Problematization: The Foundation of Sustainable Development

Opaluwah Akor

School of Arts and Humanities
Nottingham Trent University
Nottingham, United Kingdom
omachile@yahoo.com

Abstract— **Over the last century, technology has been touted as the main instrument to drive sustainable development in the global south. Both academics and governments with the indication that a successful transfer in advanced technological practices will lead to higher production and efficiency and thus economic growth have heralded the call for technological transfer. This view though popular, has failed to identify the human capacity needed to not only operate but also understand the need for this technology. The absence of problematisation in the development discourse is a gap that must be filled before technology and economic growth can take the stage. Problematisation refers to the act of putting an issue into question to understand how they came to be. In other words, bringing an accepted or overlooked issue back into the realm of discourse. This capacity, though it exists sits in the hands of the "development experts" and not the ones who need development thereby making the process of development an induced process rather than an organic one. If people cannot be trusted with the ability to contextualise the problems they face, then they will always be in need of external support. This concept paper address the issues of the approaches to development employed by government and development agencies in Nigeria and the global south. By analysing a case study, the effectiveness of problematizing can be grasped and in so, inculcated as a prerequisite for the drive for development in Nigeria and the Global south.**

Keywords: Development, problematisation, ICT, technology, Sustainable development, Nigeria, Global south.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an age where technology drives everything, any society that can embrace its application and maximally utilise it, stands the risk of slipping into the abyss of underdevelopment. This makes technology a key building block for any society. It therefore is not farfetched to say that every society needs to strive for technological advancement. Technological advancement to help in maximizing its resources, optimizing its level of production, safeguarding its people, building and maintain infrastructure, planning for the future, increasing its food production, proffering advancement in health care and other immeasurable advantages that technology brings. This puts technological advancement on a high pedestal and strife for it, a noble and upright goal for every society. It is therefore is paradoxical that this paper would advocate for something seemingly more mundane, as a prerequisite for development and claim it is of more importance than an outright bustle for technological advancement. The importance of problematization and the role it plays in every society is such that the absence of it would undermine ever attempt at advancement and the presence of it will ensure the continued advancement. In essence the capacity of people to problematize will see the constant growth in their capacity to move their society forward. To support this claim, an exploration of this concept and its place in society will be a foundation of this paper. Also, an understanding of the concept of problematization and its application (or lack thereof) in the Nigerian development discourse is important. Then an analysis of what sustainable development looks like with the application of problematization and finally the implication of this approach to policy, planning, development and society in Nigeria. The intent throughout this paper is to direct attention to the important role problematization plays in society and how its importance stretches beyond technology or the development discourse but also to the way we teach and the way we learn.

II. THE CONCEPT OF PROBLEMATIZATION: WHAT IS PROBLEMATIZATION AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Problematization has been used in unique ways and defined in a number of ways. Two notable advocates of the theory of are Brazilian philosopher and educator, Paulo Freire and French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Freire most notably introduced problematization as "a strategy for developing a critical consciousness" [1]. Freire saw this critical consciousness as necessary because it questions the truths taken for granted and brings every established structure under scrutiny. This though is not for the purpose of disrupting the fabric of society. "For Freire, problematization is a pedagogical practice that disrupts taken-for granted "truths"." [2]. This process of questioning our everyday truth raises the level of inquisitiveness allowing the exploration of different ideas and approaches to living and the construct of societies we live in. This approach to Problematization is influential in Foucault's post-structural approach where he analyses many factors in society but rather a more critical way of thinking where common practices were

reanalysed. Most notably are his questioning on the constructs that define madness and sexuality. Foucault saw problematization not as a means to disrupt the thinking and order of society. Problematization as an approach is not designed to put in a negative light any object but as a "description way of thinking". Problematization is therefore not a tool to be used for a means but a method of thinking that approaches every situation, analysing not just the data presented but also the "constructs" that produce this data. These construct Foucault called "practices". These practices (otherwise known as frameworks) are the ideas and methods that build our perspective of what is true, real and definitive. Foucault's approach to Problematization examined not just the issues at hand but also how the issue is constructed to be an issue. He looks at the questions that create the issue, the analysis that produce the issue, how the issue is classified and regulated, under what circumstance and time is the issue contextualised [3, 4]. In essence an issue is not just an issue in and of itself but becomes an issue due to its constructs or context. Problematization therefore analyses the factors that make up this context in order to establish the validity of the issue. [2] points out that in another perspective, Foucault sees problematization as a two-stage process including "how and why certain conduct, phenomena and practices become a problem [5], and how they are shaped as particular objects for thought [3, 6]. The aim for Foucault was to make notable, the elements that make certain "facts" be known as facts. This therefore opens up for better exploration, the complex combination of factors that produce these facts and also the effects of these facts themselves.

[7] Also defined problematization as "the set of discursive and non-discursive practices that makes something enter into the play of the true and the false and constitutes it an object for thought (whether under the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.)". This true and false that Foucault refers to here is not the production of true statements but the "administering of the realms or the setting of the rules that make the object in view true and false. This is so because a statement or action in its own self is neither true nor false but the criteria (or rules) used in its analysis determines the nature of the statement (or object). For instance, a product is not defective unless it cannot accomplish the purpose for which the user intends to. Foucault sometimes refers to these as "rules of the game" and they are the factors that are most central in the problematization approach to any object.

[2] notes that "The main purpose of studying problematization, therefore, is to "dismantle" objects as taken for-granted fixed essences [8], 9] and to show how they have come to be". It is in these that the true nature of the objects, its dynamics, its effects and how it should and can be interacted with is truly known. These objects in question may include (and are not limited to ideas, tradition, methods and process, customs, policies, laws and programs.

Problematization in essence "demonstrates how things which appear most evident are in fact fragile and that they rest upon particular circumstances (that are usually changing), and are often attributable to historical conjunctures which have nothing necessary or definitive about them [10]. With the understanding that the facts we hold as pillars could be constantly changing, then these process of examination or this approach of analysing data and research will eventually cause a constant review of the factors with which we construct our society on. This may eventually make necessary, a regular reconstruction of our social frameworks or a reconceptualization of the construct that shape the way we live in. This process [11] explains as rendering fixed "objects" fragile. These "fragile" entities are of particular importance as they do shape our experience of who we are and what we may know. Like a constant reinvention of identity and the factors that make identity, problematization as an approach will continually reconstitute our identity and out scope of knowledge.

III. WHY DOES PROBLEMATIZATION MATTER?

Problematization as noted earlier can be seen as the questioning of the frameworks that constitute our society. It is essential that this act of problematizing is not seen as a means to antagonising the fabrics of our lives but rather a process through which its eventually results may reaffirm the parts of our frameworks that is contemporary and can still stand up to analysis. It also could strengthen or uncover the "fragile" pillars we have constructed society upon. It is in essence a reassessment of the foundations that hold, support and create the contents of our lives, society and knowledge otherwise referred to as "frameworks". It therefore is imperative to constantly re-examine our frameworks. If a chain is as strong as it weakest link, then it is safe to say that our knowledge, society, habits, actions and lives depend on the framework by which they have been constructed and by which they are guided (knowingly or unknowingly).

Foucault tells us that problematization emerges in practice. The art of problematization does not just exist as a mental image or an idea but exists in practices. These "practices" he describes as "places" where "what is done, rules imposed and reasons given. This is the point where the "planned" (action, decision, choice) and the "taken for granted (custom, tradition, habit, thinking, idea, principle, rule, law, policy) meet and interconnect [12]. These "practices" or "frameworks" are where the objects meet the thinking that legitimises them. An instance will be the wearing of certain attires to particular gatherings and the production of true discourse that legitimizes these ways of thinking. Such practices exist in many ways in our daily lives. From the choices of meals we make to our means of transport, from our response to schedules, traffic, law enforcement, rules, sounds and alerts. We always exist in a practice of one sort or the other.

Consequently, we can explain practice as the "intelligible background" for actions. Practice as described by [13] is "a preconception, anonymous, socially sanctioned body of rules that governs one's manner of perceiving, judging, imagining and acting". In this, the people that are born out of this practice have

their lives inadvertently shaped by it. Through practices, we are constituted as particular kinds of subjects, while the multiplicity of practices ensures the always-incomplete nature of these subjectivities Processes ([14] cited by, [2: 3]).

Delving a little more in the role and understanding of practice, Foucault viewed practice as equally important to any study as the object of the study. He saw an inseparable link between practice and problematization and that shaped his approach to problematization. In his writing as part of his application for a Chair of Systems of Thoughts at the Collège de France, Foucault explained that he wanted to study what could be known about mental illnesses at a particular point in time ([15] in [16]). He though did not want to do this in the traditional way by consulting the books and traditional sources of "knowledge". Rather, Foucault saw it as more beneficial to his research to study the actual practices that have defined these people as mentally ill. He questioned "how mental illnesses were recognized, set aside, excluded from society, interned, and treated; what institutions were meant to take them in and keep them there, sometimes caring for them; what authorities decided on their madness, and in accordance with what criteria; what methods were set in place to constrain them, punish them, or cure them; in short, what was the network of institutions and practices in which the madman was simultaneously caught and defined" [15] in [16: 214]. Understanding these practices (the context or background upon which objects are formed) will reveal how an issue is analysed, classified, regulated, questioned – in essence, how it is problematized.

The act of problematizing is not just a simple process of disrupting of challenging anything. It is more of a scientific approach to issues that not only analyses the issue at hand but also seeks further understanding of the factors that define the issue as an issue.

If a group of sportsmen are placed in a sports arena and told to play football, the rules of the game and the setting of the arena would determine their actions. Their performance would be measured against the rules and expectations of football. Now their proficiency in playing sports is being judged by the "background", "practice" or "framework" they are located in. Whether or not they are footballers. In essence changing the sportsmen may not actually bring about a change or an improvement in their performance. That is unless they are actually footballers. If all inquisition into they performance, actions and conducts are based on the game off football then the outcome of that inquisition is relatively confined to the idea of football and is not a true assessment of their capabilities as sportsmen. But take for instance again another change in the practice. What if a further analysis of the sports arena uncovers a fact that they are actually on a basketball court? This undoubtedly changes the entire dynamic of the objects (that is the players and the game). It may be that they are not actually bad sportsmen but just objects that have been placed against the wrong background. Employing the approach of problematization in this instance questions not only the capability of the sportsmen to perform optimally, but also the rules, arena and setting in which the have been placed. Just like Foucault's analysis of mental illness, questioning the factors that initially classified madness and mental illness, questioning the actual practice that may have erroneously classified these sportsmen as footballer may reveal how they have been defined as footballers initially and make room for correcting the misconception.

This suggests that by examination, "knowledge" (what could be known) about an issue can be arrived at through an inquisition into what is done (the practise surrounding it). Therefore knowledge is not a transcendent phenomenon waiting to be discovered but rather something immanent to what people do. When objects are looked at with the problematization approach, the once true and undoubtable practices that define the object may not seem so solid and some wobbly or non-existent practices may emerge.

From Foucault's work, we can see practice as the "place" where imposed rules and processes meet the reasons given for them. This is the place where they interconnect and create the system we exist in and live by. While still discussing the concept of practice, it is right to note that this paper too exists as an object of practice. The texts are based on a system of thinking and doing, beliefs and ideas, theories and attitudes and they are inherently producing objects.

To inquire into the importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), its use, need, importance and effect on our society, the place to start is with problematizing and understanding the "practice" within which it exists. There is a need to understand how ICT and its lack thereof has been problematized and is deemed an issue that needs to be addressed. From this place it becomes possible to fish out the complex strategic relations and interconnections that produce the quest for technology transfer and furthermore, the (sustainable) development discourse.

IV. WHY DOES PROBLEMATIZATION MATTER TO NIGERIA?

One thing this discourse on problematization has shown is that we are all located within practice and constantly practice problematization to a degree. This shapes our lives and the actions we take. We therefore cannot completely exclude ourselves from this frame and stand back to study their operation since we are always entirely located with a combination of practices. [11:19] notes, "However, because there is no place outside practice from which to make this intervention, it must be a matter of looking at the unfolding, the evolution and the interaction of different practices". This is a constant consciousness of the practices that surround our actions and decisions. "Problematisations offer the best hope for considering this "unfolding" because they engage us in studying the times and places when "things" are contested and "real" "objects" emerge. Moreover, as itself a practice, the study of problematization can generate alternative ways of being" ([2: 4]).

With a rise in the debate on what technology we need and how they can be grown, adopted, utilised and maximised, there still is the seemingly open gap in the discourse on the practices that have defined these needs. Another point that should be noted about this application of problematization is that problematization does not mean the representation of already existing objects. There could be the misconception that the process will end up churning the objects that already exists over and over again like an analytical never-ending loop. This is not the objective of problematization. Neither is problematization the creation through discourse and analysis, an object that does not exist. Problematization merely brings an object into the realm of true and false and furthermore continues the object in the realm of discourse. This discourse can take on different forms such as scientific discourse, political analysis of moral reflection [6: 257] but having the discourse ensures the object remains contemporary.

Technology of any kind exists within these practices of which this paper has discoursed extensively on. This makes the approach of problematization of utmost importance. Not as a discourse to question its benefits or need but to better under stand it interrelation with the practice within which it exists in. from the moral discourse to the ethical implication, financial and social impact, cultural and environmental impact, the approach of problematization will as it progresses, bring into discourse the various practices that exists, reanalysing the frameworks we have built around technology and development and maybe reposition or strengthen the position of the object in view. One point Foucault makes is that you cannot predict the outcome of a process of problematization. [5] tells us that problematization is always a creation and by that he means a creation in the sense that in a given situation you cannot extrapolate the path problematization will follow. Problematization can show how fragile and unbalanced the things we consider as standards are. Those pillars that guide the decision we make or how we live our lives that have been considered infallible. [2] argues, "There is nothing inevitable about it. That is, there are always exigencies that affect how developments take place, putting emphasis on the politics, the contestation, the strategic relations involved in those developments".

The importance and strategic position technology plays in the progress of Nigeria and Africa as a whole needs its practices and objects to be as contemporary as can be and as infallible as possible. The continual application of the problematization approach will ensure these frameworks to be constantly under observation and never neglected into the annals of unquestionable truths.

The next part of this paper will examine the necessity of problematization in achieving sustainable development.

V. PROBLEMATIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Amartya Sen in his book, Development as freedom, repeatedly emphasized the need for including people in the decisions that affect their livelihood. He defines development as "the process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy". These unfreedoms are the freedom from poverty, poor economic opportunities, the lack of public amenities, the systematic deprivation faced, the effects of suppressive states and deprivation faced under tyrannical governments. Sen further argues "viewing development in terms of expanding substantive freedoms directs attention to the ends that make development important, rather than merely to some of the means that, inter alia, play a prominent role in the process" [17:3]. Sen's view of development sees these means that help expanding the freedom we need as not the objective of development. He argues that they have continually been the focus of development as the objective of development rather than focusing every development activity towards the factors that cause these "unfreedom". [17:3] further points that "if freedom is what development advances, then there is a major argument for concentrating on the overarching objectives, rather than on some particular means, or some specially chosen list of instruments".

If these unfreedoms were seen as the frameworks that have caused poverty and deprivation, then focusing on the symptoms or effects of poverty and the deprivation would be as futile as giving a person with malaria a blanket for a fever rather than treating the malaria that is ravaging the system. The approach to development he proffers is to focus on the factors that have systematically caused the deprivation. The emphasis of Sen's view being to look beyond the object but rather to study the practice that constitutes these objects. In that, a broader view of development is achieved. A view where the essence of every decision is not based on assumptions but on contemporary issues that cause the objects.

Sen argues further that the freedom the individual deserves is linked to the achievement of social development. What a member of any society can achieve is influenced in many ways by the economic opportunities, political liberties, social power, the enabling conditions of a good healthcare system, a good educational system and also the harnessing, growth and improvement of initiatives. This interrelation of the person and the factors that surround the person is similar to Foucault's analysis of the object and the practice it is located within. If the efforts at development and technological advancements are aimed at the symptoms (or effects) of underdevelopment then the solution being proffered is temporal and will eventually be a sinking of resources. It is not to say that these solutions are bad or that they are not of any benefit, it is just that they rarely address the cause of the problems and continually are temporal solutions that help for the moment but never address the root problem. These solutions are usually proffered by development "experts" who according to [18: 6] "see the rural poor as ignorant, backward and primitive, and as people who have only themselves to blame for their poverty". Development experts come into a country and based on their analysis profess solutions to the problems. Most of these solutions lean more on the side of Aid. This [19] argues is the leading cause of underdevelopment in Africa. With more than 2 trillion

Dollars worth of aid having being transferred to the poor countries in the last 50 years and about $300 Billion of that to African countries since the 1970s, there is still little evidence to show any real promise. The sustained economic growth and reduction in poverty it promised has still not been achieved.

Since the 1970s, there has been a call for a revision of the approach to development as the track record had seen little or no success and in some cases, regression. The top-down approach that had been adopted seemed to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. These failures lead to much criticism on the development approach taken by many developed government and experts. One reason for the failure was that development approaches were used in a blanket approach over very diverse societies. [20:118] argues that the fact that societies are heterogeneous show they can not have a "one size fits all' approach to their development. He further noted that cultural factors, socio-economic factors, race, religion, class, caste, gender, language, geographical location, occupation language, traditions, profession and habits differentiate the structure of societies. Development process should therefore be tailored more inline with the community. For this to happen there has to either be a unique set of development model for each community or development planning should depend on the capacity of the members of the community and the resources available to them. It hence is safe to say that for development to be successfully tailored towards the needs of any community, there needs to be a good level of participation by the members of that community in these development programs or project. Be it from farming or agricultural activities to research and technologically advanced activities, the participation of the members of the society is important.

[18: Xiii] argues "people will invest more labour only when they control the activity and are assured of keeping the fruit of their labour". This connection people have to the activities that affect their livelihood is fundamental to development. Though Gran related this to the earnings people make and the connection they have to controlling them. He further argued that "the principal problem for human development are large concentrations of power (government and corporations), the ideologies or economic doctrines they proclaim, and the process of exclusion they practice. But to involve people in development, they need to have a certain level of understanding of how to solve their problems, the capacity to problematize.

Participatory development has continually advocated for the inclusion of the marginalised in the society in the decisions that affect them. [21] advocated for this extensively in his writings. There have been advancement in the inclusion of the marginalised and the rural poor especially in development and the decisions that affect them. This inclusion though still has not changed the model from a Top down approach to bottom up approach. The process still involves the ideas, analysis and concepts being conceived far away from the locality and then utilising the locals as the foot soldiers. [22] notes that in reality, the state and the elite are still in control of participation and how participatory projects are carried out in a society. [23] notes that due to the source of the funds and expertise in these projects, the control of these projects is usually located outside the society the project is being conducted. These donor organisations have procedures, practices and standards that should be met. Unfortunately these sometimes are not the practices or standards that the locals are used to.

For proper participation to occur, there is a need for a higher level of autonomy of ideas and concepts from the locals. But with this responsibility, comes the need for the capacity to problematize because it is by this approach, that they can analyse their lifestyle and determine the issues that are and how to solve them.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) states "People today have an urge - an impatient urge - to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives. And that impatience brings many dangers and opportunities" [24: 1]. This is because the urge can drive people to activities, which are of the best interest but will do more harm than good. [19] also questions how the world has been gripped by an idea (Aid) that seems so right yet is so wrong. The effect of such activities usually motivated by good intentions has led to "an unmitigated political, economic, and humanitarian disaster for most parts of the developing world' [19: xix]. In essence, any approach to development that is not preceded with some very important steps: Firstly, the unhindered inclusion of people in the conception, development, implementation and evaluation of ideas that affect their livelihood, is most likely to end up in creating only a temporal relief that rarely lives beyond the lifespan of the project. Secondly, the inclusion of the people that would be affected by the development program is important. And finally, for any step taken towards achieving development, the importance of the capacity to problematize or reassess both the object in view and the practices that surround it is essential. This capacity combined with a participatory approach will make the analysis of the practice and object extensive and multifaceted. This approach does mitigate the chances that a project will be built on a premise that seemingly looks solid but is in fact based on a very fragile practice.

VI. DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Development is and has been an issue that has in many ways eluded Nigeria as a nation and in some way been a slow and daunting journey. Even with the discovery of crude oil in the 1970s and the rise in foreign reserve, there has still not been the anticipated level of economic growth or infrastructural development in Nigeria. Nigeria, the largest oil producer in Africa has an estimated GDP of $502 billion and economy with a growth rate of about 6% to 8% [25] is the largest economy in Africa. This though is constantly in threat as the export of crude oil accounts over 70 percent of Nigeria's export revenue and also 35 percent of its Gross Domestic Produce (GDP) [26] therefore any fluctuation in the crude oil market sends the economy into a state of hysteria.

Nigeria plays a significant role in West Africa and Africa as a whole. With its involvement in peacekeeping

(through the now defunct ECOMOG) to the large population of approximately 175 million, the significance of technological advancement and sustainable development cannot be over emphasized.

VII. PROBLEMATIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY

How then do all these apply to Technological development in Africa? It is most honourable, good and important to have clean and renewable sources of energy on the continent and in the planet, putting an end to the scourge of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases ravaging the continent, peacekeeping and our ability to respond to and anticipate natural disasters is very necessary. But fundamental to that is the position these solutions hold in our society. Why have these problems come about? Are these solutions addressing the source or the symptoms? Are we depending on the professionals to solve these problems or creating a system where we all hurdle up and lay claim to both the problems and the solutions?

As this paper has emphasized, problematization is a very indispensable capacity. Not only to the professionals but also to every member of the society who rightfully is to be included in the process of development.

[27] and [28] argue that the approach of problematization can also be misused. The case in Lesotho is one situation where the capacity for problematization was left to "development experts". [28] points out "Development projects in Lesotho have continually failed to achieve their stated objects, not least because they are based on a "construction" of the country that bares little relation to prevailing realities.". This being a result of problematization being a right made exclusive only to the "professionals". The failure of development activities has been based on their hold of exclusivity to the art of problematization. It has been attributed the status of a very complex and complicated activity that can only be performed by the best and most trained professionals. While this has been the perception, the poorest amongst us have suffered the wrath of poverty, diseases, natural disasters, wars and starvation. If the experts hold the keys, then they have done nothing to help. These experts [19] denounces have plunged Africa into a habit of laziness, Aid dependency and tyranny.

The risk is there to blame the underdevelopment in Africa on a list of things, one of which is the unavailability of Technology. This though a fact (its limited availability and reach) may not seem as glaring as it seems if the art of problematization becomes more entrenched in our daily lives and activities.

Technology is important and in the twenty-first century, is needed for any society to remain relevant to itself and to all other societies. But let us in our enthusiasm equip ourselves with the right approach to development, questioning everything, challenging not only the objects of our inquisitions but the practices that have established them in that light. In that we may see development in a new light and maybe discover new and unexpected "pillars" that will lift Africa up from the dire state in which it has found itself.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The adage goes, "when purpose is not known, misuse is inevitable". Relating that to technology and problematization, when practice is not known, a misdiagnosis is inevitable. Even with the open-ended possibilities technological development promises, there still is an equal and maybe greater possibility of getting it wrong just as it has been with development in Africa. [2] argues that the finding (concepts and arguments) developed by researchers are instrumental in establishing what is "true" and "real" in our societies. Along with such a responsibility, there should also be encouraged to consider the repercussions of their research findings. "Understanding power as creative/productive and theory as practice creates an ethical obligation to consider the political fallout of our theoretical investments". In essence, the attitude of problematization has to be a continuous affair. Along with the continual consciousness of the object and the practices that create the object, there also has to consistently be a confrontation of the implications of our reifications. In essence we always need to ask what realities are we creating with the objects we problematize. An approach of this sort allows a society always keep in critical view, its objects and practices.

[29: 7] notes "Examining thought in this way puts into question the presumed fixity of the thing "thought" and, by so doing, makes it possible to think otherwise: "It radicalises our sense of the contingency of our dearest biases and most accepted necessities, thereby opening up a space for change" [13: 33]". In this effect, problematization of technology and its practices opens us up to possibilities formerly unknown, allows a wider dynamic of Africans engage in the understanding of not only the effects of technology coming into the domain but also the discourse and frameworks that have made this inclusion a necessity.

The approach to development in Nigeria is based on a diverse range of practices, most of which look up to a central government system for the success of its plans. These practises in their various forms since 1960 have not delivered the development craved by Nigerians. It therefore is imperative to bring these practices back into the field of discourse and see if they remerge as solid pillars or crumble under the analytic examination of a problematized approach. That is a prerequisite for sustainable development in Nigeria.

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