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# **Contextualising Freire in African Sustainable Development**

**By Dr. Charles Okigbo**

## **Abstract**

Paulo Freire's ideas on the contents, methods and purposes of education are relevant in any serious consideration of the African development dilemma. Not only because he worked in and experimented with African societies, but also because of the universal flavour of his pedagogy, Paulo Freire brings some refreshing insights into strategies for responsible development through culturally-sensitive direct and mass-mediated education.

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# **Comment Situer Freire dans le Développement Soutenable en Afrique**

**Par Charles Okigbo**

## **Résumé**

Les idées de Paulo Freire sur le contenu, les méthodes et les objectifs de l'éducation sont cohérentes à toute réflexion du dilemme du développement en Afrique. Cela non seulement parce qu'il a travaillé pendant longtemps en Afrique, où il a fait de nombreuses expériences au sein des communautés africaines mais aussi en raison de la spécificité de sa pédagogie. Paulo Freire semble avoir une très bonne conception des stratégies de développement par le biais de la sensibilisation culturelle dans une éducation où la masse média devrait jouer un rôle crucial.

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## Introduction

There has been increasing interest in the mechanisms and methodologies for educating adult members of African communities, in the face of widespread criticisms about declining standards of education in schools. As the economies of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa deteriorate, in spite of various structural adjustment programmes, the school system is one of the sectors that are most easily affected. In the circumstances, there is need for strategies for checking the high rate of illiteracy and promoting development.

Paulo Freire represents a critical actor in the movement for the elevation of adult education to the status of a development imperative. His conceptions on the methods and strategies of adult education transcend the pedantic concerns of teaching adult members *how* to read, recite, and write. His pedagogy focuses entirely on the liberation of the individual from oppressive forces of society. To Freire, to be literate is not just to be able to read and write, but to utilise reading, writing and speaking skills to continuously enlarge our understanding of the world around us.

These activities derive their meaning from the cultural milieu within which they are practised. Contrary to the common focus of literacy which is on the *how*, Freire directed attention to the exploration of the "more fundamental questions of what, where, and why we read, write and speak the way we do" (Mackie 1980:2). Adult education and literacy are not acquired neutrally, but in specific historical, social and cultural contexts that make them means to understanding our place in the world, rather than ends in themselves.

Freire's ideas sound familiar and iconoclastic at the same time, and though they originated in Brazil, they are applicable anywhere there is oppression. If they sound familiar, it is because they are practical and based on what Freire experienced; if they are universally applicable in all oppressive situations, it is because Freire moulded them into theoretical explanations

and universal perspectives; and if we see ourselves in the explanatory schemata he provided, it is because the theoretical principles are returned once again to be refurbished in practice.

Freire's ideas are appealing to analysts of African development, not only because of their universalistic quality, but also because he specifically built African political and cultural conditions into his equations for genuine development of the Third World. From 1975, he was involved in designing and implementing educational projects in Guinea-Bissau. The experiences led to his publication of *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau (1978)* which has been hailed as the most readable and accessible of all Freire's books. He worked in many other African countries, trying to see linkages between development and practical education for freedom from oppression. It will be inconceivable for a renowned educational theoretician and practitioner like Paulo Freire not to have serious critics. Among the many critics are Walker (1980) who argues that there are serious contradictions and incoherencies in Freire's works and political stance. Ironically, whether these criticisms, are true or not, they represent some of the attraction that Freire has for contemporary scholarship. Among the most attractive points in Freire's pedagogy are the following: Critical consciousness, banking methodology, central problem, popular participation, revolutionary politics, and epoch elements. Each of these has serious and direct implications in our discussions of sustainable development in Africa.

### **Main Points**

Paulo Freire was influenced significantly by a myriad of forces that include his growing up in Recife, Brazil during the world economic depression with its attendant hunger and poverty, working for the Catholic Action Movement, adult literacy promotion initially at Recife; and later nationally, involvement in the Chilean Agrarian Reform Corporation, and practical work in Peru, Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania and Guinea Bissau. Some of the philosophical perspectives that flavoured his ideas include,

but are not restricted to: Academic liberalism, Catholic radicalism, unorthodox Marxism, and practical existentialism. These influences coalesced, and are crystallized in the aphoristic expressions that characterize his pedagogy. The main points are explained here below:

### **Critical Consciousness**

The central thesis in Freire's works is the proposition, which was often stated with emphatic empiricism, to the effect that critical consciousness is the motor of cultural emancipation. Denis Goulet (1974: vii) called this "the unifying thread in his (Freire's) works," adding that "Freire never tires of looking for new forms of critical consciousness and unearthing new links between oppression in a variety of settings and the liberating effects of 'conscientizacao.'" The theme "conscientizacao" (which critical consciousness approximates) "refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire 1993:16).

Critical consciousness is therefore a pedagogical philosophy of thought as well as practical guide for action. It is learning about our environment in the contexts that should lead to specific actions to counteract the oppressive elements of the situations. Freire was mindful of the many criticisms of critical consciousness or what is often referred to as "the danger of conscientizacao." These criticisms reflect "naive thinking" which Freire contrasted with critical thinking. Critical thinking leads to the realization that "the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men"(Freire 1993:73). The important role of critical consciousness in communication and education (and thus by extension in sustainable development) is brought out clearly in Freire's syllogistic reasoning: "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (Freire 1993: 73-74).

## Banking Methodology

Critical consciousness facilitates the realization of the benefits of true education, which is a rarity in many societies especially those that are still plagued by what Freire calls "the narration sickness." For education, especially at the adult level to yield the expected fruits of critical thinking and mature action, the teacher-student relationship must eliminate the usual "narrative character".  
Narrative education:

"involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)... The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the student ... The outstanding character of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power. Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Para is Belem" (Freire 1993:52)

Narrative education leads to students memorizing the narrated context and thereby becoming receptacles to be filled by the teacher. Education becomes a mechanical *depositing* process, and "instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only so far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (Freire 1993: 53).

The banking concept is used as a justification for the expert-client relationship in many formal education and donor-aid situations. True education for genuine development ought to start from the premise that both teachers and their students are learners. Ever eager to show that education and critical thinking are best realized in situations of proper communicative effectiveness, Freire (1993:58) argues that:

"solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which a (bank-clerk educator) is guided fears and proscribes communication ... Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning ...

Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolations, but only in communication."

Banking education is a concept that can be applied in many social learning situations in any culture. The idea that the teacher is the expert, and the students are receptacles to be filled with deposits, leads to the perpetuation of some oppressive tendencies in society, with even the oppressed accepting the inevitability of their conditions. The contrapuntal concept to "banking education" is "problem-posing education" which allows people to develop their power to critically appreciate their existence in the world, in active epistemological and existentialist terms

### **Central Problem**

The tension between the forces of banking education and problem-posing education in society leads to serious conflicts that pull at the very essence of any community. This tension is evident not only in the methods of training and education, but also in the substance or subject matter of schooling and learning. Affirming that men and women are active participants with free will and capable of actualizing themselves in society, problem-posing education is an empowering process that is ever evolving and building on people's ability to improve their understanding of their unique positions in the world. According to Freire (1993: 65):

Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity ... it is prophetic ... it affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future."

This is the core of the central message and problem in Paulo Freire's work. Whereas banking education is oppressive, problem-posing education is liberating, which is the ultimate value in Freire's cosmology. Commenting on the relationship between

liberty and education, Goulet (1974:viii-iv) noted that "education in the Freire mode is the practice of liberty because it frees the educator no less than the educatees from the twin thralldom of silence and monologue." He identified Freire's central message, to wit: "that one can know only to the extent that one 'problematizes' the natural, cultural and historical reality in which s/he is immersed."

Problematizing is the anti-thesis of the problem-solving which is the process of experts "objectively" diagnosing a problem and analysing the situation in a detached manner, with a view to proposing some solutions. According to Freire, such problem-solving approaches distort the totality of the human experience by presenting it as only mere difficulties to be solved. Problematization on the other hand, requires the active involvement of an entire populace in the creative task of codifying total reality into symbols for generation of critical consciousness and genuine empowerment. The ultimate result is the alteration of the relationship between the people (as actors) and the forces of their social environment. Thus the people are subjects and active participants, instead of objects that are plugged into the solving equations. Such a proposition, in spite of its implementational difficulties, is obviously appealing to aid recipients whose views are hardly sought in the diagnosis of their problems. Education and development are problem-posing processes. According to Freire (1993: 153):

The task of the educator is to present to the educatee as a problem the content which mediates them, and not to discourse on it, give it, extend it, or hand it over, as if it were a matter of something already done. constituted, completed and finished.

### **Popular Participation**

The act of teaching properly is impossible without problematization, which necessarily involves a meeting of the minds of both educator and educatees in a truly participatory experience. The litmus test for identifying educators who can

carry out radical transformations is the degree to which ordinary people are actively involved in participatory exchanges in support of development. For our education to liberate the people, teachers and students must share their experiences. The participation will be nominal and perfunctory unless the teachers believe in the peasants and seek ways to actively involve them. According to Freire (1974:164):

If they (teachers) are incapable of believing in the peasants, of communing with them, they will at best be cold technicians. They will probably be technocrats or even good reformers. But they will never be educators who will carry out radical transformations..

The participatory impulse is so strong in Freire's philosophy of being that it rules out the possibility of socially significant actions unless they have "sharing" characteristics. This is a reflection of his concern for people and their freedom. No policy, programme or project will be credited with redeeming values if it does not incorporate participatory methods that situate them in the centre of the people's lives. Successful education is not known by skill in persuasion or transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Rather, it is the ability to engage in participatory dialogue.

Stressing the importance of dialogue, reciprocity and participation in Freire's pedagogy, Goulet (1974:xiii) noted thus:

The mark of a successful educator is not skill in persuasion - which is but an insidious form of propaganda - but the ability to dialogue with educatees in a mode of reciprocity. And rural extension fails as communication because it violates the dialectic of reciprocity; indeed no change agent or technical expert has the right to impose personal options on others.

It is not only rural extension but also much of our contemporary professional communication activities that can be accused of disregarding dialogic and participatory methodologies. It is this failure to involve the people that accounts for the paucity of revolutionary ferments. Real change in society involves a correct

understanding of the inter-relationship between education and participatory communication in the context of inter-change between or among respectful partners. This is the substance of revolutionary politics, which is one of the major points in Freire's work.

### **Revolutionary Politics**

The flames of revolution are alight in almost every section of Freire's works, and all the major principles of his pedagogy, from conscientization to problematization and popular participation. These are the means to a revolutionary end. If education is the starting point of sustainable development, the ultimate end is the elimination of oppression through revolutionary politics. According to Barnard (1980:13)

"Some of Freire's central themes (are) notably his insistence that education is always political, and that the aim of good pedagogy is to enable people to increase their understanding of their own objective conditions. Such understanding, says Freire, will inevitably lead them to change the world as they climb out of the oppression in which they have been submerged.

To Reginald Connolly (1984:70) "the importance of Paulo Freire lies in the emphasis he gives to the hitherto ignored political nature of education... His thinking demonstrates the power of education as a liberating force". Such a liberation is possible only through a revolution not only in the modes of thinking and understanding the world, but also in the relations and politics of the individual constituents of the society. Without revolutionary politics, conscientization and the subsequent phenomena of problematization and participation will remain atomized processes without mass appeal and significance. It is revolutionary politics that popularizes the new initiatives and makes them standardized practices and norms in the society.

Just as education is always political, according to Freire, revolution is also as natural as education. Revolution is

inevitable whenever people realize their incompleteness in the face of oppression and denial of freedom. In Freire's (1972:82) words, "because men are historical beings, incomplete, and conscious of being incomplete, revolution is as natural and permanent a human condition as is education".

Freire's ideas are incomplete until they are conceived as he intended them: "essentially geared to the radical transformation of social reality" Connolly (1980:17). Such radical transformation is not possible without critical reflection, and so in Freire, there is the creative marriage of ideas and action which yields a revolutionary praxis. Freire recognizes that action without reflection is disastrous; while introspection without participatory revolutionary action is escapist idealism or wishful thinking. Radicalization is the nourishing spirit for revolutionary politics. In the foreword to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (1993:19) he contrasted radicalization with sectarianism in these words;

Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticises and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality.

Revolutionary politics needs to be guided by continuous critical appraisal lest revolutionaries become reactionary "by falling into sectarianism in the process of responding to the sectarianism of the right" (Freire 1993:19). This possibility should not lead the radical to a docile position of accepting the status quo, which is invariably oppressive. In every age and every society, there are always some "radicals" who are committed to human liberation and are prepared to enter into reality and thereby better transform it, by knowing it better. This is the essential difference between animal and human activity. Men and women can produce social institutions, ideas, and concepts; and through their continuing praxis, they can create history, by employing epochal units.

## Epochal Elements

People, in contrast to animals, can tri-dimensionalize time into the past, the present, and future. Human history develops as a constant process of change involving not only tangible objects, but also social institutions, ideas, and concepts, and ultimately yielding "epochal units" As Freire (1993:82) explains:

These epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartments within which people are confined ... epochal units interrelate in the dynamics of historical continuity.

Freire's philosophy derives its characteristic flavour from his deep transparent concern for historical relevance. Every society is what it is because of the inter-play of historical forces or epochal units. The end results are not predetermined in an absolute sense, and thus, there is plenty of room for revolutionary action to influence the final historical outcome. There is a dialectical relationship between the immaterial ideas and their concrete representation. An historical epoch is marked by the inter-play among all the epochal elements - ideas, themes, and thematic universe.

In delineating the dialectical relationships between ideas and their opposites, on the one hand, and between these and their concrete representations (i.e. themes) Freire (1993:82) noted that:

An epoch is characterised by a complex of *ideas*, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization, constitute the *themes* of that epoch. These themes imply others which are opposing or even antithetical; they also indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled. The complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitutes its '*thematic universe*'.

Our social reality presents us with a plethora of themes, many of which are in contradiction, and begging for resolution through

peaceful or revolutionary means. Oppression and exploitation, as in colonial or feudal situations, can lead to misperception or mythicization of crucial thematic relationships, leading to a climate of irrationality and sectarianism. As Freire explains, this climate can drain the themes of their significance, deprive them of their characteristically dynamic aspect and lead to the propagation of a negative theme: "myth-creating irrationality." The positive and opposite theme is "a critical and dynamic view of the world" which is a necessary tool for the revolutionary task of transforming reality in favour of the liberation of people and of the sustenance of responsible development.

Freire's epochal elements are useful tools in explaining human-world relationships, and programming for necessary action that can lead to positive development in society. He proposed that the fundamental theme of our epoch is *domination*, with its opposite theme of *liberation*, as being the objective to be achieved. In the Third World, domination implies underdevelopment, which he argues, cannot be understood apart from the relationship of dependency.

In all human experience, including development areas, people exteriorize their views of the world and thereby reflect their generative themes. When a group does not concretely express a generative thematic, this does not imply "the non-existence of themes ... on the contrary, (it suggests) a very dramatic theme: the theme of silence" (Freire 1993:87). This is one of the most serious problems of Third World development as reflected in the structure of mutism in the face of large scale deprivation.

The main points of Freire's pedagogy have immediate relevance in our understanding of sustainable development issues in Africa. Among the interacting themes that constitute the thematic universe for Africa today, problems of socio-political development dominate. Freire's domination-liberation thematic is a succinct summary of the prevailing African predicament, and his recommendations of conscientization, problematization and radicalization, among other interventions, deserve more attention from students of African development.

## Freire and Sustainable Development

That development has eluded most parts of Africa today is not in dispute. National and regional reports show clearly how many countries in Africa lag behind their counterparts in other parts of the world. Some of the indices are chilling:

- (i) Africa has a disproportionate share of the poorest countries with the lowest Gross National Product per capita.
- (ii) African countries have some of the lowest percentages of children reaching grade five. Compare Guinea-Bissau 20%, Mali 22% and Madagascar 22%, with Singapore 100%, Jamaica 96% and Sri Lanka 92%.
- (iii) Africa has the lowest rate of rural people (population) with access to safe water; 15 of the 25 countries where there are wild polio virus transmission are in Africa; as are 10 of the 15 countries where eradication of polio is especially difficult. (UNICEF 1995/96).
- (iv) Africa has some of the lowest rates of industrialization, higher education development, resource utilization and gross domestic output.
- (v) Political instability, social strife, intra-country warfare, and coups d'état are rampant in the Africa region.

It is ironical that Africa is one of the most richly-endowed regions of the world. The statistics cannot reveal the full extent of Africa's rich natural and cultural resources.

The following is only a snippet:

- Africa has 23 per cent of the world's lands; yet less than 25 per cent of arable land is actually cultivated. (World Resources 1994-95:308).
- Geographically, Africa's mineral potential is at least equal to that of other continents. West Africa is rich in gold, tin, and iron ore. Southern Africa is literally a gold mine of industrial and precious diamonds, copper, and gold ... (World Resources 1994-95:338).
- Natural energy resources ... are plentiful in Africa, but the continent currently consumes only a fraction of its own oil,

gas, coal, hydro and geothermal resources ... less than 4 per cent of Africa's vast hydro resource potential ... and even less of its geothermal solar, wind, or biogas potential are being harnessed ... (World Bank 1989:129).

In spite of these rich resources, Africa remains largely undeveloped. African development is not all together a hopeless case, as many pessimists argue. There are many signs of positive developments, though these are often over-shadowed by the more visible signs of chaos, catastrophe and crisis. Chege (1995) points to increasing political democratization in many African countries as well as the World Bank's indices for economic recovery, and argues strongly that there is abundant hope in the horizon. The crux of the problem, however, is not whether there are some signs of hope, but how the development so far achieved in some sectors and regions can be *sustained*. If social development is not sustained over a considerable period of time, it will be at best transient, temporary and illusionary. This accounts for the present world attention on issues of "sustainable development," a term which does not lend itself to easy definition.

Many definitions of "sustainable development" have been presented by social and natural scientists, policy makers and development scholars. Among these are:

- "a process of change in which exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the reorientation of technology development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (WCED 1987:43).
- "the management and conservation of the natural resources base, and the orientation of technological and institutional change, in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations" (FAO 1992:7)
- "Sustainability is the capacity of a system to maintain output at a level approximately equal to or greater than its historical average, with the approximation determined by its historical variability" (Lynam and Herdt 1988).

The commonality among these is the idea that development and societal growth can be enhanced through maintenance and incremental strategies of systematic planning and implementation of worthy programmes. Wete (1994) argues that definitions of sustainable development also assume that there is already a modicum of social development which is in need of sustenance. Whatever one's conception of sustainable development, there are fascinating insights provided by some of the thematic concepts in Freire's pedagogy. The six concepts that were discussed in the preceding section will now be related to sustainable development, in the next section.

### **Conscientization and Sustainable Development**

Development of Africa has to start from the people achieving a new awareness of their potentials and self-worth, without which they would continue to see themselves as deprived and disadvantaged. This is the task of conscientization, as Freire conceived of it. Ordinarily, the majority of the people would be unmotivated, and feel apathetic, downtrodden, and fatalistic in their attitudes. Conscientization leads people to "become aware that they can know as conscious beings, and therefore can act upon their world to transform it" (Bee 1989:4)). This is a new kind of empowerment based on the appreciation of the difference between culture which people can create and recreate, and nature which they do not make.

Freire's approach was designed to empower the people to see themselves as active creators not passive receivers. They would replace their fatalistic and apathetic view of the world which emphasizes their limitations, with a new understanding of their roles in a world, where they can bring about positive changes through critical awareness and active participation in cultural creation. The emphasis is on the active role of people in and with their physical environment; the human aspects of culture which de-emphasize assimilation and storing information; and the role of men and women as active subjects in the world.

Though Freire's pedagogy was on how to achieve critical consciousness so that people could teach themselves to read and write, it is reading and writing in the context of mastery of their oppressive environment. Such critical awareness will be a failure if it does not support responsible and sustainable development. One of the handicaps to achieving this is our conventional method of education which discourages critical questioning and rather adopts the processes of depositing knowledge, which Freire aptly described as the banking method.

### **Problem-Posing**

Sustainable development has not been helped by our existing methods of education which only serve the purposes of transfer of information from the "expert teacher" to the "ignorant students". Because development is not a purely scientific and technological phenomenon that must be "learned," but rather a cultural experience that should be propagated, there is great need to re-think the educational processes that are related to it, in the context of Freire's pedagogy.

Freire recommended that teachers (development experts) and students (the people) should see themselves as subjects in the task of unveiling reality (i.e critical consciousness), as well as in the equally important task of re-creating appropriate knowledge. Our educational systems must be cured of their present "narration sickness" to make the content and curricula truly supportive of genuine development.

Many of our contemporary conceptions of development do not recognize the need to re-think our educational methods and direct attention away from "rote learning" to active questioning of our situations and the available options. Sustainable development will be delayed until we can raise issues with many of the things we accept as "nature" and thereby given. We must pose questions about the role of culture in promoting or hindering development. Problem-posing education is Freire's answer to the conventional educational method, which according to him, achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture, and therefore

can only be an impediment to sustainable development. Freire talks so glowingly of the problem-posing methodology as if it is an innate quality of every individual. In the absence of proper preparation in the techniques of this method, it must be a difficult exercise to expect that everybody will know how to pose the right questions about their social reality. In development discourse, asking the right questions is as important as getting the right answers.

### **Problematization and Sustainable Development**

Development studies often emphasize the typical consultancy model or problem solving method by which an expert detaches him(her)self from a situation so as to give an objective diagnosis leading to a learned prescription. Such methods are abhorred by Freire who recommends a problematization process which involves associating "an entire population to the task of codifying total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and social forces" (Goulet 1974:ix). What is called for is active involvement in development problems, instead of detachment in the name of objectivity and neutrality which are not achievable when the issue is how to improve peoples' living conditions.

In problematization, deliberate steps are taken to penetrate the problem-situation and become immersed in the social situation of underdevelopment or whatever the subject is. As Freire argues, "no one can present something to someone else as a problem and at the same time remain a mere spectator of the process." To problematize a situation means to be actively involved and to completely immerse oneself in the extant conditions. This runs in the face of scientific and social science objectivity and detachment, which Freire would argue are detrimental to the ambition of solving problems instead of just studying about the situations. Problematization, whether in sustainable development or the other possible areas of social behaviour, necessarily involves participation, another key concept in Freire's pedagogy.

## **Popular Participation and Sustainable Development**

Popular participation, one of the key points in Freire's methodology, is now an accepted principle in sustainable development. The active involvement of the people in designing and implementing development programmes is highly recommended if we have to avoid such mistakes as "talking down" on these people. Arguing for popular participation in support of development, Moemeka (1994:14-15) had this to say:

Development communication is not merely a matter of transmitting information about how things can be done better . It is much more than the exchange of problem-solving information. It also involves ... teaching of new skills, and encouragement of local participation in development activities. True and effective community development requires the participation of every segment of the nation - rural, urban, city, sub-urban; and every sector - government, private and public business.

Freire had experimented with various methods of education and communication, and the results he realized convinced him of the superiority of participatory approaches in arriving at authentic solutions to the problems of the people. As he reported, he had experimented with and abandoned various methods but never the conviction that only by working with the people could he achieve anything authentic on their behalf. One of the greatest shortcomings of contemporary development studies is the low level of involvement of peasants and ordinary citizens. The revolution in people's hearts, which should precede the general revolution of development, needs the active participation of the people. This is the underlying principle of participatory communication approaches (Servaes and Arnst, 1994).

## **Revolutionary Politics and Epoch Elements**

The greatest task of development is the central problem of dehumanization, which Freire recognized as an ontological possibility as well as a historical reality. The people's vocation

is to regain their humanity which is denied them by their oppressors, who in turn lose their own humanity by exploiting and oppressing their people. A revolutionary politics is needed to liberate both the oppressors and the oppressed, otherwise, it will be only a reversal of roles if the people only fight their oppressors. In the context of sustainable development, Freire's methods represent radical approaches that call for "liberating action" aimed at freeing both the elite and the peasants from their ignorance of the true nature of social reality.

The elites deserve to be pitied in the sense that their humanity is diminished through their oppressive attitudes towards the peasants. Only an authentic praxis arising from a typically Freirean dialectical method can help in resolving the oppressor-oppressed contradiction.

When all these ideas of conscientization, problem-posing, problematization, popular participation and revolutionary politics are rolled together, the end result is a plethora of socially significant themes that represent the epoch or the germs for sustainable development through liberation. Not surprisingly, the anti-theses of these themes are also ever present to frustrate genuine development efforts. Sustainable development requires the proper management of the myriad processes and themes that liberate men/women, and enhance humanity. This is an all-encompassing view that calls for cultural, technological, educational and political correctness, all geared in a synergistic sense to uplift the human condition. Though Freire did not specifically focus on sustainable development through communication, the six concepts that underlined his pedagogy have obvious relations with sustainability. In a recent analysis of the relationship between telecommunications and sustainable development, Labelle (1995) identified five concepts, each of which is accorded significant attention by Freire. These are: environmental, economic, social, political and cultural manifestations.

## Conclusion

Paulo Freire's methodology for adult learning is relevant in many social learning situations, including sustainable development. Though he started with adult education, his relevance in political revolutions and liberation struggles is unmistakable. His greatest legacy is the implanting of a durable and widely applicable system for making education a practical enterprise that is built on critical awareness of our position in the world. Humankind is both the subject and object of study as well as the only enduring protagonist in the intellectual-cum-practical quest for sustainable freedom. In the absence of freedom, both the intellect and the physical body are in bondage, and thus necessarily undeveloped. True development is the radical exercise of freedom, based on critical consciousness and the active involvement of all the actors.

Any reading of Freire in the context of African development leads to exhilarating insights about how education, communication and popular participation can be employed to provide true enlightenment and mass involvement with regard to such issues as political democracy, agriculture, health, gender, science and industrial development. No doubt, there are many perplexing questions that are not answered. One of them is how to reverse the damages of a 200-year tradition in Western-style education which typifies the banking method, and bring about greater participation in a "conscientizacao" methodology. Another is how to use the modern mass media to promote popular participation and conscientization. Such questions notwithstanding, Freire is no doubt relevant in our understanding of our predicament in Africa today. It must be stressed, however, that his methodology should not be used in isolation, as if it is a magic wand. There are other complementary approaches that involve social marketing, promotions, international global ethic and responsibility (Nwosu 1995; Okigbo 1989).

Sustainable development calls for the adoption of holistic and synergistic approaches to redefining our situation in the context

of available resources utilization and the needs of future generations.

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