Fidelis O. Ejegbavwo, PhD

Department of Philosophy, St Albert Institute, (An affiliate of University of Jos)

Fayit, Fadan-Kagoma, Kafanchan, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

drfidel12@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0458-8696>

Corresponding Author's Email:

sojomah@gmail.com

Date Received: 30th April, 2026

Date Accepted: 19th May, 2026

Introduction

The philosophy of development is a broad and interdisciplinary field of inquiry that seeks to explore the meaning, purpose, and ethical foundations of human progress. The concept of development has long been based on a specific understanding of progress that prioritizes economic growth, industrial expansion, and technological advancement as the

principal determinant of societal improvement. This conception evolved from the rationalism of the Enlightenment that was institutionalized through post-World War II modernization theory, its paradigm encompasses a linear trajectory of development in which societies advance from "traditional" to "modern" stages, climaxing in the industrialized economies of the Global

North. However, as global realities shift, critical voices have begun to question whether conventional measures of development such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), industrial expansion, and technological innovation truly capture the essence of human flourishing. This paradigm of development has also come under sustained philosophical scrutiny for its reductionism, Eurocentrism, and inability to adequately address issues of inequality, cultural diversity, and ecological sustainability. In compliance with the aforementioned philosophical debate, it is therefore necessary to rethink what progress means and how it relates to the principles of social justice.

The concept of progress, in its narrow definition, tend to reduce human existence to a mere pursuit of material accumulation, overlooking the deeper moral, cultural, social, and environmental dimensions that constitute just and meaningful life. Philosophy of development, therefore, offers an avenue to interrogate these assumptions, question the narratives of modernity, and to propose new paradigms that place human dignity, equity, and justice at the center of developmental aspirations. From the historical viewpoint, the Enlightenment era gave birth to the idea of linear progress, suggesting that societies evolve from primitive to advanced stages through the application of reason, science, and industrialization. Thinkers such as Auguste Comte and G.W.F. Hegel viewed development as inevitable, tied to rationality and the unfolding of history (Badham 142). This Eurocentric narrative was one of the key

determinant of the policies of colonization and modernization, where development was equated with Westernization and its models of state-building, economic structures, and cultural practices. In the post-colonial era, development was redefined largely in terms of economic growth, with institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund promoting industrialization, liberalization, and globalization as universal pathways to prosperity. Yet, these models often ignored the social realities of inequality, environmental degradation, cultural identity, and political marginalization in many parts of the Global South. Consequently, progress was achieved for some, but at the expense of others a reality that demands critical rethinking. To rethink progress is to confront the ethical questions that underlie development (Paupp 165). What does it mean for a society to progress? Is progress merely technological advancement and capital accumulation, or does it entail something deeper, such as the well-being of citizens, fairness in distribution of resources, preservation of the environment, and respect for human rights? The philosophy of development insists that any genuine conception of progress must be grounded in social justice. Justice, in this context, transcends legal frameworks to embody fairness, inclusivity, and dignity for all people, particularly the marginalized. Without justice, progress remains lopsided, benefiting the few while entrenching poverty, exclusion, and exploitation for the many. To this end, main argument of this essay is that rethinking progress in the philosophy of

development necessarily requires a paradigmatic modification from growth-based system to a justice-oriented, pluralistic, and relational understanding of human flourishing.

Furthermore, rethinking progress through the lens of social justice necessitates a holistic understanding of human life. It means moving beyond reductionist economic metrics to embrace multidimensional approaches such as Amartya Sen's capability approach, which defines development as the expansion of freedoms and opportunities for individuals to live lives they value. It means grappling with ecological justice, recognizing that the pursuit of growth must not destroy the planet for future generations. It also means addressing global inequalities, where the prosperity of some nations is often built upon the underdevelopment of others. This reorientation requires philosophy to serve as both a critical and constructive discipline: critiquing dominant paradigms while simultaneously envisioning alternative frameworks that uphold the values of solidarity, justice, and shared humanity. In today's world, marked by deepening inequality, climate change, migration crises, and cultural conflicts, the urgency of this philosophical inquiry cannot be overstated. The failures of conventional development paradigms evident in widening wealth gaps, the erosion of communal life, and ecological collapse underscore the need for a new vision of progress that is both ethical and sustainable.

Rethinking progress and social justice in the context of the philosophy of development is not merely an academic

exercise; it is a call to reimagine the foundations of human coexistence, to question structures of domination, and to advocate for a more humane world order. It challenges policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike to embrace a vision of development that does not prioritize profit over people, nor power over justice, but instead seeks a balance where human dignity and equity form the bedrock of progress. Thus, the philosophy of development becomes an indispensable tool for examining the contradictions of our present order and for charting a future in which progress is not measured solely by economic indicators but by the extent to which justice, fairness, and human well-being are realized in society. This essay critically explore how rethinking progress in light of social justice transforms our understanding of development, providing fresh insights into the ethical responsibilities of states, institutions, and individuals in the pursuit of a just and equitable world. It is argued in this essay that rethinking progress in the philosophy of development essentially entails a paradigmatic alteration from growth-based metrics to a justice-oriented, pluralistic, and relational understanding of human flourishing. In paying attention to the critical development theory, the capability approach, and African philosophical traditions, this essay critically examines the drawbacks of dominant development paradigms and proposes an alternative framework grounded in social justice, cultural pluralism, and ethical responsibility.

Historical Background of Development and Progress

The history of the concepts of progress and development are inherent in philosophical, economic, and political thought, the two concept are often used interchangeably.

Generally, development is concerned with the structural transformation of societies economically, socially, and politically, development' is the means whereby the goal of universal human improvement can be attained (Cowen & Shenton, 3). Progress on the other hand implies a normative improvement in human conditions such as freedom, justice, and well-being. Important to the concept of progress is the notion of order, the condition of all Progress is order; Progress is always the object of Order (Cowen & Shenton, 26). The historical trajectory of these concepts reveals shifting paradigms influenced by cultural values, colonial encounters, and global socio-economic dynamics. In antiquity, progress was often tied to moral and civic virtue.

The Greeks, particularly Aristotle, linked development to the idea of *eudaimonia* human flourishing achieved through virtue and rational living. In Politics, Aristotle stressed that the polis exists for "the sake of the good life" (Aristotle, 29). Development here was not economic growth, but the cultivation of human potential within a just society. Similarly, Roman thought, exemplified in Cicero's works, emphasized civic responsibility and justice as the basis for societal advancement. The Enlightenment marked a decisive shift in the conceptualization of progress. Thinkers

such as Francis Bacon and René Descartes promoted rationality, science, and human mastery over nature as the basis of advancement.

The idea of development was expressed in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, specifically in his 1784 essay titled *Idea for a universal history with cosmopolitan intent*. The contents of this essay has been used to show the extent to which eighteenth-century thinking continues to find its way into official and quasi-official development doctrine. Special emphasis has been laid upon Kant's view expressed in the destitution into which human beings plunge each other. Primarily Kant's idea of development has been conceived as the positive source of development inherent in what Kant hoped would be the 'inevitable escape' from destitution (Cowen & Shenton, x). However, the counterpoint to development as encapsulated in the concept of underdevelopment, arose at the very moment when the positive doctrine of development was getting established. Cardinal Newman in his 1845 Essay titled *On the Development of Christian Doctrine* presented this dimension in the theory of development by dealing with the criteria of development embedded in the question of whether it was possible to evaluate phenomena of development. Even though his attention was more on Christian doctrine, in his approach by which he established the difference between corrupt and true development bears the potency of the contemporary meanings of development and underdevelopment: "Newman raised the distinction between the internal and external of development which, when

transposed to the time and place of capitalist development, lies at the heart of underdevelopment theory” (Cowen & Shenton, xi). In his later work in 1878, titled *Grammar of Ascent*, Newman tendered his appreciation on how the evaluation of development served as restriction to its scope and as such extended the meaning of development to encompass the interior of development as that which gave limitation to the doctrine rather than simply the base of the belief of the subject to the external authority of the conscience.

Condorcet, in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, envisioned history as a linear march toward reason, equality, and liberty (Condorcet, 5). This idea of continuous improvement through reason and science laid the foundation for modern conceptions of progress. However, such a Eurocentric vision often ignored cultural diversity and justified colonialism under the guise of “civilizing missions” (Escobar, 22).

In France, the concept of development in the modern era was has its origin in the works of Saint-Simonians and Auguste Comte in early nineteenth-century who articulated development doctrine as a response to what they described as the errors of the received idea of progress. Indubitably, the idea of development was entrenched in the older idea of progress that there was an unfolding of potential and that the new was a purposeful improvement on the old. In the modern era, development doctrine that was obtainable was no longer possible to treat progress and development as if they were substitutes

for one another. Even though progress was what qualified development in this perception, it was not its substitute (Cowen & Shenton, ix). Another spectacular view of development in the 19th century is its link to industrialization and economic growth. Economists like Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, argued that the division of labor and market expansion would generate prosperity and elevate human societies (Smith, 13). Karl Marx, however, critiqued capitalist development, arguing that while it unleashed productive capacities, it also entrenched class inequalities and alienation (Marx, 133). For Marx, true progress lay in the eventual emancipation of workers from exploitative social relations.

In the mid-20th century, after World War II, development became institutionalized as a global project. The establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) framed development as economic modernization, largely equated with GDP growth and industrialization. President Harry Truman’s 1949 inaugural address marked a watershed, as he described vast regions of the world as “underdeveloped” and in need of assistance from advanced nations (Rist, 71). This inaugurated what many scholars call the “development age,” where progress was measured in terms of Western-style modernization. Critiques soon followed, especially from dependency theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank, who argued that development in the Global North often created under development in the South

through exploitative economic structures (Frank, 26).

Similarly, Arturo Escobar critiqued the discourse of development as a Western construct that marginalized local knowledge systems and reinforced global inequalities (Escobar, 44). This opened debates on whether development should be redefined in terms of social justice, sustainability, and cultural autonomy rather than merely economic growth. In recent decades, the United Nations has promoted a broader view of development through frameworks such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Inspired by Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*, development is increasingly understood as the expansion of human capabilities and choices rather than mere material progress (Sen, 36).

This marks a historical turn from earlier Eurocentric and growth-centered paradigms to a more holistic approach that emphasizes justice, equity, and sustainability. Thus, the historical background of development and progress reveals a complex evolution from ancient ethical ideals, Enlightenment rationalism, and industrial modernization, to critiques of global inequality and contemporary calls for inclusive, just, and sustainable development. The challenge today is not only to rethink what counts as progress but also to ensure that development promotes justice and dignity for all peoples.

Rethinking Progress

The concept of progress has long been associated with improvement, growth, and the advancement of human societies. Traditionally, it has been defined in terms of material expansion, technological innovation, and economic growth. However, contemporary debates in philosophy, development studies, and social theory have questioned whether this conventional view adequately addresses the deeper needs of humanity. Rethinking progress requires examining its historical limitations and envisioning a more just, sustainable, and inclusive model of human flourishing. The Enlightenment era shaped the dominant narrative of progress as a linear movement from ignorance to knowledge, from poverty to wealth, and from oppression to freedom. For there to be any substantial rethinking of progress, one must give priority to social justice as the core of progress. Development cannot be considered worth its salt if it produces economic growth while propagating inequality and exclusion. The theory of justice espoused by John Rawls presents a foundational template for addressing distributive inequality. Rawls' difference principle opined that inequalities are only justified if they benefit the least privileged members of society (Rawls 83). This principle antithetical development prototypes that tolerate inequality as an indispensable consequence of growth. It is worth noting that distributive justice alone is insufficient criterion for determining progress and development. It is on this note that Iris Marion Young contends that justice must also pay

attention to structures of oppression and exclusion (Young 39). Marginalized groups frequently face systemic barriers that resolving through redistribution alone may not be possible.

African philosophy enriches this discourse on development and progress by accentuating relational justice. Mbiti's communal ontology presupposes that injustice is not simply a matter of unequal distribution but a disruption of social relationships. Mbiti's account of African cosmology lay emphasis on the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the spiritual realm as an important elements of progress and progress (Mbiti 67). Likewise, Gyekye's communitarianism presents the importance of mutual responsibility and social harmony. It is based on this that he contends that good life involves both personal development and active participation in the community (Gyekye 121). Accordingly, social justice in development and progress ought to integrate distribution, recognition, and inclusion, ensuring that all individuals have both the resources and the dignity necessary for flourishing.

Thinkers such as Condorcet envisioned human history as an inevitable trajectory toward rationality and equality (Condorcet, 5). Similarly, positivist philosophers like Auguste Comte saw progress as the gradual advancement of science and reason. While these views inspired confidence in modernization, they often overlooked cultural diversity and the costs of industrialization, colonization, and environmental exploitation. In the twentieth century, progress became

largely synonymous with economic growth.

The post-World War II development agenda measured progress through Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and industrial output, assuming that economic modernization would automatically translate into social well-being (Rist, 71). However, this growth-centered paradigm has been criticized for ignoring issues of inequality, ecological degradation, and social justice. African philosophers focus on this critique by uncovering the cultural and epistemological assumptions embedded in GDP-based models. Kwasi Wiredu contends that development template smuggled from the West often fail to give adequate attention to indigenous notions of value and social life. GDP reflects a commodified ontology that lessens human existence to mere economic productivity, thereby abandoning relational and moral dimensions of well-being (Wiredu 136). In a similar pattern, Kwame Gyekye accentuates that individual well-being cannot be understood in independent of the community. In his moderate communitarianism theory, Gyekye contends that the flourishing of the individual is intrinsically connected to the flourishing of the community (Gyekye 101). From this perspective, the parameter for measuring progress and development cannot be wealth but necessarily encompasses social harmony, moral development, and communal solidarity. To this end, the critique of GDP reveals a profound philosophical issue that is the reduction of progress and development to quantifiable economic indicators that obfuscates the

multidimensional nature of human well-being. For example, dependency theorists like Andre Gunder Frank argued that the so-called progress of industrial nations often relied on the underdevelopment of poorer countries through exploitative economic structures (Frank, 26).

To rethink progress, scholars and policymakers have gradually highlighted human-centered approaches. Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* argued that progress should not be measured solely by wealth but by the expansion of human capabilities the freedom of individuals to pursue lives, they value (Sen, 36). This capability approach redefines development as the expansion of substantive freedoms, the real opportunities individuals have to lead lives they value (Sen 18). This changes the evaluative emphasis from income to agency, from commodities to functioning. It is this approach that influenced the creation of the Human Development Index (HDI), which evaluates progress through indicators like education, health, and life expectancy, not just income. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach highlights the importance of dignity, equality, and justice as core elements of progress (Nussbaum, 33). Another dimension of rethinking progress comes from environmental and sustainability concerns. The industrial model of progress has contributed to climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental crises that threaten human survival. As Arturo Escobar notes, the Western model of progress assumes endless growth, which is

fundamentally incompatible with ecological limits (Escobar, 44).

In response, the concept of sustainable development popularized by the 1987 Brundtland Report seeks to balance economic growth with ecological preservation and intergenerational justice. This shift recognizes that true progress cannot be achieved at the expense of the planet or future generations. Social justice also plays a central role in reimagining progress. Philosophers like Nancy Fraser argue that progress must address both redistribution (economic justice) and recognition (cultural and social inclusion) (Fraser, 44). This means moving beyond material prosperity to tackle systemic inequalities of race, gender, class, and global power.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, reflect this broader vision by linking poverty eradication with equality, environmental sustainability, and peace. Thus, rethinking progress entails moving away from narrow, Eurocentric, and purely economic definitions. It requires integrating freedom, justice, sustainability, and human dignity into how societies evaluate advancement. In this sense, progress is not merely about having more, but about being more cultivating societies where all individuals can thrive within ecological and social harmony.

Social Justice and Development

Historically, the concept of development has been associated with economic growth, industrial advancement, and technological modernization.

Conversely, in recent decades, scholars and policymakers have recognized the limitation of this approach, that development cannot be understood exclusively through material prosperity. It is a fundamental truism that development necessarily entails the inclusion of social justice as a tool that ensures fairness, equity, and dignity for all members of society. Development devoid of justice risks becoming exploitative, benefiting a few while marginalizing the many. Social justice and development are deeply connected, with the former serving as both a condition and a goal of the latter. At its core, social justice refers to the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society. It emphasizes equality, human rights, and the protection of marginalized groups. Development, on the other hand, is not merely an increase in GDP but a holistic process that enhances human capabilities, reduces inequalities, and promotes collective well-being (Sen, 18).

Considering the importance of social justice as shown above, any development agenda that ignores social justice is incomplete and unsustainable. The connection between social justice and development is evident in Amartya Sen's capability approach, which shifts the focus of development from economic growth to human freedom. Sen argues that development must expand people's real freedoms the ability to live the kind of life they value (Sen, 36). In this structure, social justice guarantees that these freedoms transcend the privileged few but extend to all, including women, minorities, and the poor. A society may achieve

economic prosperity, but if vast populations remain excluded from quality education, healthcare, and political participation, development remains unjust and partial.

Correspondingly, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the inseparability of justice and development. Goals such as eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, promoting gender equality, and ensuring peace and justice (UN 2020) demonstrate that justice is not a separate moral aspiration but a practical necessity for sustainable progress. A society that perpetuates structural injustice such as unequal access to land, discriminatory laws, or gender-based violence undermines its own prospects for stability and inclusive growth.

Moreover, it very important to contend that without social justice, development creates new forms of exclusion. For example, globalization has enabled technological and financial growth but has also deepened inequality between the Global North and the Global South (Pogge, 32). In many developing nations, rapid economic reforms have enriched elites while displacing poor communities, leading to social unrest and widening disparities. This underscores the necessity of embedding justice within development policy to ensure equitable outcomes. Social justice also has a transformative dimension: it empowers marginalized voices and fosters participatory governance. As John Rawls maintains, a just society is one in which inequalities are arranged to benefit the least advantaged (Rawls, 53).

Applying this principle to development means ensuring that infrastructure projects, social programs, and economic policies directly uplift disadvantaged groups rather than exacerbate their marginalization. Social justice and development are mutually reinforcing. Development without justice risks entrenching inequality, while justice without development may lack the material capacity to sustain dignity and equity. The philosophy of development, therefore, must embrace social justice as its foundation, ensuring that growth is inclusive, humane, and sustainable. Only then can development fulfill its ultimate aim: the flourishing of all people in society.

Toward a New Paradigm of Development

The contemporary discourse on development has undergone substantial transformations, transcending from the earlier conceptions that equated progress primarily with economic growth, industrialization, and modernization. The traditional paradigm, which prioritized Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and industrial output as measures of success, has increasingly been challenged for its inability to capture the multidimensional realities of human well-being, justice, and sustainability. In response, scholars and policymakers have called for a new paradigm of development one that rethinks progress in terms of inclusivity, equity, and ecological balance.

This paradigm shift is fundamentally in two dimensions; theoretical and practical, as it pays attention to urgent

global challenges such as inequality, climate change, and social injustice. One of the sturdiest critiques of the old paradigm is its reductionist approach. Development was limited to GDP parameters of growth, but such indicators neglect the lived experiences of marginalized populations and fail to address disparities in wealth and opportunity (Sen, 18). Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* profoundly redefined development by proposing that it should be understood in terms of the expansion of human capabilities and freedoms rather than merely material prosperity. This capability approach has influenced international frameworks like the United Nations Development Programmer's Human Development Index (HDI), which combines income, education, and health as measures of progress.

The new paradigm accentuates social justice as a core pillar. Nancy Fraser argues that justice in the 21st century cannot be restricted to redistribution of resources but must also address recognition of marginalized identities and ensure participatory parity (Fraser, 73). In this sense, development is not only about lifting people out of poverty but also about dismantling structural inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and other social markers. This is particularly relevant in contexts like sub-Saharan Africa, where colonial legacies, poor governance, and global economic structures continue to perpetuate underdevelopment.

Furthermore, sustainability has become essential to the rethinking of development. The Brundtland Report of 1987 first popularized the concept of

sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 43). Today, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect a more holistic vision that integrates social inclusion, environmental stewardship, and economic growth. For example, Goal 10 calls for reduced inequalities, while Goal 13 urges urgent action against climate change highlighting the inseparability of social justice and environmental sustainability.

Another important aspect of the new paradigm is the emphasis on local agency and participatory development. Arturo Escobar criticizes the dominance of Western models of development imposed on the Global South, describing it as a “discourse of domination” (Escobar, 54). He calls for alternatives rooted in local knowledge systems and cultural values. Such an approach recognizes the diversity of development paths and resists the homogenization of progress according to Western standards. By valuing indigenous practices and community-based approaches, development can be more sustainable, inclusive, and context-sensitive. The new paradigm of development moves away from narrow economic determinism to embrace a multidimensional understanding of human flourishing. It integrates freedom, justice, sustainability, and cultural diversity as central to the meaning of progress. By doing so, it challenges us to rethink not only how we measure development but also how

we pursue it in practice. Such a shift is crucial in ensuring that development serves all people, especially the marginalized, while safeguarding the ecological systems upon which future generations depend.

Conclusion

The philosophy of development that emphasizes rethinking progress and social justice invites a fundamental shift in how societies conceptualize and pursue human flourishing. For decades, development was largely equated with economic growth, industrial advancement, and material accumulation. However, this narrow understanding has proven inadequate in addressing the deep inequalities, cultural disruptions, and ecological damages that accompany purely growth-driven paradigms. To truly advance human well-being, development must be reimagined as a multidimensional process that integrates moral values, social justice, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability. This requires moving beyond the simplistic idea of development as an economic phenomenon and recognizing it as a deeply ethical and philosophical undertaking that concerns the dignity of the human person and the collective good of society.

Rethinking progress entails understanding that development cannot be reduced to GDP figures or infrastructural expansion. While economic growth is important, it becomes hollow if it fails to address poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and social exclusion. The

philosophy of development insists that authentic progress is measured by the extent to which individuals and communities are empowered to lead meaningful lives. As Amartya Sen's capability approach highlights, development must enhance people's real freedoms their ability to choose and act in ways that enrich their existence. In this sense, progress is not just about wealth accumulation but about expanding opportunities for education, healthcare, political participation, and cultural expression. It is about creating societies where every human being has the space to actualize their potential without systemic barriers.

Equally, the integration of social justice into the discourse on development underscores the moral obligation to correct structural imbalances that perpetuate inequality. Social justice calls attention to the plight of marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, rural populations, and the urban poor, who are often left behind in conventional development strategies. Justice requires that development policies ensure fair distribution of resources, equal opportunities, and respect for human rights. It means dismantling oppressive structures that breed discrimination and ensuring that the voices of the powerless are included in decision-making.

In this light, social justice is not an optional supplement to development but a central principle that gives meaning to progress itself. Moreover, rethinking progress and justice challenges us to embrace ecological consciousness. True development cannot be achieved at the expense of

environmental degradation, for the destruction of the earth's ecosystems ultimately undermines human survival. Sustainable development therefore integrates economic advancement with ecological stewardship, ensuring that current generations meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. Here, justice is extended across time, linking present and future humanity in a shared moral responsibility.

The philosophy of development as rethought through progress and social justice calls for a holistic paradigm one that sees individual's not merely as economic agents but as beings of dignity, culture, and rights. It urges societies to adopt policies that are people-centered, inclusive, participatory, and sustainable. Such a paradigm offers the possibility of a more humane world where development is not the privilege of a few but the shared heritage of all. As a moral project, development must be pursued with fairness, compassion, and wisdom, recognizing that genuine progress is achieved not when the strongest thrive at the expense of the weakest, but when every person, regardless of status, has the opportunity to live a life of dignity and fulfillment.

Thus, the task of rethinking development is not merely academic but practical and urgent. It demands intellectual humility, ethical sensitivity, and political courage. It requires leaders, policymakers, scholars, and citizens to move beyond entrenched paradigms and embrace transformative approaches that prioritize justice and sustainability. Only then can development truly fulfill its promise: to advance the good of all

humanity, grounded in fairness, equality, and respect for the sanctity of life.

By integrating insights from African philosophy, particularly the works of Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, and John Mbiti, this essay has demonstrated the importance of relationality, community, and ethical responsibility in redefining progress. Finally, progress must be understood not as the accumulation of wealth but as the expansion of equitable, meaningful, and sustainable human possibilities. Social justice is not an optional addition to development; it is its very foundation.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by H. Rackham, Harvard UP, 1932.
- Badham, Richard J. *Theories of Industrial Society*. Routledge, 2016.
- Condorcet, Marquis de. *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. Translated by June Barraclough, Noonday, 1955.
- Cowen, Michael P and Shenton, Robert W. *Doctrines of Development*. Routledge, 1996
- Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton UP, 1995.
- Frank, Andre Gunder. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. Monthly Review Press, 1967.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume I*. Translated by Ben Fowkes, Penguin, 1976.
- Rist, Gilbert. *The History of Development: From Western*
- Origins to Global Faith*. 4th ed., Zed Books, 2019.
- Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by Edwin Cannan, Modern Library, 1994.
- Frank, Andre Gunder. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. Monthly Review Press, 1967.
- Fraser, Nancy. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Post socialist" Condition*. Routledge, 1997.
- Gyekye, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity*. Oxford UP, 1997.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann, 1969.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Harvard UP, 2011.
- Paupp, Terrence Edward. *Redefining Human Rights in the Struggle for Peace and Development*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Pogge, Thomas. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. Polity Press, 2008.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised ed., Harvard University Press, 1999.
- United Nations. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*. United Nations, 2020.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars*. Indiana UP, 1996.
- World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. Oxford UP, 1987.

Citation: Ojomah, Solomon Ojoka & Ejegbavwo, Fidelis O. "Rethinking Progress And Social Justice In The Philosophy Of Development". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp74-86.