

Towards Transforming Sub-Sahara Africa through Collective Rural Development

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Abstract: *Sub-Sahara Africa's development seems to be a mirage across the ages, as it continues to battle with development problems at continental, regional and national levels. Any development that is urban-centred alone, to the near complete exclusion of rural areas, is inconsequential and unsustainable. Regrettably, that is the kind of development obtained commonly in this region. Rural development is neglected by even the grass root governments and people. This hampers the realisation and sustainability of development goals. This paper makes a case for collective rural development as a pragmatic means for transforming the region. It reveals that both government and individuals are yet to do the right thing in order to develop and transform the rural areas of this region. Development efforts so far are urban-centred for political propaganda, selfish interest and to make a splash, which result in rural-urban drift, rural underdevelopment and impoverishment. As a position paper, it draws basically from secondary sources— library and internet print materials. Besides, intuition and non-participant observation are the primary sources employed. Descriptive method and qualitative approach are employed pursuant to the nature and preoccupations of the study, alongside the text-content analysis sourced secondary data analysis. The paper submits that collective rural development is a panacea for the development issues of the Sub-Saharan Africa. It recommends that rural development should be taken very seriously as the beginning point of development by all and sundry, government, NGOs, corporate institutions and individuals alike. Rapid rural development programmes and gestures should be evolved and sustained.*

Keywords: Collective, Rural, Development, Transformation, Sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION

It seems many perceive and confine development to urbanisation (urban development) alone. On the other hand, some other people and authorities only take cognisance of non-human development. For development to be development and as well sustainable, it must be encompassing. That is, it must involve both human and non-human (infrastructural) development, and both rural- and urban- centred. Basically, for political reasons (propaganda, politicking, etc.), most leaders of the Sub-Saharan African nations such as Nigeria, often engage solely in urban-centred infrastructural (non-human) development. Their one side development, infrastructural development, is not extended to rural areas. The rural areas and people are left to ruin. They are only remembered prior to elections and given unrealisable promises of providing them with one basic amenity or infrastructural development or the other. The euphoria ahead of their anticipated development coupled with abject poverty, frustration and their elites' cajoles and rhetoric's often push the incapacitated rural people to succumb to the detects and electoral demands of their unscrupulous leaders, the sources of their woes and underdevelopment.

Rural people, especially rural women, are known to be the poorest of the poor, ridden by abject poverty, epidemics, social and cultural issues, and lack of infrastructure and social amenities. Studies have proven that bulk of rural women in particular are significantly contributing to their national economies, but they are the poorest of the poor,

illiterate, ignorant, disease-ridden, occupying low social, economic and political status (UN, 2008:1; Ochelle, 2014:2). The role of women, especially in the rural areas, was until recently regarded as secondary in the socio-economic development of Nigeria, as women tended to be ignored (Ihimodu, 1996:1). In his contribution to the literature on the state of African women and their role in development, Robert (2016:1) writes,

Women among various cultures have contributed significantly to their arts and society, like their men counterparts. It is however regrettable that the recognition, appreciation, attention and works accorded them have been insignificant, particularly those of African nation-states (growing societies), like Bekwarra nation (society) in Cross River, Nigeria, West Africa.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Development is variously conceptualised by legion scholars, though seemingly alike. The concept of development, as it is currently, began in 1986 with the Brundtland Commission that encapsulated the concept of development to include economic, environmental, cultural, social, and health as well as political needs (Brundtland, 2003). This conception points to the fact that development is development only when and where it is encompassing and not widely deficient. It has been argued by Seers (1972) that development has to do with the reduction of poverty, unemployment and inequality; and if the degree of per capital income of the people is increasing, it should not be recognised as development. This highlights the fact that a complete development is not only non-human (material and infrastructural) based improvement or growth, but human advancement and better/improved standards of living too. It is at that point that transformation is possible. That is why we use ‘transforming’ herein to refer to all-round pragmatic change efforts and measures to reposition the Sub-Sahara region from every ugly stagnant retrogressive situation to a new face of betterment.

Development, according to Afigbo (1990) cited in Anure (2015), consists of five main ingredients: increasing material wealth for use of individuals and the modern collectivism known as the nation; eliminating unemployment, eliminating poverty and want; eliminating inequality and increasing the general availability of labour-saving devices. For Rodney (1972), development is the ability of a nation to tap and harness its natural resources to better the lots of its citizens. These definitions point to individual and group development. Their approach to development is a comprehensive one. At the individual level, development implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being, while at group level, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships (Akaater, 2015:44 cited in Anure, 2015).

To us, development is the situation of a better standard of living, all-round change, improvement, growth, increase, innovations, betterment, transformation and at least fair availability of basic human needs, infrastructure and good governance impact. It involves the advancement of human; natural (phenomena) and the society at large in all capacities so as to attain (reach) certain appreciable standards, level and ways of life and operation. Human development entails the state of advancing (bettering) the standards and ways of life of a people, both individually and collectively. The above definitions simply apply to rural development, as the development processes of rural areas are not different from those of the urban areas.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the postcolonial theory of development, which makes strong arguments against the prejudicing notions of the Eurocentric development theorists and blames the West (Global North) for the ageing underdevelopment of the non-Western, colonised, nations. The advancement of postcolonial theory has aided academics across various disciplines in their ability to study phenomena from outside of the traditional Eurocentric viewpoint. The postcolonial theorists make a case for a shift from the ageing Eurocentric perception of development that subjugates the knowledge and experiences of the Global South to that of the Global North, all for the earlier advantage of the latter over the former for which it exploited, raided and underdeveloped, to an indigenous non-Eurocentric perspective (see Rodney, 1972; Sharp and Briggs, 2006). The postcolonial theorists unanimously lash the development theorists for their Eurocentric (prejudicing) theories of global development (Sharp and Briggs 2006; Biccum, 2002; Pender 2001; Escobar, 1995). The overriding criticism from postcolonial scholars concerning discourse associated with development studies deals with the characterisation of ‘development’ as simply spreading a ‘culturally superior’ Eurocentric understanding of enlightenment (Sharp and Briggs, 2006; Biccum, 2002; Pender, 2001; Escobar, 1995; Rodney, 1972).

Institutions of the post-World War II speculated development as a universal and inevitable phenomenon that naturally springs from the enlightenment principles, adding at the same time that the development of 'poor' nations must be actively sought by the people, particularly governments of such nations. The contrast lies in fact that development is viewed to be natural in the context of the Global North (as the centre of human progress), but in the Global South, it is rather what ought to be sought and man-tailored (see Biccum 2002). That is Eurocentric and prejudicing. The postcolonial scholars are bound to refute the stance. It is the superiority tendency of the Global North, tied to Eurocentric perspectives and discourse, that the non-Western people are perceived as less developed. Of course, having being stripped of development after and upon sustained years of endless underdevelopment by the West, those non-Western nations are bound to remain underdeveloped or to continually battle with development issues. This dynamic is continuously made manifest by the 'super' managerial role played by the World Bank, a Western institution, as the pre-eminent authority in any knowledge that concerns the development and education of the so-called 'third world' (see Pender, 2001).

The discourse of development is said to be a discursive construct that produces the very concept of the 'third world', as it makes the presumption that natives of these 'poor' countries will inevitably eventually be reformed, yet it continues to reiterate the separation between reformers and reformed by reconstituting the concept of the 'third world' as different and inferior (Escobar, 1995:53). Further, Escobar points to the practice of development theory reinforcing the idea of the 'third world' as essentially subjugating the individual intricacies of 'third world' countries under one blanket term, necessitating one universal response (Escobar, 1995:56). Much like Edward Said's thesis, *Orientalism* (1978), Escobar observed that Eurocentric stereotype has come to categorise that which is not Western otherwise, with subjective and prejudicing perspectives, resulting in a much too simplified account of the Global South. Such a practice negates the complexities of individual regions and thus makes assumptions on universal strategies for development. Rostow (1998), a prominent development theorist, has noted that [almost] every account of the West's historical development overlooked details concerning any favourable contribution from the trans-Atlantic slave trade or colonial conquests. This is another valid criticism of the development theorists with Western mind caste. Deliberately leaving out the enormous contribution of the non-Western peoples to the development of the West is a sustained attempt or gesture to legitimise the traditional theorists' contention that Western development sprang naturally and independently. If that be it, then the case of the non-Western nations ought to be the same since then, now and in the future.

Postcolonial scholars condemn the Eurocentric perspectives of development because they are prejudicing, imperialistic, racial, rhetorical, mythical, subjective and delineating. Indigenous knowledge is relegated and neglected; the image of the people as well as the region is battered, and the entire possessions of the non-West are often considered inferior, which should not be (Sharp and Briggs, 2004). The nature of communication in western scientific knowledge and the concept of the 'expert' is one reason advanced by postcolonial theorists for the subjugation of indigenous knowledge in development practice (Spivak, 1988; Pretty, 1994:38). Richards (1985) demonstrated that West African farmers used local knowledge as the basis for their rural development agenda, even though it may not have been fully utilised, due to the western scientific worldview. Institutionalising the idea of indigenous knowledge complementing rather than competing with Western knowledge (World Bank, 1998) alienates native populations and undermines development strategies. Also, it dilutes indigenous knowledge and practices and weakens the potential for it to deliver sustainable and relevant development (Sharp and Briggs, 2004). Development theorists have been at best hesitant and at worst unwilling to incorporate postcolonial ideas into the realm of western development. Perhaps one of the major reasons for this intrinsic hesitation by development theorists is to do with the epistemological foundations of post-colonialism. Development advocates would argue that postcolonial criticisms are emotional, subjective and irrational responses which undermine the attainment of universal knowledge that can be gained only through empirical inquiry based on Western scientific methods (Grovogui, 2013; Hopkins, 1997; Todorov, 1993). Be their argument as it may, it is inconsequential, flawed and subjective, as the facts surrounding the development of the West are rather practically obvious as evident in history rather than their latter apportioned scientific claims to sustain their Eurocentric perspectives in development discourse and other formal human endeavours.

4. COLLECTIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SUB-SAHARA AFRICAN TRANSFORMATION

There cannot be any significant and/or sustainable development without an appreciable rural development. It is like building a house without a good foundation. Poor foundation definitely warrants the collapse of a building, no matter how fine and/or expensive it might be. A storey building upstairs cannot exist without the down floor. No

doubt, the down floor of a storey is usually well and strongly built so it could carry the other (up) floors. This sheds light on the state of the development in most parts of the Sub-Sahara Africa, especially Nigeria.

Rural areas and people are not developed and thus urban development attempted by governments, especially state and federal governments, is usually inadequate, inconsequential and confronted by numerous problems. Poor, hungry, helpless and illiterate people are largely found in rural areas and urban suburbs. These people are those who make the statistics given for the development of a nation, a region and a continent. When a large number of rural and urban suburb inhabitants are ridden by abject poverty, outright lack, hunger and starvation, diseases and dreaded health issues, high illiteracy, insecurity, crimes, social vices, etc., there can be no valid (obvious/logical) claim of development. That is why there are rising urban issues in Nigeria and most other parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa. Rural-urban drift (rural-urban migration), with its attendant effects (consequences), has become very pronounced because of the common trend of urban-centred development.

Lamenting the state of development and inherent degenerating issues in Nigeria, the giant of Africa, Robert in Robert and Besong (2017:37) laments,

Nigeria's huge human natural resources, which if properly harnessed can put the economy on the fastest lane of development and growth, have been beleaguered by high unemployment and poverty, wide spread corruption, greed, embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds, failed/bad leadership and followership alike, among several others. The government most often politicks with political propaganda in the name of entrepreneurship development efforts and projects.

The National population statistics of Nigeria, in the 2007 census had it that the population of youths, the ages between 16 and 40, stood at over 70% of the national population estimate. This implies that the present Nigerian population is predominantly youth-centred. Only 30% of the 70% is gainfully employed, the other being idle or unemployed. The implication is youth restiveness— indulging in and perpetrating crimes, social vices, terrorism, militancy, gangsterism, insurgency, fraud (419), kidnapping, thuggery, theft, suicide, homicide, etc. (Okoye, 2006; Uji, 2014; Besong and Robert, 2016; Dibie, Besong and Robert, 2016; Robert, 2017). More so, recent World Bank's statistics proves that poverty among the youthful population is as high as 70%. This figure, Uji (2014) observes, contrast with the NPSN (2007) census figure above and also with the recent claim that Nigeria is the fastest growing economy in Africa. It is ironical to have growth here without development. There can be no significant development without the employment of the workforce, the youths, having 70% poverty ratio (Robert in Robert and Besong, 2017:37).

Sharing the stance of Otitolaiye and Otitolaiye (2014:82), we posit that both government and individuals owe the rural and urban poor the moral obligation of helping them out of their predicaments through standard and sustained education, entrepreneurship and wealth and employment creation, provision of information resources (ICT development), social amenities, poverty alleviation, privatisation, economic liberalisation, development and growth, healthcare, etc. For example, three out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) centre on health (reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, etc.). Yet, larger populations of the developing nations continue to battle with chronic health issues, basically for outright lack of good healthcare. It is often claimed that health services represent an area in which developing countries have the potential to become major exporters (Whalley 2004). More so, to duly fit into the contemporary digitalised global society, ICT development is imperative in the Sub-Saharan Africa. ICTs boost a country's productivity by improving efficiency and help firms and households to overcome constraints posed by limited access to resources and markets. The ability to use ICTs is critical for development. According to Cali, Ellis and Velde (2008:64), development and reform in the ICT sector involves market liberalisation and competition, private sector participation and effective regulation. Regrettably, private sector participation in ICT is still lower in Africa than in other regions.

In many developing countries, access to formal financial services is very limited, particularly for poorer households and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and it is likely that this lack of access to finance significantly constrains economic growth and reduces the ability of the poor to participate in markets, to increase their income and to themselves contribute to economic growth (Cali, Ellis and Velde, 2008: xii). More so, access to electricity is central to almost all aspects of economic activity and development, including private sector development and job creation, agricultural and industrial productivity and access to water, health care and education. It is strongly related to growth and development. However, access to electricity is limited or unreliable in many developing countries. It is estimated that at least 1.6 billion people still do not have access to electricity (Cali, Ellis and Velde, 2008: xiii). The case is at extreme in Nigeria.

Following urban-centred development, most (greater number) of the rural dwellers often migrate to towns and cities to key into urban life and the perceived (obvious) betterment therein. Yet, reaching there, handicapped and incapacitated, they continue with an intermediate (or worse) life (living) that is usually in-between their erstwhile rural life and the newly embraced (acquired) urban life. Considered as rural asylums, refugees or those on exile, the government simply (most times) deliberately leave them to urban suburbs. Left with a life [style], most times, worse than the erstwhile rural life, most of them become nuisance to urban and urban suburbs dwellers, the government, themselves and the society as a whole. As they struggle to survive, they thereby engage in dubious, illegal and immoral activities and life. Most of such migrants soon become prone to danger or sources (agents) of danger to many other people, including the well-to-do (elites, bourgeoisie and oligarchs) of the urban areas. They inflict pains on others without a second thought and some even hurt themselves in the long run with suicide, drug addition, alcoholism, prostitution, armed-robbery, theft, kidnapping, etc. cum varied repercussions of their varied ills. Most armed-robbers, thieves, criminals, burglars, kidnappers and hired assassins have given credence to the foregoing, as they confessed to having got into the ill act(s) because of their strained frustration in the town after migrating from their homes (villages) to the given urban areas. Suicide is now on the increase in Nigerian cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Abuja, Onitsha, etc. The highest cases in very recent times are in Lagos. As observed by Okoye (2006:6), extreme poverty, as obtained in many Third World countries, causes people to commit suicide. And, frustration is a strong contributory factor to suicide.' She further writes,

In [sic] the developing African continent, especially the developing Third World, there are many more factors that cause individual and societal stress and tension. Most prominent of these are devastating poverty, loss of hope and not knowing where your next meal is coming from. Others are constant civil unrests, tribal clashes, religious rivalries, strikes, political killings [thuggery and assassination], rape, destruction of public properties [vandalism], unemployment, etc.

Further, a critical examination of the helpless life of the urban suburbs dwellers would no doubt prove the vulnerability of these people to all forms of inhuman life worse than what most rural dwellers suffer(ed) in the deserted rural areas. They too most often lack harbour and social amenities, electricity, healthcare, (good) schools, pipe borne water, etc. A good number of them live a life similar to that of mad men/women on the street. Some of them live and/or sleep under bridges, uncompleted buildings, uninhabited or damaged buildings, near-by bushes, bus-stops, town halls, public rest rooms, motor parks (garages), etc. Most of these people would have ordinarily preferred living at home– their rural areas– but because of the search for greener pasture and/or betterment, they migrate to urban areas, where development is centred and thus obtained at least minimally.

Unfortunately, they reach there and discover most times that their rural areas are even better than the urban areas, being that they could rarely fit into the urban area/life appropriately. They lack finance and resources to duly enjoy urban life. The urban suburbs and the aforementioned urban harbours for nonentities and miscreants become the refuge of the poor rural-urban migrants. Returning home becomes difficult for most of them who are shy of returning home empty-handed, worse than they were when they moved to the urban area. Therefore, it is crystal clear that if rural areas and people are duly developed, there would be low rate of rural-urban drift, and the decline in agriculture and low food production and availability resulting in food crisis. And, of course, the rising menace of rural-urban drift (shift) would be obtained minimally or no more.

Collective rural development is a thankless task for all and sundry. A thankless task is a seeming unpaid and unrewarded/unappreciated duty/responsibility yet with high prospects and benefits to both the benefactors and the beneficiaries (Dibie and Robert, 2015). It involves all hands being on deck to attain even development. Government and all agents of socialisation – family, schools, mass media, press groups, peers and religions – are the key players, while individuals are the other players that have to collectively be at work to develop and transform rural areas. It begins with parents at the family level of socialisation. Every individual is within and outside the rural areas is involved; i.e. everyone has the (corporate) social responsibility of contributing their own quota to the development of the rural areas. Every urban area is developed cum transformed rural area. Its initial development consciously and unconsciously by all and sundry is what transformed it to an urban area in current time. This implies that many rural areas that have been left to ruin – perpetual underdevelopment – would have also become urbanised (urban areas) by now or since. It also implies that developing any society means transforming it. In other words, urbanisation begins with rural development cum transformation, as any well (fully) developed rural areas are bound to become urban areas. Therefore, to develop and sustain the development goals of Sub-Saharan Africa, the rural areas must be developed first, and sustenance culture evolved, roused, inculcated and imbibed.

Rural development is one pragmatic means of transforming the larger society, like the Sub-Saharan Africa. When every well-to-do individual, who is a migrant (resident/settler in) to an urban area, remembers home with good

adventures, innovations and rural-based investments, every rural area would certainly become developed and transformed. Most often than not, the bourgeoisie (investors, entrepreneurs, etc.) keep investing exclusively in urban areas rather than developing their own rural areas. Meanwhile if they do so, they are bound to be the pioneer developers of their areas, which would become urban areas in no distant time. Through their significant establishments, which breed or accelerate development, in rural areas, the areas are bound to get developed and transformed. Unfortunately, most indigenous investors and entrepreneurs often prefer to cluster their businesses or establishments in already developed towns and cities. They simply forget that their likes of other areas took the risk and developed their then rural areas that have become developed and transformed urban areas, now cherished by many, including them (the current/latter days investors/entrepreneurs), as urban areas that are better to live in and establish and run businesses.

They also forget that most of today's urban areas were worse than today's rural areas in the past, before their development and transformation by their own indigenous developers and others in general– collective rural development. The today's towns and cities were rural areas until when developed and transformed by their indigenous people and resident who were not just conscious (mindful) of rural development but also ready to bear the risk of championing the development, urbanisation and transformation of the areas. By so doing, they have (had) contributed individually and collectively to developing and transforming such societies (areas) to the point of becoming well-known and enviable urban areas today. The gestures of such people that (had) immensely laid the foundation for or contributed to the development of and consequent transformation of today urban areas show clearly that rural development is a collective gesture – social responsibility – for all and sundry; i.e. every individual, family, monarchs, government, elites, all sets of leaders, institutions, NGOs, pressure groups, the media, religions, the international community (allies), and what have you. So, there is no point shying away from today's rural areas for investment/establishment. Somebody take the lead in beginning to develop rural areas in every possible capacity. The government of every area (nation) has the lion's share of the thankless task of developing, urbanising and transforming rural areas and emerging (semi-urban) towns/cities – urban suburbs. It is the people's right to beget all of that from the government, even without crying aloud for it. Every government ought to develop not just urban but rural areas and not just the areas, in terms of infrastructure, but the people too. Otitolaiye and Otitolaiye (2014:82) maintain that 'Helping the rural and urban poor is a moral obligation for every supply is a basic need like food and shelter.' The government cannot do it alone. It is every citizen's obligation to develop their areas, as part of their social responsibilities. For instance, the government would not have to be there everywhere and every time to tell the people to avoid vandalising or maintain already established development projects in the rural areas.

Parents, peers, etc. who preach against agriculture and rural settlement are to blame too for the underdevelopment of the ageing rural areas, as they cause young people, who would have stayed at home and contribute to developing, urbanising and transforming their areas, to flee their homes for urban areas. Some parents do not take their children home at all. They leave them perpetually in towns and cities developed, urbanised and transformed by some other people. Some people merely dead going home or establishing significant firms/institutions for fear of being hurt or killed mysteriously by their statesmen/women or elders. Such envious killer individuals are to blame. And, those who dread them and stay back forever are to blame more, because despite all the odds in an area, a few other persons, who refused to be constrained by individuals and/or any negative factors, usually break the uneven and set pace for others.

Imagine the extent of development, urbanisation and transformation that would have been attained in the Sub-Saharan Africa if African leaders, who loot(ed) and establish(ed) abroad have had all in their own country or home towns. Even if their areas were remote rural areas, they would have got transformed by now. The home-based establishments of a few of them have bred or contributed to the development of their areas. Take the example of the development brought to such places by the schools, especially higher institutions, set up by the leaders who invested at home, particularly in the (then) rural areas.

5. CONCLUSION

On the whole, the governments of the Sub-Saharan Africa fail almost completely, most often, to deliver its functions/duties to the citizenry and the society. It neglects both its responsibility and the citizenry. Both the people and the society are either poorly developed or underdeveloped in most parts by their corrupt government, elites and bourgeoisie. The rural and urban suburb dwellers are left to their ruin and fate. The basic social amenities and infrastructure that the government owe them are usually almost non-existent – no electricity at all in some areas, poor/irregular power supply, no pipe borne water, lack of healthcare and schools, etc. Rural areas are deserted permanently by both government and individuals.

The failure and misdeeds of governments are aggravated by individuals and the agents of socialisation and other societal/social institutions. Negative attitude, cultural factors, the decline in agriculture, urban-centred development/urbanisation, abject poverty/lack, underdevelopment, Western mind caste, globalisation trends, socio-economic and political issues are what prompt rural-urban drift for the rural dwellers, who unfortunately reach the urban areas and most often than not begot the worst of life ever. Most individuals also fail to contribute their due quotas to the development, urbanisation and transformation of their home towns and immediate environment of residence. Most of them prefer establishing in urban areas to doing so in their own areas that rural or emerging urban areas. Again, where and when the government attempts to develop, the common trend is to concentrate only on urban areas and infrastructure for obvious political propaganda and ill-interests.

6. RECOMMENDATION

This study recommends the following:

1. Governments of the Sub-Saharan African nations should learn from the good examples of their contemporaries of the developed nations how best to develop, urbanise, and transform rural areas. They must debase from urban-centered development that rather brings up as well as degenerate serious urban and rural issues alike. It is high time the government bettered the lives of rural dwellers and the areas.
2. There is the dire need for wide reorientation of the masses, through mass sensitization, awareness campaign, education, etc., on the need for collective rural development efforts and gestures, and on the tales and reality of urban life so as to reduce rural drift, urban crime/nuisance and the sole concentration of development projects, programmes and ventures in urban areas. Every individual should be made to know and conscious of the fact that everyone needs to invest in or begin the development of their own rural areas. Government (ex-)officials and individuals should be prevailed on, with strong constraining legislations, to establish at home (with favourable easy-going establishment laws) rather than overseas. Sustenance culture should be imbibed so that developed projects could be easily sustained.

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