

**Transcendental Knowledge and Development:  
Addressing African Development and Sustainable Knowledge Gaps Challenges**

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**Introduction**

Bernard Lonergan's book *Insight* presents a powerful outlook on metaphysical aspects of knowing and blends with epistemology in answering what man can know and to what length he can be willing and able to search for truth. For in knowing, we validate the content and objectivize that which we claim to know. That conformity makes us better able to deal with shrouds of unknowing.

Dealing with material in epistemology can rather be technical more especially for non-technical readers in the discipline of philosophy. Formal training in philosophy is necessary if one is to better appreciate the content of the Lonergan's insights and perhaps assimilate them to their daily life's usage and appropriation into the wider conversation and relevance in the areas of development economics.

As such therefore, Lonergan's work important as it is may remain out of useful reach for many people who would ordinarily benefit immensely from it. It is imperative that every development and governance practitioner in Africa and the Global South needs to be well anchored in solid understanding on what life is beyond the physical things (development and modernization seen and material accumulation) that we more often than not worship other than 'other' wellbeing aspects of development which form the breeding grounds for unfettered looting of public resources which in one way or another leads to rapacious competition for political control to protect what is corruptly accumulated.

**What is transcendence?**

Lonergan develops a radical reinterpretation of the meaning of "transcendence" seen as "beyond" which overcomes the spatial and temporally image-bound notions such as lying "beyond" a linear limit but still on the line, or "beyond" a spatial boundary but still in space, or "beyond" a temporal now but still in time. This view is developed through his sweeping definition of transcendence in terms of the *pure unrestricted desire to know*. This pure element takes on the Kantian notions of a priori and categorical imperatives that make knowing necessary developed in his *Critique of Pure Reason* – attempting to answer three fundamental questions: What can I know?, What ought I to do? What may I hope for? and on this very basis Lonergan proposes a critique of previous attempts at raising the question of the possibility of knowledge of the transcendent. Is transcendent knowledge possible anyway without the tool of philosophical enquiry? Can man know beyond the scientific calculations and the critical need to verify as Rene Descartes mathematical workings and methodic doubt leading to self-doubt and final affirmation of the self? Lonergan makes a deliberate attempt to elaborate his *analogical extrapolation* of the idea of an *unrestricted act of understanding*. This is pure abstraction that forms the basis for assertions or judgments about transcendent reality within the reality of being.

In the text, Lonergan provides guiding posts that are important as building blocks leading to knowing and correlates them with the *anthropomorphic notions* of causality that he criticized and supplanted. He also puts his mind to explain the problem of the *contingencies* of proportionate being and human knowing. In confronting them with the fact of the *intrinsic intelligibility of being* makes a critical point of departure as at this section, he demonstrates an implicit *cosmological* proof for the existence of God.

### **The place and role of transcendent knowledge in development?**

Given the outlook developed by Bernard Lonergan, one can safely proceed to review the place and role of knowledge in development. Taking a panoramic view of the major developments in the world the last three decades, much has changed. We live in a world which is constantly changing and the societies where people live are paradoxical. On one hand there is unprecedented opulence of a kind that one would hardly imagine about a century ago. While on the other hand, there is dehumanizing and mind bogging misery in some societies caused by the lack of freedom to improve socially, politically and economically. So there are some people in this world today who are intrinsically poor due to “*unfreedoms*”. Most of the unfreedoms come from little or limited mass awareness on what the best alternatives are in pursuit of development. However, a general overview quickly affirms a fact that there have been remarkable changes beyond the economic and political spheres.

The vast majority of the 7.4 billion people as reported by The Economist Magazine *The World in 2015*, are literate. Most people have been able to move themselves out of the lower rags of poverty the last thirty years on the one hand courtesy of global innovations and on the other, the sharing of knowledge and ideas also at a global scale through such initiatives as The Millennium Declaration for Development and the endless list of other international development programmes taking on after the Millennium Development Goals.

While the kind of development and transformation mentioned above does not necessarily represent transcendence, many aspects of the outcomes of this development has core pointers on the need for transcending basic physical well-being. New ways of measuring development have since been designed that evaluate development in terms of Gross National Happiness. I hope that this kind of happiness whose index was borrowed by The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from Bhutan is not purely a materialistic based happiness but has within its core design aspects of spirituality and a genuine search for meaning that goes beyond building super-highways and mega-development facilities like stadia and shopping malls.

We must begin to appreciate the role of philosophical knowledge if we are to be better placed as good stewards and practitioners of development work. It essentially opens up our minds and heads to divergent dynamics that require very robust engagement with development’s

possibilities as William Cowper puts it “freedom has a thousand charms to show, that slaves, howe’er contented, never know (cited in Sen, 1999: 298).

Within the morass of available literature on globalization, innovation and knowledge sharing on a wide range of themes, the specific issue of movement of ideas and knowledge cannot be disputed as it has been used to not only influence events but also to shape how we develop new insights into the ways of the future in technological revolutions in medicine, media with the famous CNN effect being a case in point, international travel, and telecommunications. In short, the world has totally changed for the better because of those who believed on the power of creating a dent on the face of the earth with their ideas and skills.

Moving beyond the self then, makes perfect sense if we are to widen the scope of what is possible. The notion of being and the reality of God always remains even we negate. Huge scientific search does not sweep metaphysical reality away. The principles of the first cause and non-negation always remain. Only at this level would one find sense and go beyond the normal search for validation in life and as such make a considered contribution toward development in society.

### **Knowledge, Market Failures and International Development Institutions**

It is easy to recognize that one of the most important issues facing the entire world is poverty and unfettered inequality especially in the Global South. Despite the earlier mentioned leapfrogging of most regions of the world, Joseph Stiglitz has reminded us that there is an ongoing streak of divide between the developed North and developing South:

What separates developed from developing countries is not just a gap in resource but a gap in knowledge; and the intellectual property regime can make closing that knowledge gap either easier or more difficult. The developing world’s plea was for an intellectual property regime that provided them more access to knowledge. Furthermore, with their limited budgets for health – a dollar spent on drugs was a dollar not spent on education or on development – the cost of medicines matters enormously, which is why access to lifestyle medicines at affordable prices is so important (Stiglitz, 2006: 118).

Most developing countries need to develop more capacity for engagement in designing better industrial policies and ensure religious implementation if they are to make a mark on the international development scene. Africans have long been accused of being notoriously religious at the expense of devoting some time and energy to engage in technical knowhow training and facilitate technology transfer from the North. Tailoring intellectual property rights law to govern patents and copyrights is one area of development that we in the South need to keep an eye on and make valuable contributions on and if agreeable dismantle it all-together as Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) makes an attempt to “impose a single standard for intellectual property law on the world” (Stiglitz, 2006: 119).

A huge section of the development data is on the activities that happen at the market. No wonder, the United Nations’ World Trade Organization (WTO) plays an important role in creating an international commercial regime guided by law. While the market has tremendous power to

transform lives and the standard of living, when markets fail millions of people around the world are affected as was the case in the 2008 global financial crisis and in the 1997-98 East Asian Crisis. Again, when markets fail, there are major costs and consequences to the environment. Weak movement regulation and rouge Multinational Corporations collude to wreak havoc to society as a whole. It is worth noting that international development organizations play a key role in this discussion and how they harness and use knowledge to push forward their development agenda. Noble or not, whether it is the white man's burden or the black man's burden remains to be seen. What fuels Globalization? Broadly speaking there have been many stages in the life of globalization leading up to what we have today. We have to draw from history to work out relationships between globalization and global poverty, prosperity and freedom that are complex. In this regard, we can easily distinguish among three stages of modern globalization:

1. The first stage between 1870 and 1914, ending with World War I;
2. The second stage following the end of World War II and continuing to the mid-1970s;
3. The third stage from the mid-1970s to the present (Golding and Reinert, 2007).

Globalization has been accompanied by the creation of new institutions that have joined with existing ones to work across borders. Within the international civil society, there are many new groups that are pushing forward the globalization agenda. We also have multinational corporations (MNCs) that work closely with parent-architects of globalization to support and defend globalization no matter the cost. This is a vast area that needs further scrutiny on the thematic issues that are emerging within the literature and on-going debate.

### **International Development Institutions and Management of Development Knowledge**

The Bretton Woods Conference was a gathering of world leaders that took place in 1944 in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, with the aim of placing the international economy on a sound footing after World War II. The conference resulted in the establishment of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund are sometimes referred to as the *Bretton Woods Institutions*.

The five World Bank Group institutions are as follows:

1. **The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)** lends to governments of middle-income and creditworthy low-income countries.
2. **The International Development Association (IDA)** provides interest-free loans, called credits, to governments of the poorest countries.
3. **The International Finance Corporation (IFC)** lends directly to the private sector in developing countries.
4. **The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)** provides guarantees to investors in developing countries against losses caused by non-commercial risks.
5. **The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)** provides international facilities for conciliation and arbitration of investment disputes.

The World Bank's annual World Development Reports and other functionally useful reports are a clear demonstration of the depth and breadth that the institution ties to policy, knowledge generation, research and communication in development economics reporting globally. The

bank's spending on research and publications is demonstrative of its capacity to handle diverse development themes.

**The International Monetary Fund** is a subscription-based, global financial organization whose purpose is to promote international monetary cooperation and the multilateral system of payments.

It engages in four areas of activity:

1. Surveillance or monitoring;
2. The dispensing of policy advice;
3. Lending; and
4. Providing technical assistance.

The annual Global Development Outlook Reports by IMF also are a clear indicator on the amount of knowledge that the institution generates about every country where it operates and supports governments on the above core functions.

Technically, the usefulness of the information provided by these institutions for local application is a different matter altogether.

**Other international economic institutions include the following:**

**A. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs):**

Private, non-profit organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development. NGOs often differ from other organizations in the sense that they tend to operate independently from government, are values-based, and are guided by the principles of altruism and voluntarism.

**B. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):** An international organization, primarily of high-income countries, helping governments tackle the economic, social, and governance challenges of a globalized society. OECD's core mandate is research in the areas of socio-economic and governance fields.

**C. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** Manages a "network" of development activities undertaken by the United Nations in the areas of democratic governance, poverty alleviation, crisis prevention and recovery, energy and the environment, and HIV/AIDS. UNDP's annual Human Development Reports published since 1990 have been seminal and classics in conceptualizing and articulating major human development and related themes that would be difficult to dispute.

**D. World Trade Organization (WTO):** An international organization governing the system of rules for global trade among its member nations. It is also involved in dispute settlement and compliance monitoring related to international trade.

**E. Research Institutions and Think Tanks based in the North** – a review of majority the leading global think tanks are based in the North. These research institutions and foundations spends troves of US dollars in research for every themes conceivable. By contrast, most research institutions based in the South are struggling from shortage in funding to broad-based technical specific skills with accompanying supportive environment for doing effective and robust research.

*Sources: World Bank Group institutions: adapted from The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2003: box 1.1; other institutions: World Health Organization 2001b.*

It is very instructive to note that none of the wide ranging institutions listed above are African or Africa based. They are all located in the West and Europe and run by people who have nothing to move them so much as to maintain an original mien to develop Africa. The African nation state must wake up to these realities and make better demands at the international negotiation forums. If not, Africa only needs to maintain status quo and the continent steadily walks towards the doldrums.

### **African Intelligentsia and Development Dilemmas**

Africa is a huge source of both excitement and unacceptable misery. It is important to recognize that given the global facilities that are readily available today, including problems of omission and commission, many people find it hard to enter the global economy at all. Exclusion is as important a problem in this context as unequal inclusion. To rebel against the appalling poverty and staggering inequalities that characterize the contemporary world, (especially the developing regions of the world led by Sub Sahara Africa, Asia and Latin America) or to even protest against the alleged unfair sharing of the benefits of global cooperation, it is not necessary to claim that the inequality not only is terribly large, but is also getting marginally larger (Sen 2006).

Again, to echo Sen, we live in a world which is constantly changing and the societies where people live are paradoxical. On one hand there is unprecedented opulence of a kind that one would hardly imagine and on the other hand, there is dehumanizing misery in some societies. The issue of fairness in a world of different groups and desperate identities demands a fuller and urgent understanding. Clearly, when there are gains from cooperation, there can naturally be many alternative arrangements that benefit each party compared with no cooperation – a concept often referred to as “cooperative conflict”. Will this form Africa’s blueprint for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

How are we to understand Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Whether one is an African or not it is a tough engagement to take a geopolitical and panoramic view of Africa and get the best out of the chaos that the continent is in - with regard to global trade, finance, migration, democracy, civil war, conflict and peace, international justice, good governance and the prospects these issues bare for the development and transformative agenda on the continent. What can we learn from the many African post-conflict societies, the reconstruction work and prospects for sustained if not lasting peace and development? When other regions of the world are fast-tracking possibilities for integration into the global economy, large swaths of Africa are still lacking credible and legitimate government to help plug into this globalizing process successfully. Is knowledge the problem for us in Africa?

The African continent is exhibiting mixed results that contradict the probable outcome for its large population. As a single united body, what gain is Africa destined to get from the knowledge laden process of globalization? Is globalization a tool kit for Africa to pull itself out of the many negative notions that are often associated with it? Or is globalization a challenge to national sovereignty? Is it an avenue of possible growth (real not imagined) and progress or a route for further marginalizing the continent?

Writing in *Geography of Power: The Making of Global Economic Policy*, Richard Peet identifies three types of power as economic power, ideological power and political power (Peet, 2007: V). In the section on ideological power, Peet points out that the geography of reason, geography of academia and hierarchies of knowledge are all tilted toward the Anglo-American region of the world. As a given, it is not possible to assume the power of knowledge and its capacity to influence transformation. The geography of reason makes it possible to find a “synthesis between profit and intellect that proved to be accumulative: profit supported education; intellect furthered innovation; innovation made profit” (Peet, 2007: 59).

The African intelligentsia has major obstacles to overcome if it is keen to corroborate a wide body of ideas necessary to create an ethic such as the protestant’s *Purist* which spurred a craving to move forward in their development aspirations. Given the diversity of the Third World and the dare need to reconstruct social power of the popular classes:

It is the duty of the intelligentsia, especially those of the Third World and Africa, to deconstruct the new justificatory rhetoric, thus lying bare its functional connections with the tactical and strategic objectives of crisis management. We cannot, however, do this as long as we cling to time-worn formulae left in the dust by the renovated thrust of the world system. We need, therefore, here and now, to seize the progressive, democratic issues given a high profile because of the waning of postwar models, in order to give attention and the thinking focused on them a radical spin (Amin, 2014: 149).

Samir Amin is right in as far as we seek to better understand who we are in the broader functioning of international affairs and development. The radical spin would be our saving grace if we genuinely seek to rediscover ourselves in the Herculean task of developing Africa for all Africans.

### **Man’s Search for Meaning and the Relevance of Transcendent Knowledge for Development Economics**

In the Insight, Bernard Lonergan indicates that *Man's unrestricted desire to know is mated to a limited capacity to attain knowledge. From this paradox there follow both a fact and a requirement. The fact is that the range of possible questions is larger than the range of possible answers. The requirement is a critical survey of possible questions. For it is only through such a critical survey that man can provide himself with intelligent and reasonable grounds both for setting aside the questions that cannot be answered and for limiting his attention to the questions to which answers are possible.* These paradoxes naturally provide the cue for us to begin the long journey of searching for meaning. That can take more often than not an existential approach. That approach requires us to deal with issues to do with searching for will to meaning, a logo-drum,

life's deeper meaning, suffering, and the experiences that transcend our material well-being such as love and friendship.

Our single minded ability to find the spirit of understanding necessary for being our brother's keeper is squarely within the sphere of this general transcendental knowledge. Searching for developmental meaning must not be limited to hard-nosed economics and econometric models that are totally removed from the real issues that shape our lives. Lonergan aptly points out that; *if there is or if there is to be a higher integration of human living, then it will be known only through a knowledge that goes beyond the various types that hitherto have engaged our attention. But if the new knowledge is to be continuous with the old, then it will conform to the basic characteristics with which we have become familiar.* Taking the Thomistic view about the knowledge of God that, *consists in knowing that he is but not what he is* leave us with much to ponder about in the variant of knowing that development as it is compared to knowing what it is.

In the end development and knowing cannot be separated. They are intimately related and conjoined at the hip. Above all, pursuing the aspirations for attaining higher view points on life and onward development of a panoramic view about reality including specific development needs, aspects and as such we engage on finding alternative development paths in Africa going into the future.

### **Knowledge for Development – Final Remarks and Conclusion**

Within Africa today and the openly derided '*Africa Rising Narrative*' - the worry is that globalization might actually be creating rich countries with poor people. The real hope of Africa lies in the hands and minds of Africans who are keen to work with their governments towards first realizing an African Renaissance. Africa must pursue the option of a:

Guided embrace of globalization with a commitment to resist through pre-emptive national or regional development strategies and economic policy coordination. Africa countries must be prepared to develop alternative formulations and conditions under which to engage themselves in beneficial global economic exchanges. Africa can and must compete in a rapidly changing global environment (Cheru, 2002: XV).

To this end, it is imperative that Africa must then be able to get a few things in the right order if moving forward will be gainful. As Mandela noted in 1997 Southern Africa Development Cooperation meeting: 'Africa's rebirth depends on individual countries and regional groupings committing themselves to democracy and respect for human rights'. Looking at both internal and exogenous factors that compound Africa's development challenges, the dire economic, social and political crisis on the continent from the mid-1970s can closely be traced to the problem of governance. To then lay claim to the possibility of gaining positively from globalization, Africa has to over a period of time overcome several major challenges that include:



- a. Genuine renewal of democracy and governance that works on the continent;
- b. Rapid and robust sustainable investments in education and other research think tanks to manage ideas and knowledge for inclusive development of the continent;
- c. Attain an agricultural renaissance by rejuvenating agricultural production, modernizing agriculture, and pursue deliberate efforts aimed towards rural development and poverty reduction;
- d. Paying more attention to growing and strengthening regional economic cooperation such as SADC, EAC and ECOWAS to buttress regional development and guarantee security;
- e. Fast-tracking and better management of urbanization – develop sustainable cities and improve livelihoods in poor urban settlements and strengthen the rural-urban interface; and
- f. Prevent widespread conflicts, negative ethnicity, and building foundations for sustainable peace, justice and equitable economic growth.

The global economy is inherently full opportunities for countries that are ready to plug into the global information superhighway. As Thomas Friedman has demonstrated in *The Lexus and The Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, it is those who are ready to drive on the path of innovation and creative ideas that will keep the Lexus on the production line going, failures with take the path of the traditional Olive tree (2000). Essentially, if Africa manages the internal problems listed above as an urgent necessity and well, it can leapfrog the lost decades in its development and reduce the catch up race. Only then can Africa come close to realizing both in spirit and word an African Renaissance. This readily makes it possible to buttress George Ayittey's infamous and often misquoted maxim: African solutions to African problems (Ayittey, 2005). Providing solutions to own problems practically delivers on other public goods like self-determination over political and economic development on the continent, spirited protection and promotion of human rights more especially for the poor and weak and single-minded commitment to fully pursue the ideals of democracy and then integration into international solidarity.

Development is a momentous engagement with knowledge and freedoms possibilities that Africa urgently needs. As a way of finding an alternative development for the continent, a well knowledgeable African youth and its leadership will be its saving grace.

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