

SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

Change is an integral part of our lives and our existence has been through stages of growth and development from childhood, teenage, adulthood and old age. Likewise at various stages of our lives we attain primary, secondary and tertiary education etc. In similar vein, several changes occur in the society we live. History has witnessed the transformation of human society from preliterate to modern social organizations. Human societies have evolved from primitive hunting and gathering stages to horticultural, agrarian, industrial/modern and contemporary post-modern society. Cultural civilizations, empires, kingdoms and epochs has risen and fallen no doubt, but the nature of human socio-cultural organizations and social interactions equally transforms itself to fit the structural patterns of existing society in every epoch. It is generally opined that change is the only permanent phenomena, and as changes occur in the natural world so does changes occurs in human society. No human society is relatively static for too long as social change is a ubiquitous and inevitable phenomenon; likewise change may occur in all facets of society or selected parts of the social structure. Social change in society may be as a result of the expediency needed in providing solutions to specific social problems faced in a society; or on the other hand, social change in society may bring about accompanying social problems to that society hence the need for a stronger adaptive capacity of human society to social changes and social problems.

This Paper presents the concepts of social change and social problems and introduces the reader to the sociological study of the duo and theoretical perspectives to social change and social problems.

KEY WORDS:-Social Change, Social Problems, Society, Civilization.

INTRODUCTION

SOCIOLOGICAL ROOTS TO THE STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The origin of sociology as an academic and scientific discipline is the history of the study of social change and social problems in 18th and 19th Century Europe. Western Europe at this period was swept with ravaging social changes and associated social problems occasioned by twin revolutions born out of the Era of Enlightenment: firstly the French Revolution which started in 1789 and the British Industrial Revolution (1750-1850).

The French Revolution of 1789witnessed intense violence and the bloody terror shook Europe to its core. With the divine rights of Kings been questioned and the decline of the authority of the church and theology as the true source of knowledge and associated rise in application of rationality and empiricism, the aristocracy throughout Europe feared that revolution would spread to their own lands, and intellectuals feared that social order was crumbling in Europe with the pervasive changes and social problems recorded in France. On the other hand, the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century reinforced these concerns. Starting first in Europe and then in the United States, the Industrial Revolution led to many changes, including agricultural revolution (shift from manual to mechanized agriculture), transport revolution (faster forms of transporting raw materials, finished goods and people e.g. rails and trains), industrialization, the rise and growth of cities as people left their farms to live near factories (rapid urbanization) etc. As the cities grew, other social problems manifested as people lived in increasingly poor, crowded, and decrepit conditions, and crime was rampant. Here was additional evidence, if European intellectuals needed it, of the breakdown of social order. With these pervasive social changes and social problems there was an expedient need to provide explanations to the crises of the industrial society coupled with the need to ascertain the basis upon which social order could be maintained within the prevailing chaos that the discipline sociology was born. Sociology therefore according to Okodudu (2010:60) took the late comers advantage to fill the explanatory vacuum of hitherto sciences and the 19th century philosophers (founding fathers of Sociology) who were longing for the past that has been irredeemably gone were thus classified as the philosophers of the Era of Romanticism (Okodudu 2010:35).

I. SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change as earlier discussed is ubiquitous and inevitable as change is the only permanent phenomenon. According to Defleur et al. (1977 cf Anele 1999) '*social change is the alterations in the pattern of social organization of specific groups within a society or even of the society itself*'. Deducing from the definition above Ekpenyong (1993:190) posits that alterations in the social organization of a group and or society refer to the development of new norms, the modification of role expectations, a shift to new types of sanctions, the development of different criteria for ranking and the introduction and use of new production techniques. Anele (1999) further asserts that a change in any part of the society or social organization affects other parts and the society generally at large. For example, the recent advent of information communication technology in Nigeria has changed virtually the nature of social interaction and pattern of social organization from personal relationship with loved ones far and near over the telephone and internet dating to macro-economic activities such as e-banking, e-commerce, e-education/virtual learning, e-governance etc.

Likewise, Moore (1968 cf Anele 1999:17) defined social change as '*the significant alteration of social structures (that is of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values and cultural products and symbols*'. It is evident that both of social change and cultural change were emphasized in Moores' definition. Although changes in the material and non-material contents of a culture also may not be regarded as social changes; however, it is very difficult to separate social changes from cultural change. Because the two are usually interdependent, social change may usually introduce cultural changes, and vice versa hence the hybrid '*socio-cultural*' (Anele 1999:14). From the foregoing analysis, social change summarily may be seen as the alteration or transformation at large scale level in the social structure, social institutions, social organization and patterns of social behavior in a given society or social system. It can also be seen as the alteration, rearrangement or total replacement of phenomena, activities, values or processes through time in a society in a succession of events. The alteration or rearrangement may involve simple or complex changes in the structure, form or shape of the social phenomena. Sometimes it may mean the complete wiping out of the phenomenon and their total replacement by new forms (Calhoun, *et al.* 1994). However, it is pertinent to note here that some minor changes that take place in the lives of individuals and small, limited groups may not be regarded as social changes although these kinds of changes may be the manifestations or effects of changes that are taking place at larger scale.

This implies that for a change to be social the alterations permeates the entire society or social group and not merely alterations in the lives and behavior of individual member of that society or group, in this regard social change is said to be collective and impressive on the entire society or group.

1.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change has the following characteristics as identified by Idrani (1998) and Anele (1999):

1. **Inevitable:** Social change is inevitable and unavoidable as it occurs all the time. Its process may be imperceptible and can be cumulative, i.e., one may not easily perceive the processes of social change, although it is always taking place.
2. **Ubiquitous:** Social change is present in every human society. There is no society that is static and unchanging. All societies are susceptible to social change. In other words, social change is a universal phenomenon (it is everywhere and anywhere). It is spread both over time and space.
3. **Multi-Leveled:** Change occurs both at micro-level and macro-level. The point here is that while social change often refers to noticeable changes in social phenomena, we must not lose sight of the fact that small changes in minor relationships and smaller groups can also be significant especially in a pluralistic society e.g. ethnic unrest.
4. **Contagious:** Social change is contagious like infectious diseases. The influence of change in one area or aspect of society can have an impact on other related areas. For example changes in religious beliefs can cause change in the economy, family etc.
5. **Rate:** Social change has a rate; it can be rapid (revolutionary) or slow (evolutionary).

6. **Detectable and Measurable:** Social change is detectable and measurable. Anele (1999:18-21) provides following detection and measurement parameters: **scale** (involving the size of the society and degree or magnitude of alteration); **brevity** (involving length of change e.g. short term changes are easily observable and measured unlike long term changes that are usually measured retrospectively); **repetition** (changes that repeated frequently are most likely to be identified and measured unlike those occurring sparingly)

1.2 THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change as earlier mentioned is as old as human society and as human society has changed over time so as social scientists and social philosophers have propounded several explanatory theories to social change in society. Some of these theories would be considered below.

Evolutionary Theory

Evolutionary theory views social change as progress and hold a linear view that tends to see only the most recent societies as having achieved the highest level. Social change is viewed as natural, inevitable, and continuous and moves in a particular direction. Change is also seen as necessary, just as Charles Darwin explains development following on from natural selection.

The concept of evolution in sociological theorizing otherwise known as social evolution is predicated on the assumption that all organic, inorganic and super-organic phenomena were subject to the same natural laws and on the argument that sociology which explains super-organic phenomena had attained a scientific status (Afonja and Pearce, 1984). The concept of evolution was made popular by the natural scientist Charles Darwin who in his '*Origin of Species*' published 1859 postulated that '*all life forms including the human race had gradually evolved from lower orders of life as a result of progressive adaptation to the environment through the survival of biological forms best adapted to a competitive struggle*' (Horton and Hunt, 1980 cf. Anele 1999:37). From Darwin's perspective, the most basic elements of biological evolution are organisms and their environment. In corroborating this point Needham (1931 cf. Afonja and Pearce, 1984:15) defined the evolutionary process as '*involving primarily the passage from simplicity to complexity, from homogeneity to heterogeneity, which from empirical observation of living creatures and their remains may be deduced, to have occurred and to be occurring*'.

For Auguste Comte, human society and civilization progresses through a natural and inevitable course and which forms the basis upon which humans and their society are organized. Comte divided society into traditional and modern societies (Anele 1999). The traditional society is military in orientation characterized with wars and conquests of empires with all social intuitions serving the needs of the military. The modern society on the other hand is characterized by the dominance of the economic system induced by the industrial revolution. Comte's idea of evolution here is that human society progresses from military (primitive) to modern society. Comte's traditional or military and modern society dichotomy is synonymous with Durkheim's and Herbert Spencer's.

Furthermore, Comte's evolution of human society was more reflected in his '**Law of three stages of Human Progress**'. According to Comte, human thought, knowledge and society have inevitably moved from three stages which includes theological, metaphysical and positivist stages. The Theological stage which is akin to the military stage saw humans attributing all forms of natural occurrences to supernatural forces such as gods. Emphasis is on imagination and the military institution dominates all forms of social relations. The Metaphysical stage is characterized with abstract reasoning and the use of philosophy and logic in explaining phenomena. Observation has modified imagination to some extent. The final stage which is Positivists or scientific stage is akin to the industrial era with science and its application is utilized as the standard for all explanations. Observations and empiricism is the yardstick for all human endeavors be it economy, industry, health, technology etc.

On his part, Herbert Spencer equally divided society into traditional/military or primitive and industrial society with similar characteristics as highlighted above hence he suggests that human society evolves from

the former to the later. Spencer in developing his evolutionary theory of fixed stages (1897) postulated his '**Law of Evolution**' which he argues is a cosmic and natural law which moves all forms from simple, undifferentiated forms to complex differentiated forms and it operates independent of man and his consciousness and applies to all phenomena including man and society, animals and plants (Anele 1999:41). The evolutionary process according to Spencer is initiated by what he called **structural differentiation** i.e. differentiation of parts/structure and differentiation of functions of institutions of society. He argued that homeostasis or equilibrium is maintained by the mutual dependence of the parts and the changes in parts are mutually determined and the changed functions are mutually dependent (Spencer 1897 cf. Afonja and Pearce, 1984).

Also Karl Marx who is largely known to be conflict theorists contributed to the evolutionary perspective (Anele, 1999:44). According to Karl Marx in his Historical Materialism theory, change is inevitable and every society must inevitably evolve through the following stages: primitive communalism to antiquity or slavery to feudalism to capitalism to socialism and ultimately scientific communism.

Other theorists such as Tylor, Morgan, Marsh, Maine etc. made monumental contributions to the development of the theory (Afonja and Pearce, 1984). Morgan, in his work *Ancient Society* (1877 cited in Afonja and Pearce, ibid) posits human society has evolved from *savagery, barbarism* and *civilization*.

Diffusion Theory

Diffusion theory suggests that social change is as a result of diffusion of cultural patterns and practices of other societies which is a function of spread of cultural practices from society to society. According to Linton (1955 cf. Ekpenyong 1993:198) "*we are great culture borrowers*" and likewise, Murdock (1934 cf. Ekpenyong ibid) estimated that about 90 percent of every culture known to history has acquired its element from other people. This implies that change is externally induced and not internally generated as the evolutionists asserts. Diffusion has been defined by Horton and Hunt (1980 cf. Anele 1999) as "*the spread of culture traits from group to group*". According to Kroeber (1973 cited in Anele 1999:102) "*diffusion is the process, usually but not necessarily gradual, by which elements or systems of culture are spread; by which an invention or a new institution adopted in one place is adopted in neighboring areas, and in some cases, continues to be adopted in adjacent ones, until it may spread over the whole earth*". The diffusion theorists especially those from the USA and Britain proposes that there were a few cultural centers from which inventions radiated to the non-inventive areas through cultural borrowing e.g. Technology Transfer from the West to Africa. For example, Perry and Smith identified Egypt as the source of archaic civilization from where philosophy, mathematics and other ancient arts circulated the world (Afonja and Pearce, 1984). Likewise, the German school with Schmidt, Ratzel and Graeber identified what they called **cultural circles** from where specific cultural items originated (Afonja and Pearce, 1984). In present modern society, the Western societies of Europe and America are seen as the cultural circles from which modern cultural traits evolved and for the third world countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America to change and develop they must adopt the cultural patterns and traits of the West. The supposed need for the shift from traditionalism and diffusion of modernism in third world countries gave birth to the modernization theory of development and social change.

Cyclical Theory

The cyclical theory of change holds that civilizations go through cycles of growth and decay. Each civilization learns from its predecessors. The classical Greek philosophers were the first to utilize this model. Plato spoke of eras of time when initially hopes will blossom on to deteriorate as the era disintegrates. Splenger (1932) had a similar view and for him societies go through periods of ups and downs often described as life cycles. According to him, culture is the living entity of people and culture is housed in the civilization of that era. The pattern is that each culture will arise, develop, ripens, decays and falls never to return. As earlier mentioned, Huntingdon (ibid) examined the rise and fall of civilization in the cyclical manner. Furthermore, Sorokin (1947) suggests that social changes follows a trendless cyclical pattern i.e. like a swinging pendulum, culture moves in one direction and then back to another. According to Sorokin a culture has three distinct systems of truth namely: ideational, idealistic and sensate. Whereas ideational truth comes from God, idealistic comes from both God and the senses, however in the sensate society only sensate truth is valid and valuable.

Functionalist Theory

Functionalism as developed by Emile Durkheim emerged from the evolutionary theory (Afonja and Pearce, 1984). Although Functionalists emphasize what maintains society and not what changes it, they try to understand problems of change processes in the context of a stable system. Proponents see change as slow and societies as having interrelated parts, with cause and effect having a reciprocal impact on one another.

According to the theory, society consists of interdependent parts each of which performs particular functions and helps to maintain the stability of the entire social system which has a tendency to seek equilibrium and balance. Imbalances in the system mean that the system has to adjust to new equilibrium. Social change hence denotes movement from one state of social stability to another for instance traditional societies move from traditional values/kin ties to industrialization with weakened kin ties and individualism. Talcot Parsons (1902-1979), the father of 20th century functionalism developed the social system's perspective saw society in its natural state as being stable and balanced i.e. society naturally moves toward a state of *homeostasis*. He sees the society as a system and institutions of society as sub-systems that perform basic functions for the survival and continuity of the whole. In addressing the problem of change, he postulated the **equilibrium theory** which asserts that as society move towards attaining equilibrium it must fulfill its functional pre-requisites (which are sets of functions society needs to fulfill for it to survive including: Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency) as it interacts with both its internal (interactions between sub systems) and external environment thereby forcing it to adapt to the interplay of forces of both environmental factors.

Conflict Theory

The conflict theory propounds that change emanates as a result of conflict and class struggles among competing groups in society. These groups can be an economic or political class, gender, racial or ethnic groups all pursuing conflicting group interests in the society. The theory holds that conflict and social change are ubiquitous, normal, constant, and inevitable phenomena in human society as it is a veritable tool in remedying social inequalities and injustice in society.

The conflict theory of change is rooted in the dialectic approach of social and political philosophy. The German philosopher Friedrich G.W Hegel like the classical Greek philosophers sought to explain reality from absolute ideas. Hegel posits that every idea and all of history goes through the dialectic process whereby an idea (thesis) develops, is challenged by a counter or opposite idea (anti-thesis), and merges into a new form (anti-thesis). The synthesis becomes a new thesis and the process according to Hegel begins all over again. In essence it is this dialectic process of ideas that leads to change in society.

1.3 FACTORS PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE

Several factors have been identified by social scientists to engender and stimulate social and cultural change (Ekpenyong 1993) involving the complex interaction of environment, technology, culture, personality, political, economic, religious, ideology, population change etc. Hence no single factor explanatory variable can account for changes in human society. This position has earlier been buttressed by Parsons (1966 cited in Ekpenyong1993:191) when he asserts that, *"no claim that social change is "determined" by economic interests, ideas, personalities of particular individuals, geographical conditions and so on, is acceptable. All such single factor theories belong to kindergarten stage of social science development. Any single factor is always inter-dependent with several others"*.

This implies that social change may originate in any institutional area, bringing about changes in other areas, which in turn make for further adaptations in the initial sphere of change. Hence, technological, economic, political, religious, ideological, demographic, and stratification factors are all viewed as potentially independent variables which influence each other as well as the course of society. The following are factors that cause social and cultural changes in society:

1. **Environmental Resources**-Exploitation of natural resources from the physical environment e.g. Crude oil exploration and associated socio-cultural changes in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.
2. **Technology** -Technology used in exploitation of the natural environment shapes culture and society e.g. internet technology has become part of the social structure of modern society
3. **Population** -Changes in population as a result of interplay of birth, death and migration forces engender social and cultural changes in society e.g. the quest for smaller family size in contemporary Nigeria due to fear of population explosion and harsh economic realities.

4. **Isolation and Contact** – A society that is isolated from other societies may have a slow rate of change unlike another that has contact with the outside world which may witness rapid changes.
5. **People's Needs**- A lacking need in society may cause uprising of the masses in demand for the provision of such needs. This could be need for social amenities, equality, social justice etc.
6. **Social Movements, Leadership and Ideology** - Social Movements with strong Ideology and viable leadership may mobilize the masses and bring about expected changes in society e.g. several civil society groups and pressure groups.
7. **Attitudes and Values**- The attitudes and values of members of society concerning a change may facilitate or hinder such change. A tradition bound attitude will always hinder social changes.
8. **Cultural Base** – A society with viable cultural base as reflected in its level of technological discoveries and innovations would generate several socio-cultural changes within the society.

1.4 PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

For Social change to occur in any society it has to manifest in either of the mechanisms or processes outlined below:

1. **Social Evolution** – This involves the natural inherent growth or development of a society from simpler to more complex advanced and modern forms. Change is a natural process.
2. **Borrowing and Diffusion** – This is the process through which social change occurs when societies borrow and infuses cultural elements from other societies consciously or unconsciously.
3. **Discovery and Invention**- This involves the process of deriving new perceptions of aspects or an entire cultural base of a society and creating hitherto non-existing material or non-material culture from the existing culture base i.e. a new application or combination of cultural knowledge.
4. **Assimilation**- This process involves a situation when two societies or cultural groups have contact, the weaker group is subsumed into the stronger one and thereby making the weaker group losing its cultural autonomy e.g. the loss of the African-ness of Francophone West Africa.
5. **Acculturation**- This process involves two societies having contact with their cultures converging and over time leading to cultural homogeneity. E.g. The Hausa and Fulani cultural convergence.
6. **Cultural Loss**- This involves loss of cultural knowledge of the old which are replaced with new ones as a result of cultural extinction occasioned by diffusion, assimilation etc.
7. **Planned and Guided Change**- Here, government at all levels, community development associations, organized groups etc. may initiate socio-cultural changes and equally control its pace, rate and direction e.g. government policies on population growth control such as family planning, limits on number of children per family, legalization of abortion etc.

1.5 AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Society, as earlier mentioned is made up of constituent parts known as social institutions all performing specific functions for the stability and growth of society. Ekpenyong (1993) suggests that all institutions of society are sources or agents of social change and these include:

1. **The Economy**- It is through the economic system that man and society fulfills its basic needs of food, shelter and clothing; it equally provides the technological means through which society adapts to its environment, it then engenders massive changes through exploitation of environmental resources in quest of meeting man's need and development of society.
2. **Government** – As earlier mentioned, the government initiates guided and planned change as it sets agenda and goal for society. It helps society attains its set goals and achieve social change through promulgation of laws, policies, developmental projects, provision of social amenities etc.
3. **Religion** – The role of religion as a tool for social change is not contestable as it brings about both positive and negative changes. For example religious wars and extremism experienced in our world are offshoots of religious intolerance. Religious doctrines engender social change in so many ways for example it took missionaries from Europe to put a halt to killing of twins and human sacrifices in Nigeria. Max Weber's work on *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a classic example of the role of religion in social change.
4. **Education**–Education is a veritable agent of social change as it helps liberate hitherto ignorant masses from poverty, superstition, dogmatism, traditionalism etc. It opens their minds, changes their

attitudes, values and beliefs and provides them better understanding of their environment and their society. Education provides the right conditions and attitudes for social change to occur.

5. **Mass Media**—The media both electronic and print is a catalyst to social change. The media is a tool for mass education, mass mobilization and it helps spread ideology of change. As the world gets smaller as a result of globalization, the media presents new cultural traits, technologies, fashion tastes, food, fads from across the world over the internet, satellite television, magazines etc. which are spread and diffused in distanced lands and even in the smallest and farthest of nations.

1.6 ACCEPTANCE AND RESISTANCE TO SOCIAL CHANGE

It is interesting to note here that not all changes in society are accepted as they come sometimes they often face one form of resistance or the other. As Ekpenyong (1993:205) noted “*new ideas, new scientific and technical developments, and new patterns of social life are sometimes resisted even in the rapidly changing societies*”. Several reasons account for the acceptance and resistance of social change and as identified by Ekpenyong (ibid) and Anele (1999) they include:

1. **Cost of Change**—This implies that if the cost of the proposed change in monetary, environmental, moral terms etc. is very high as against its immediate benefits it may be resisted by the masses on the other hand if the benefit outweighs the cost it will be accepted.
2. **Utility and Compatibility with Existing Culture** – For a new cultural change to be accepted in a society it must prove that its utility is superior to the existing cultural patterns and it must not be conflicting with the existing cultural practices otherwise it will be resisted.
3. **Attitudes and Values** – If a society has an enclosed social structure with a tradition bound attitude it will resist any form of change in order to maintain its cultural values; on the other hand a more open cultural system will be friendly to change and easily accept changes.
4. **Vested Interests and Maintenance of Status Quo** – Society is made up of several groups pursuing diverse interests, in this sense a change in the social structure would affect several groups differently. Those who see the change as beneficial will support it and those who feel threatened by the change would resist it and advocate for the maintenance of the status quo.
5. **Demonstrability of Innovations** – For a new innovation to be accepted it must demonstrate its superiority to the old system.
6. **Technical Difficulties of Change** – If a new cultural or technological innovation has several difficulties in its practical application it will be resisted unlike an innovation with little or no technical difficulties.

1.7 MODERNIZATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Modernization is a lineal movement from traditionalism to modernity; it is a contemporary version of the evolutionary theory and it is a contending theoretical paradigm for sociology of development developed by sociologists and economists of Western Europe and America. The modernization theory emphasizes that third world countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are under-developed because they lack the inherent economic, psychological and cultural traits of growth and development and for them to develop these societies need to abandon their cultures and adopt or diffuse the modern culture which is produced by the West.

The modernization process in Nigeria and Africa generally has been fast tracked by the globalization process which emphasizes an open global economic market system, cultural homogeneity and shrinking of cultural divides and diversities through information technology systems etc. The modernization process which started in Nigeria and Africa during colonialism has brought about several social and cultural changes in the traditional Nigerian social structures and some of these changes would be analyzed utilizing an institutional perspective:

Firstly, the family institution has changed a great deal; the traditional family system that is largely extended is gradually giving way to small nuclear family sizes. Similarly, there is a change of marital residence from patrilocal residence system to neo local system i.e. residing outside the groom's father's house but a neutral place most likely in the cities. Traditionally, the family is also a unit of production which in turn strengthening family ties however modernity has taken away economic activities outside of the family thereby weakening family ties. Also, socialisation function of the family is gradually been taken over by the education sector

while baby-sitting and nurturing is also been taken over by kindergarten, crèches and professional nannies. Likewise, the elderly ones are now taken to old people's homes instead of the integration into the larger family. There has been this notion of family egalitarianism as against traditional patriarchy which has led to several women liberation movements as women are currently largely involved in economic activities outside the home and are attaining economic freedom. These women liberation syndrome has accounted for the high rate of divorce and separation in Nigerian marriages today and single parent-hood.

Secondly, with regards to religious practices there has been a shift from African Traditional Religion's Polytheism to Christianity and Islamic Monotheism. Religion hitherto was a unified and decentralized family and community affair, with each family having specific deities, ancestors and gods. However modernization has brought in freedoms of worship thereby weakening family ties and group solidarity as religion is termed to be an individual race to heaven. The father's role as chief priest of the family regarding ancestor worship has been eroded. Churches have brought divisions in families and communities due to denominational doctrinal differences e.g. church marriage etc. Also Traditional marriages are today de-emphasized by most Christians in favour of church wedding. Furthermore, Modernization has provided scientific and empirical explanations to strange happenings such as disease, earthquakes, rainfall etc. which were attributed to gods thereby making those gods irrelevant. Traditional religion was tied to the environment thereby producing spiritual awe and relevance to environmental conservation however modernism and development has eroded such indigenous perceptions and environmental world views. Also traditional Belief systems such as killing of twins, female genital mutilation etc. has been abolished with the advent of modern Christian religion. In Christendom the advent of Born Againism and Pentecostal missions has brought about new religious rituals like speaking in tongues, freedom of dressing to church, use of bible electronic gadgets. Unfortunately some churches are now money making enterprises with society losing grip of truth and morals unlike traditional Africa that oath taking was a form of reiterating the collective conscience and enacting social justice.

Thirdly, with regards to the economy, economic activities are now operated outside the family on a larger scale. There has been a change from self-reliant subsistent Agrarian economy to so called world capitalist Industrialization based on cash crops and mineral production thereby disarticulating the economy. In essence Africans produce what we don't eat and eat what we don't produce. Likewise, introduction of capitalism and monetized economy and introduction of taxation has led to the commoditization of everything including human beings. Modern economic structure has changed the stratum of society from an ascribed social status to achieved social class. Also, introduction of mechanised production has improved productivity but it has reduced man labour hence unemployment which was alien in the traditional economy. Modernism has brought about improved means of communication and transportation which eases commerce and trade e.g. use of technology for e-commerce, e-banking etc. and which has equally aided pervasive rural-urban labour migration.

Fourthly, there is massive change in the political organization of the Nigerian society as a result of modernization. Traditional governments and institutions such as monarchies, gerontocracies are now replaced by bureaucratic form of government with the federal, state and local levels of government and the legislative, executive and judicial arms of government. Traditionally law and order were maintained through the normative systems i.e. norms & customs, kin relations, oath taking etc. Now we have advanced modern state apparatus such as the police, military, courts and prisons etc. Modernization has fostered the processes of democratisation, participatory government, electioneering, rule of law, fundamental human rights, equality, freedoms, abolition of all forms of slavery and servitudes through several mechanisms such as the use of modern technology for elections and election observations e.g. card readers, audio-visual gadgets etc.

II. SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social problems are as old as human society as it is equally ubiquitous and inevitable aspect of human existence. A condition is not a social problem unless it is seen as violating certain fundamental values and beliefs about how society should operate. Achieving widespread consensus about whether a condition contradicts these values and beliefs can be difficult to obtain. All human problems do not become public ones.

A social problem is a socially constructed way of seeing certain conditions that provides a claim to change through public actions. Thus, a social problem is not separate from everyday interactions of citizens in a society. Nor is it separate from the operations, goals, and objectives of social institutions.

Defining a condition as a social problem, gaining acceptance of that definition among a significant proportion of the population, and garnering public resources to address the problem in a certain manner usually are not easy tasks to accomplish. One of the earliest attempts was made by Case (1924 cf. Anele, 1999) who defined social problems as "*situations impressing a large number of competent observers as needing remedy by collective action*". This definition attests to the fact that social problems are situations that are need remedy by a collective action, implying that the situation is affecting the generality of society members. However the problem with this definition is that it failed to categorize who the competent observers are, if they are scientists, sociologists, psychologists or mere public opinion. Nevertheless Robert Nisbert (cited in Anele, *ibid*) defined social problem as "*a way of behavior that is regarded by substantial part of a social order as being in violation of one or more generally accepted or approved norm*". From Nisbert's definition it is deducible that the process of constructing the idea of a "social problem" defines and reinforces what is considered to be a standard for behavior or social conditions. That is, defining a condition as a social problem also defines what society considers being the "right" way to do things. Furthermore, Scott and Marshall (2005) defined social problems "*a generic term applied to the range of conditions and aberrant behaviors which are held to be manifestations of social disorganization and to warrant changing via some means of social engineering*". Premised on these definitions, a few examples will help make our understanding more lucid. For instance, if as a result of poverty and unemployment some persons are unable to afford the basic needs of life, these become personal problems. However, if this situation grows into a more adverse situation where the poor are made vulnerable to psychological brainwash and ill conviction to embrace terrorism and armed robbery as a means to end poverty thereby leading to loss of lives and property, where the people are put into tension, fear, insecurity, then poverty assumes or acquires a social character. In essence, social problems we can conclude are patterns of behavior that constitutes a threat to society or the groups and institutions that makes up society.

2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

On the basis of the above definitions the following are identifiable characteristics of Social Problems:

1. All social problems are *deviations* from the "ideal" situation.
2. All social problems are situations which pose a threat and have injurious consequence for society
3. All social problems have some *common basis* of origin- *social and often political in origin*
4. All social problems are *social in their results* – they affect all sections of society.
5. All social problems are caused by pathological social conditions.
6. All social problems are *interconnected and contagious*.
7. The *responsibility* for social problems is *social* – they require a collective approach for their solution.
8. Social problems occur in all societies – they are ubiquitous and inevitable

2.2 ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

While social problems take many forms, they all share two important elements: an objective social condition and a subjective interpretation of that social condition.

The Objective Element - Realism

The objective element of a social problem refers to the existence of a social condition. It posits that social conditions that are problematic to society are real and they exist. We become aware of social conditions through our own life experiences, through the media, and through education. We see the homeless, we hear of armed robbery and kidnapping in the streets, and see battered women in hospital emergency rooms. We read about employees losing their jobs as business downsizes due to economic recession. In television news reports we see the anguished faces of parents whose children have been killed by violent youth, cult groups and insurgencies etc. All these are objective realities we are faced with in our day to day interaction with the world around us.

The Subjective Element- Social Construction of Social Problems

This perspective posits that social problems are socially constructed (i.e. social conditions become social problems when they are defined as such). The subjective element of a social problem refers to the belief that a particular social condition is harmful to society, or to a segment of society, and that it should and can be changed. We know that crime, drug addiction, poverty, racism, violence, and pollution exist. These social conditions are not considered social problems, however, unless at least a segment of society believes these conditions diminish the quality of human life. This re-echoes our definitions early given that a condition is considered a social problem by either competent observers or a substantial part of the social order.

2.3 CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Eitzen et al (2009) identified two categories of social problems namely:

1. *Norm Violations*

Norm violations assume that a standard of behavior exists. People who study norm violations are interested in society's failures like the criminal, the mentally ill, or the school dropout. Eitzen et al. (2009:10) contend, however, that norm violations are symptoms of social problems rather than the problem itself. Deviants, for example, are victims and should not be blamed entirely. The system in which they live is to be blamed as well.

2. *Social Conditions*

Eitzen et al. (2009: 11) suggest that a second type of social problem involves conditions that cause psychic and material suffering for some category of people. The focus is on how society operates and who benefits and who doesn't benefit under existing social arrangements. Pertinent questions raised include: what is the bias of the system? How are society's rewards distributed? Do some categories of people suffer due to the way schools are organized? Are some groups of people put at a disadvantage because of the manner juries are selected? Do some categories suffer because of the way health care is delivered?

2.4 CAUSES OF SOCIAL PROBLEM

In identifying the causes of social problems, Landis (1969 cfAnele 1999:28) identified three related processes as precursory to social problems which include:

1. **Major Social Change - Structural Factor**

The concept of Social change has already been discussed earlier and it was highlighted that change can be gradual (evolutionary) or swift (revolutionary); secondly it was also discussed that the rate, pace and magnitude of social change differs amongst societies hence it is not all changes that engenders social problems. However, swift revolutionary changes and major changes with great magnitude affecting almost the entire social system produces associated social problems. For example, history of military incursion into politics in Nigeria which led to several military coup de tats ushered in a political culture characterized by political instability, human rights violation, politically motivated assassinations, election rigging, thuggery, insecurity etc. Secondly, the introduction of a factory site or a University campus in a rural environment would lead to massive urbanization of that rural community as increased student intakes and staff of the university would lead to massive in-migration to the community. Other businesses like fast food, hotels, bookshops, etc. would be established; new houses would be erected to shelter the increasing population. Expansion of the university campus and spaces for housing, roads and other social amenities would mean conversion of farmlands and virgin lands for development purpose. This implies loss of livelihood and unemployment for the rural dwellers; increased heterogeneity of the population would lead to individualism, increasing crime rate as materialism would have replaced the collectivism of the hitherto homogenous society. Prostitution would be on the increase as students would bring various cultural practices, lifestyles and attitudes to the community, student cult gangs would render the community insecure and social order would gradually breakdown as traditional values, norms and customs of the hitherto small rural society are eroded by the major socio-economic change introduced into the system.

2. **Value Conflict - Cultural Factor**

Values according to Landis (1969 cfAnele 1999:30) are an individual's or a society's estimate of worth, and their preferences or rejections in social institutions. Individual values are to a large extent influenced by societal values and it is within this context that individuals appraise and assess themselves. However, in pluralistic society with several interest groups, ethnic groups or races all pursuing specific group values

engenders value competition and fight for superiority. This condition presents a situation or an array of conflicting values for the individual and society at large. It is then the duty of the society through the political institution to mediate and corroborate these conflicting values for the individual and society at large. Failure to do so would engender chaos as various groups within the society would be pursuing various goals and not a generally accepted goal. Now wonder a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria lacking value consensus has been faced with sectional politics and several secessionist struggles and self-determination movements such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and most recently the Nnamdi Kanu led Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

3. Individual or Group Concern

It is inadequate for major social change or value conflict alone to constitute social problems without the presence of individual or group concern. In essence a people must socially construct or define a condition as causing discomfort or threatening their collective welfare and continued survival for it to be a social problem (Anele 1999). This re-echoes the objective and subjective nature of social problems as earlier highlighted, hence an objective condition does not itself prove to be a social problem not until a subjective interpretation by a majority of the social system defines it as such. In an attempt to ascertain the varying perceptions and subjective construction of a condition as a social problem by several individuals and groups in the society Landis (1969 cfAnele 1999) identified the following factors: firstly concern may be guided by **moral or ethical judgment** (based on morally right or wrong behavior such as prostitution, abortion, drug abuse etc.); secondly **occupational commitment** of an individual may guide his or her concern for the problem condition (e.g. a religious leader's stands against abortion, divorce and prostitution); and finally **interest in maintaining or changing the status quo** for example poverty may be seen as being super-imposed on the poor by the structure of society hence becoming a social problem the ruling class may not see it as such but may only see it as a social problem and introduce poverty alleviation programmes only when they perceive the poor to revolt against the privileged positions.

2.5 REACTIONS TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Different people within a society or group react differently to social problems. The differences may be explained in terms of the following factors:

1. **An Attitude of Concern:** Social problems as mentioned earlier must be a condition regarded by the majority of the social system as a problem which requires collective remedy. In this sense, those who define a condition as a social problem tends to react in ways seeking to proffering panaceas to such problems by the generality of the population which hereby shows an attitude of concern for not just the existence of the problem but its possible solutions.
2. **An Attitude of Unconcern:** Many people and the State at times remain indifferent to a problem thinking that it does not affect them. At times their own individual problems like family tensions and job pressures keep them so engaged that they do not find time to be interested in what affects others. It is only when their own interests are involved that they become agitated and starts taking interest in the problem. The indifference and passivity of the State only add to the problem further.
3. **Fatalism:** Some people are so fatalistic that they attribute everything to destiny. Issues like poverty and unemployment are also explained in terms of misfortune and religious retribution. They, therefore, suffer the misfortune quietly and wait for some miracle to happen.
4. **Vested Interests:** Some people take no interest in the existing problems because they stand to gain so long as the problem exists. Motivated by self-interest, they describe the problem as insoluble and talk about its eradication as a waste of time.
5. **Absence of Expert Knowledge:** Some people, though deeply concerned about the problem, do not take much interest in it believing that its solution is impossible unless people change their attitudes and values. As the changes must be initiated by a change in outlook they remain unconcerned about finding alternative possibilities of treatment.

2.6 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The theoretical perspectives guiding sociological thinking on social problems include *functionalism*, *conflict* and *symbolic interactionism theories*.

Functionalism

Functionalism sees society as made up of various parts (social institutions such as economy, education, family, government etc.) serving interrelated and interdependent functions for the survival and stability of society. Functionalism views social problems as arising from society's natural evolution especially when it witnesses sudden and rapid changes. When a social problem does occur, it might threaten a society's stability, but it does not mean that fundamental flaws in the society exist. Accordingly, gradual social reform should be all that is needed to address the social problem.

The major assumption of the functionalist theory is that social stability is necessary for a strong society, and adequate socialization and social integration are necessary for social stability. Society's social institutions perform important functions to help ensure social stability. In essence, if some parts of society fail to perform their functions so as to disrupt the network of interdependence among all parts, it leads to a state of **dysfunction**. As dysfunction occurs, social disorder will take place in form of social problems, such as high rate of crime, unemployment, poverty etc. The theory holds that social problems weaken a society's stability but do not reflect fundamental faults in how the society is structured.

Conflict Theory

The general position of conflict theory is that society is characterized by pervasive inequality based on social class, race, gender, and other factors. Social problems arise from fundamental faults in the structure of a society and both reflect and reinforce inequalities based on social class, race, gender, and other dimensions. Hence, far-reaching social change is needed in the structure of society to reduce or eliminate social inequality and to create an egalitarian society.

Conflict theory holds that social problems arise from several kinds of social conflicts such as class conflict, racial or ethnic conflict, gender conflict etc. Each conflict arises from the differential or unequal positions of individuals and groups in society and the social inequality between the powerful and the powerless. The theory emphasizes that different groups in society have different interests stemming from their different social positions. These different interests in turn lead to different views on important social issues and ultimately conflict.

Symbolic Interactions

Symbolic interactions focuses on the interaction of individuals and on how they interpret their interaction. Its roots lie in the work of early 1900s American sociologists, social psychologists, and philosophers who were interested in human consciousness and action. Herbert Blumer (1969) a sociologist at the University of Chicago, built on their writings to develop symbolic interactions, a term he coined. Drawing on Blumer's work, symbolic interactionists feel that people do not merely learn the roles that society has set out for them; instead they construct these roles as they interact. As they interact, they negotiate their definitions of the situations in which they find themselves and socially construct the reality of these situations. In doing so, they rely heavily on symbols such as words and gestures to reach a shared understanding of their interaction.

Generally speaking, symbolic interaction is the interaction between a person and others that is governed by the meanings that they give to each other's actions and reactions. The interaction would be a pleasant one if the two parties regard each other's behavior as friendly and vice versa. Hence, the meaning (variously referred to as symbols, significant gestures, interpretation, definition or label) that people attach to an act in a given interaction is more important than the act itself, because reactions to others depends on the meaning ascribed to their behavior rather than the behavior itself. Social order then is possible because people learn what various symbols (such as shaking hands) mean and apply these meanings to different kinds of situations.

Applying the Theories

For a better understanding of the different views of these three theoretical perspectives, let's see what they would probably say about *armed robbery*, a very serious form of crime and a notorious social problem. A functionalist approach might suggest that armed robbery actually serves positive functions for society, such as the job-creating function mentioned earlier for crime in general. It would still think that efforts should be made to reduce armed robbery, but it would also assume that far-reaching changes in our society would be

neither wise nor necessary as part of the effort to reduce crime. Conflict theory would take a very different approach to understanding armed robbery. It might note that most street criminals are poor and thus emphasize that armed robbery is the result of the despair and frustration of living in poverty and facing a lack of jobs and other opportunities for economic and social success. The roots of street crime, from the perspective of conflict theory, thus lie in society at least as much as they lie in the individuals committing such crime. To reduce armed robbery and other street crime, conflict theory would advocate far-reaching changes in the economic structure of society. Whereas, symbolic interactionism would focus on how armed robbers make such decisions as when and where to rob someone and on how their interactions with other criminals reinforce their own criminal tendencies. It would also investigate how victims of armed robbery behave when confronted by a robber. To reduce armed robbery, it would advocate programs that reduce the opportunities for interaction among potential criminal offenders, for example, after-school programs that keep at-risk youths busy in “conventional” activities so that they have less time to spend with youths who might help them get into trouble.

Evaluating the Theories –A Critique

An evaluation of the three theories below shows that they all do have shortcomings in their explanations of the causes of social problems in society. The functionalist theory, for example has been criticized for portraying society as stable. Consequently, it only focuses on the positive functions of social institutions and ignores the negative ones. It has also been highly queried for being inherently conservative and thereby justifying the status quo and legitimizing social problems such as inequality, poverty and crime without paying necessary attention to the root causes of these problems and proffering proactive and lasting solutions to dysfunctions instead of palliatives in managing these dysfunctions.

Likewise, the conflict theory has been criticized for solely linking social problems to inequalities in society and the advocates tend to believe in a utopian classless socialist society where none of these problems would exist. However this notion has been known to be misleading as communist societies including the defunct United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), Cuba, Vietnam and China were and are still faced with myriads of social problems including crime and inequality. This provides credence to the assertion of functionalists like Durkheim that social problems are inevitable and even in a society of saints.

2.7 SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The social problems that are plaguing the Nigerian society today are myriad and could hardly be catalogued. They are very uncountable in the true sense of the assertion. Prominent among them are: juvenile delinquency; human trafficking; child labor/abuse; escalating crime waves such as armed robbery; terrorism; arson; advance fee fraud (419); internet-cybercrime (yahoo-yahoo); drug peddling and drug abuse; currency trafficking; bribery and corruption; embezzlement of public funds; student and youth unrest; insurgency and militancy; cultism; cultural violence; religious intolerance; boundary disputes; stack dishonesty; election rigging; coups and counter coups; lack of commitment to duty; examination malpractices; filthy and gross indiscipline; result racketeering; disrespect for other species; gross economic inequality; poverty; disease and hunger; widespread illiteracy; lack of gainful employment opportunities; open injustice; ostentatious spending; abuse of authority; hoarding of essential commodities; cheating and exploitation of the masses; discrimination and ethnic jingoism; inordinate ambition; lack of realization of human potential; narrow education resulting in ill-informed citizens; civil wars; famine; drought and unchecked desertification; environmental degradation; human trafficking; teenage pregnancy; single parenthood; out of school children (Alimajiris) etc.

III. CONCLUSION

This Paper has been able to vividly elucidate the concepts of social change and social problems, the sociological roots to the study of social change and social problems, theories of social change and social problems, factors and processes of social change and the contemporary social problems in present day .

In concluding, suffice it to state that social change in any society be it contact change in form of diffusion, acculturation or assimilation or immanent change in form of innovation or discovery arises firstly as a response to solving a particular social problem or difficulties faced by that society and on the other hand

social problems in society can arise from externally diffused changes in a social system. The world today is fast evolving and changing in contemporary times as a result of the impact of globalization and rise in information technology usage. Culture, traditions, norms, values are eroded and replaced with modern once especially of the Western European and American variant with the aid of modern information technology like the internet, social media, satellite television, Hollywood etc. Social and cultural changes arising from the shrinking of the world into a global village and breaking down of cultural barriers and dissimilarities between societies is gradually begetting a simultaneous diffusion of Western culture, political systems, world capitalist economy, value systems etc. in the developing world of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

As earlier mentioned, social changes are associated with social problems and in essence diffused contact change will render the receiving societies several social problems associated with the need to adapting with the diffused variant of new ways of doing things; the need to absorb culture shock and the length of time needed to fully accept and develop wholesomely the new attitudes, mechanisms, skills and technologies the diffused or assimilated changes is perpetually imperative.

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