

The Ethics of Categorical Imperative and the Struggle for Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Development is a crucial goal for any nation, but it remains a thing of mirage for Nigeria. This research examines the ethical principle of categorical imperative and its impact on the struggle for development in Nigeria. It analyzes the current challenges faced by the country, the roles of the government, civil society, and other stakeholders in promoting development, principles and challenges of implementing categorical imperative in Nigeria. This moral principle introduced by Immanuel Kant, advocates for ethical decision-making based on universal principles. Applying this principle to development in Nigeria requires the prioritization of the wellbeing of all citizens. It emphasizes the importance of eradicating corruption, ensuring social justice, and promoting equal opportunities for all Nigerians. Currently, Nigeria faces numerous challenges that hinder its developmental progress. These challenges include political corruption, inadequate infrastructure, high poverty rates, income inequality, and security concerns. These issues create barriers to sustainable development and hinder the improvement of living conditions for Nigerians. Notably, this academic research employs analytical method on relevant literatures and the researcher discovers that development in Nigeria will continue to experience several hiccups, if the government and the stakeholders are negligent of impunity, lack of transparency, poor governance and corruption. The government should however, respect the humanity in others and act in accordance with rules that could hold for everyone, by building a strong pact with accountability and honest structures that will be an immense resource to development, which involve ensuring fair and just policies and practices that treat all citizens as ends in themselves.

Keywords: categorical imperative, development, Nigeria, ethics, government, civil society, stakeholders, principles, challenges, methodology

Introduction

Nigeria is a developing country that has been grappling with various challenges ranging from economic instability, political corruption, social injustice, and ethical dilemmas. The country faces a continuous struggle to achieve development, which is largely attributed to its inability to adhere to ethical principles that guide the decision-making process. One of the most influential ethical theories that offer a practical framework for moral decision-making is the categorical imperative developed by the renowned German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. This theory emphasizes the importance of universal moral values, ethical responsibilities, and rationality in decision-making. The categorical imperative theory argues for ethical responsibilities that are not swayed by personal desires, but instead uphold the universal principle of treating others as ends in themselves, not merely as means to an end. By adopting this ethical framework, policymakers can prioritize the common good of the society, resulting in policies that are equitable, just and sustainable.

Furthermore, the research discusses how the current state of corruption, inequality, and poverty in Nigeria is linked to unethical practices fueled by the pursuit of individual interests. It highlights the need for a shift in consciousness towards a culture that values public good and community welfare. This research, will explore the application of the ethics of categorical imperative in Nigeria's developmental struggle. It will discuss the ethical challenges that hinder development in Nigeria, and how the adoption of Kantian ethics can redress these challenges. It will also examine the implications of ethical decision-making on sustainable development and the benefits it holds for Nigeria's economy and society. More so, by highlighting the importance of ethical principles in development, this research aims to encourage policymakers and stakeholders to adopt a morally responsible approach in Nigeria's development efforts. By doing so, Nigeria can overcome its development challenges and create a thriving, sustainable society that benefits all its citizens.

Critical Evaluation of The Ethics of Categorical Imperative

The concept of categorical imperative was first introduced by philosopher Immanuel Kant in his seminal work "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals". According to Kant, moral principles are absolute and universal, and should be applied regardless of the particular circumstances or consequences. The categorical imperative is a principle of morality that binds all rational beings, and it requires us to act only on maxims that we could will to be universal laws.

One of the central aspects of the categorical imperative is its inherent universality. This means that the principle applies to all rational beings, and it is not contingent on any particular circumstance or context. As Kant puts it, "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." This means that our actions must be guided by principles that could be willed to be universal laws. In other words, Kant argues that we must treat humans as ends in themselves and not merely as means to an end.

Kant's moral theory is grounded in reason and the idea that morality is not subjective, but objective. The categorical imperative allows us to identify universal moral principles that are valid for all humans irrespective of their cultural background or personal desires. Kant claims that the categorical imperative is the supreme principle of morality, and it provides a foundation for ethical decision-making. He points out that "the practical imperative will thus be as follows: so, act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only."

The concept of the categorical imperative has been widely studied and debated in philosophical circles. Some scholars have argued that the principle is too rigid and fails to account for the complexities of real-life situations. For instance, if the categorical imperative were to be followed strictly, certain actions that are considered morally justifiable under certain circumstances, such as lying to protect a friend from harm, would be deemed immoral. However, Kant argues that moral principles need to be absolute and universal, and thus, we must follow them even if they lead to unfavorable outcomes.

One of the criticisms of the categorical imperative is that it is difficult to apply in practice since it requires us to consider the consequences of our actions if they were to become universal laws. According to philosopher Onora O'Neill, the principle of universality is not necessarily incompatible with the consideration of consequences, but rather it requires us to take them into account. O'Neill states that "Kant's ethics is fully consequentialist, fully focused on the outcomes of our actions, but only once we have determined our duties by the categorical imperative." This means that while the categorical imperative is concerned with the universality of moral principles, it does not neglect the importance of consequences in determining what is morally right.

Another criticism of Kant's theory is that it prioritizes individual autonomy over other moral values such as compassion and empathy. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum has argued that the categorical imperative ignores the importance of emotions in moral reasoning. Nussbaum points out that humans are not purely rational beings, and our emotions play a crucial role in shaping our moral judgments. She writes that "emotions are not just some secondary source of information, but are often primary and indispensable ways of understanding value." However, Kant's focus on rationality and universality appears to disregard the role of emotions in moral decision-making.

Despite these criticisms, the concept of the categorical imperative remains significant in contemporary ethical debates. It provides a framework for thinking about moral principles that are based on reason and universal principles. The principle allows us to transcend the limitations of our personal biases and cultural influences and identify moral principles that are valid for all humans. As philosopher Christine Korsgaard writes, "the categorical imperative represents the moral point of view, the standpoint of impartiality and universality that is needed for moral reasoning."

The concept of categorical imperative is a central aspect of Kant's ethical theory. The principle emphasizes the importance of universality, autonomy, and reason in moral reasoning. While it has been

criticized for being too rigid and ignoring the role of emotions in moral judgment, it remains a valuable tool for thinking about objective moral principles that are valid for all humans. As philosopher Stephen Darwall states, “Kant’s ethical theory, with its emphasis on the moral law as a universal and necessary law, provides a foundation for moral discourse that can give substance to our common human aspirations for justice, dignity, and freedom”.

Current Challenges Facing Development in Nigeria: Kantian Principles in Perspective

Nigeria is in West African country with a population of over 200 million people, making it the most populous nation in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. This data can be debatable because, it does not comprise of 2022 and 2023 National Population Commission figure, since the exercise for census was paused by the transition of federal administration. Despite its vast natural resources and enormous potential for economic development however, Nigeria has faced severe developmental challenges and remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Developmental challenges in Nigeria are diverse and multifaceted. These challenges, ranging from political instability, weak institutions, insecurity, corruption, poverty, and a lack of infrastructure, have hindered national progress towards sustainable development.

Developing a sustainable path of development in Nigeria requires a critical examination of the current challenges facing the country in light of Kant's Categorical Imperative. This ethical theory proposes that individuals and societies should act based on principles that apply universally to all human beings. In other words, actions should be guided by morality and ethical principles, regardless of individual or societal circumstances. The following, nonetheless brings to mind, the events that pose a difficult challenge to the development of Nigeria:

Political Instability

Political instability is one of the significant challenges facing development in Nigeria. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced several military coups and democratic transitions. Political instability undermines economic development by creating an uncertain environment for investment, discouraging foreign direct investment, and leading to capital flight (Ezirim & Wood, 2018 p. 4). The current government must work towards a stable political environment that guarantees the rule of law, protects property rights and promotes accountability.

Corruption

Nigeria's fight against corruption has been waning despite efforts by the government and international community to curb it. Corruption remains widespread and deeply entrenched in the country's public and private sectors. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria ranks 149 out of 180 countries, indicating high levels of corruption (Transparency International, 2021). Corruption undermines development by distorting public policies, reducing efficiency in public service delivery, and increasing the cost of doing business (Adeniji & Chioma, 2016 p. 9). Kant's Categorical Imperative recognizes the need for individuals and societies to act in a way that promotes the common good and prevents actions that impede it. The Nigerian government must act with integrity, transparency, and accountability to curtail corruption.

Security

Security challenges pose a significant threat to Nigeria's development agenda. The country has been contending with insecurity for decades, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflict, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, and other crimes. These security challenges undermine socio-economic development by reducing foreign investment, disrupting transportation and trade, and discouraging internal migration (Ezeah & Ezirim, 2019 p. 9). Kant's Categorical Imperative highlights the need for societies to respect human dignity and protect human rights. Thus, the Nigerian government must address the root causes of insecurity, promote national unity, and protect citizens' lives and property.

Poverty

Despite its vast natural resources, Nigeria is one of the world's poorest countries, with over 83 million of its citizens living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2021). Poverty undermines human dignity, limits access to basic necessities of life, and impedes economic progress. Kant's Categorical Imperative highlights the need for societies to act in a way that promotes the well-being of all members, regardless of social status. The Nigerian government must implement policies that promote inclusive growth, reduce income inequality and provide basic amenities to all citizens.

Lack of Infrastructure

Infrastructure development remains a significant challenge in Nigeria. The country's infrastructure deficit, including roads, power, water supply, and healthcare facilities, has obstructed economic growth and development. Inadequate infrastructure creates bottlenecks in supply chains, increases production costs, reduces productivity and competitiveness, and limits access to essential services (Ezirim & Wood, 2018 p. 7). Kant's Categorical Imperative highlights the need for societies to act in a way that promotes the well-being of all members, regardless of social status. Thus, Nigeria's government must prioritize infrastructure development to promote economic growth and development.

Education

Education is crucial for human capital development and national progress. However, Nigeria's education system faces significant challenges ranging from inadequate funding, poor quality of education, limited access to higher education, and inequitable distribution of educational opportunities (Adebisi, 2020 p. 12). The poor quality of education limits the country's capacity to produce a skilled workforce necessary for sustainable economic growth. Kant's Categorical Imperative emphasizes the importance of universal education as a means of fostering human dignity and promoting the well-being of all citizens (Kant, 2013 p. 73). Nigeria's government must prioritize education by increasing funding, improving the quality of education, and expanding access to higher education.

Since it is established that the development of Nigeria is focused on the above-mentioned challenges, it is therefore modest to say that Nigeria's developmental challenges are multilayered and require a holistic approach to address adequately. The Nigerian government must begin by addressing these concerns and by ensuring the restoration of these issues that critically impede the development of a country as even adorned with natural resources and temporal goods that are impressively phenomenal.

The Role of the Government, Civil Society and Other Stakeholders in Promoting Development

According to Kantian principles, the role of government in promoting development is to create an environment that allows individuals to freely pursue their own goals, while also ensuring that the advantages of development are distributed fairly among all members of society. This requires governments to implement policies that encourage economic growth and innovation, while also protecting the basic human rights of citizens.

Civil society also plays a crucial role in promoting development, as it provides a platform for citizens to voice their concerns and promote social change. However, this requires a commitment to democratic principles, including freedom of speech, association, and the press, as well as the active participation of citizens in public life.

Other stakeholders, such as private companies, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations, can also contribute to development through their own initiatives and partnerships with governments and civil society. However, these efforts must be grounded in a shared commitment to sustainable and equitable development, rather than simply pursuing profit or prestige.

For Kant, the ultimate goal of development is not simply material prosperity, but rather the cultivation of human reason and autonomy. This requires a focus on education, culture, and scientific inquiry, as well as a recognition of the equal dignity of all human beings. To achieve these goals, Kant argues that all individuals and institutions must be guided by the moral principle of respect for others as ends in themselves, rather than merely as means to our own ends. This means refraining from actions that would

harm others, including exploitation, coercion, and deceit, and actively promoting the welfare and autonomy of all members of society.

In practical terms, this requires governments to adopt policies that promote social justice, such as progressive taxation, universal healthcare, and education, and measures to combat discrimination and inequality. It also requires the active participation of citizens in shaping these policies and holding their governments accountable.

Civil society can also promote development by advocating for greater transparency and accountability in government and private sector activities, as well as promoting public awareness of social and environmental issues. This can be done through social mobilization, community organizing, and media campaigns.

Ultimately, the role of government, civil society, and other stakeholders in promoting development must be grounded in a shared commitment to the principles of reason, freedom, and moral responsibility. By working together to promote these goals, we can create a more just and equitable world where all individuals have the opportunity to flourish and fully realize their potential.

The Relationship Between Categorical Imperative and Development in Nigeria its Principles and Challenges of Implementation

The Categorical Imperative, as enacted by Immanuel Kant, stands as an ethical principle that emphasizes the universality and duty of moral obligation. This principle finds its application in various spheres of life, including social, economic, and political development. In Nigeria, where development remains a crucial issue, the question of how the principles of categorical imperative can be applied to promote development arises.

One way the principles of categorical imperative can be applied to promote development in Nigeria is through the promotion of fairness and equality. Under the principle of universality, the actions of individuals should apply universally irrespective of who takes them. Therefore, any policy or action geared towards development should consider all sections of society, especially the marginalized groups. As such, promoting fairness and equality in terms of access to resources, education, and job opportunities would enhance development.

Another way the principles of categorical imperative can be applied to promote development in Nigeria is through accountability and transparency. The maxim of honesty and openness emphasizes the importance of operating within the confines of the law. Thus, the government and other stakeholders involved in the development process must remain accountable to the public and ensure that the allocation of resources is transparent. This is necessary to reduce corruption and foster trust between the government and citizens.

However, implementing the principles of categorical imperative in Nigeria faces significant challenges. For instance, the country's political environment is fraught with nepotism, corruption, and tribalism, which makes it even difficult to promote fairness and equality. Besides, the weak institutions and lack of political will have led to the failure of several development programs. As such, promoting the principles of categorical imperative in Nigeria would require a massive overhaul of the current political system.

Despite the challenges, some potential benefits come with applying the principles of categorical imperative in promoting development in Nigeria. One of such benefits is the reduction of corruption. By promoting accountability and transparency in the allocation of resources, opportunities for corrupt practices reduce significantly, leading to a more efficient and effective utilization of resources. This would likely lead to increased economic growth and development.

Another potential benefit of applying categorical imperative in promoting development in Nigeria is that it fosters a sense of social responsibility. When policymakers and the government understand that they have a moral obligation to act in the best interest of society, it encourages them to act responsibly.

This sense of responsibility extends beyond political leaders to other stakeholders involved in the development process, such as local communities and private organizations.

Furthermore, the application of categorical imperative principles could lead to a more inclusive form of governance. Since the principles emphasize the universality of actions, policymaking would consider all groups and sectors of society, thereby reducing marginalization and exclusion. This would likely lead to higher levels of cooperation and collaboration among various stakeholders involved in the development process, leading to faster progress.

The relationship between the Categorical Imperative and Development in Nigeria stands on the principles of fairness, accountability, and social responsibility. Incorporating these principles in the development process would enhance development and reduce corruption. However, promoting these principles faces significant challenges, including a difficult political climate, weak institutions, and lack of political will. Nevertheless, the potential benefits include a more inclusive form of governance, social responsibility, and increased economic growth.

Conclusion

Overall, it may be said that, the ethics of categorical imperative and its application to the struggle for development in Nigeria is an important debate that needs to be addressed by Nigerian leaders and citizens alike. This ethical principle advocates for universal moral laws that apply to everyone, regardless of their social status or position. In the context of Nigeria's development, this principle can be used to guide decision-making and actions towards the greater good of all Nigerians. However, the application of categorical imperative is not without its challenges. The struggle for development in Nigeria is hampered by corruption, economic inequality, political instability, and a lack of leadership accountability. These factors make it difficult to implement universal moral laws that benefit all Nigerians. Additionally, the cultural differences and diverse values of Nigerians may also complicate the application of categorical imperative. To overcome these challenges, there is a need for Nigerian leaders to demonstrate commitment to the principles of fairness, justice, and accountability. There should be a concerted effort to fight against corruption, promote economic growth and stability, and create an enabling environment for civic participation. In addition, Nigerian leaders should incorporate the diverse values of their citizens when making decisions on matters that affect them.

From a personal perspective, having grown up in Nigeria, I have witnessed firsthand the effects of corruption, poor governance, and lack of accountability on the struggle for development in Nigeria. I believe that the application of ethical principles such as categorical imperative can go a long way in addressing these issues and creating a better future for Nigeria. Therefore, the ethical principles of categorical imperative offer a framework for decision-making that prioritizes fairness, justice, and the common good. Nonetheless, implementing these principles in Nigeria's struggle for development will require a deliberate effort from Nigerian leaders and citizens. By working together towards a shared vision of development that benefits all Nigerians, we can create a brighter future for Nigeria and there would eventually be a better and transformative nation.

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