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COURSE TITLE & CODE

Social Change (SOC 213)

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Introduction:

- Social change is a very complex sociological concept which is inevitable in all social institutions and societies
- Sociologists refer to fundamental alterations in the patterns of culture, structure, and social behaviour over time as social change. It is a process by which society becomes something different while remaining in some respects the same. The impact of social change is strikingly apparent when we reflect on events that influenced the lives of our parents and grandparents and realize how distant the events seem to us.
- Social change is an important concept of study to social scientists in general and Sociologists in particular. The study of social institutions and changes there-in reveals the former and new state of the society by comparing the past with the present and projecting into the future. The dynamic state of all social institutions in the society brings about obvious changes in the daily lives of man. Being more rational, man manipulates the environment to suit his way of life unlike animals that have come to adapt to their environment the way they met it.

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Definition of Social Change

Social change can be described as the transformation in social structure overtime. Also, social change can be defined as the alteration and modifications which all social institutions or some parts of them, undergo over time in the process of communication and interaction.

- According to Laur (1977), social change is the alteration in the social phenomena at various level of human life from individual to the global.
- Boudon (1986) refers to social change as an inclusive concept that refers to alterations in social phenomena at various levels from individual to the global.

- Giddens (1989) defines social change as the modification of basic institutions during a special period. Charles Harper (1998) defines social change as the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns through time.

Types of Social Change

- ***Social change due to endogenous factor:***
- Conflict theories, especially the Marxists located the source of change in conflict arising within the system. Marx maintained that all historical societies contained basic contradiction involved in the exploitation of one social group by another.

This however creates a fundamental conflict situation between the social groups thereby giving rise to a new social order. Marx's position is that for a change to occur, there must be conflict within the system. Endogenous change may therefore be referred to as institutional change. For example, conflict in Nigerian political institution is an institutional change affecting other spheres of life like the economic and social institution.

- ***Social change due to exogenous factor:***
- There are changes derived from external source. The diffusion theorists believed and located the source of change in what they called social contact. Social contact could be represented,
- For example, in the relationship or contact, which the colonial government had with the various indigenous African societies. The change brought by this contact is alien. They are alien because they are externally influenced. This contact brought a whole range of changes in socio-political and economic institutions of Africans

Categories of Social Change

- It may be Planned and Unplanned
- It may be induced or autonomous
- It may be novel or recurrent
- It may be progressive or retrogressive
- It may be total or partial
- It may be fundamental or minor
- It may be exogenous or endogenous
- It may be significant or insignificant

SOURCES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

- **Physical Environment:**
- If humans are to survive, they must achieve a working relationship with their environment. Should the environment change for any reason those who have evolved a given type of adaptation must respond by making appropriate institutional change, fashioning new forms of social organization and new technologies.
- **Population:**
- Changes in the size, composition, and distribution of a population also affect culture and social structure.
- **Conflict / Clashes over resources and values:**
- Not surprisingly, conflict is a basic source of social change. Members of a group must marshal their resources for competition. For instance, during wartime they must alter their customary ways of ordering their daily lives, and they may invest greater authority in military leaders. Of course, conflict

also frequently involves negotiation, compromise or accommodation, which may result in new institutional arrangements.

- **Supporting Values and Norms:**

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- **Innovation:**

- A discovery represents an addition to knowledge, whereas an invention uses existing knowledge in some novel form. Thus, a discovery constitutes the perception of a relationship or fact that had not previously been recognized or understood.

- **Diffusion:**

- Diffusion is the process by which cultural traits spread from one social unit to another. Diffusion is a people process and hence is expedited or hindered by the social environment. Simply because a trait is functionally superior does not necessarily ensure that individuals will adopt it.

- **The Mass Media:**

- Diffusion is facilitated by the instant flooding of information across national, class, ethnic and economic boundaries by means of the mass media. According to one view, the media functions as a kind of giant hypodermic needle, discharging into the passive body of the population endless propaganda that renders it susceptible to the manipulators' wares, whether products, ideas, values, or candidates.

Kinds of Change

- **Normative Change:**
- Change in norms may occur over time which may be prompted either by changes in objective circumstances or by subjective change in perceptions and expectations. In other words, normative changes may involve the consideration of the majority or may as well be subjective, that is, considering individual perception rather than the generality. On this note, accessibility to power becomes integral to the change in guiding principles and expectations. For instance, the members of legislative arm of government represent people from various constituencies but they are closer to the corridors of power than the people they are representing.
- **Change in Social Values:**
- Social values are inherent in all social institutions and societies. It is defined as the conception or standard by which things are compared, approved or disapproved, desirable and undesirable, more or less correct, more or less honourable. Social change may emanate from ideas, actions, feelings, qualities, objectives, and expectations of individuals or groups. An influential individual or group may successfully induce its value into the social structure, thereby replacing the old values. For example, the Governor Lateef Jakande administration of Lagos State from 1979-1983 valued housing and education while the current Ambode administration values good transport infrastructure and habitable environment more than other sectors of the social structure. It should be noted that change in social values may bring about normative change and vice versa.
- **Institutional Change:**
- The society comprises of parts which makes whole. These parts are called social institutions which function together for the existence of the society. Every social institution is expected to carry out specific roles and functions guided by principles and laws. As the society develops, institution change may also occur. For example, the marriage institution had gone through various transitions due to westernization of the cultural patterns in Nigeria.

The prerequisite for marriage such as the involvement of spouses' families, payment of bride price, check on family background and religion are more often than not taken lightly.

- **Change of Personnel / Actor**
- Social institution and society at large cannot function effectively without individuals occupying specific positions and carrying out specific roles in relation to specific norms and values, as regards the hierarchical structure of the social institutions. A change of actor might bring about new norms, values, policy and service delivery. For instance, military administrations make use of decrees as the guiding principles/laws while the civilian regimes make use of the constitution put together and subjected to amendments by the legislative arms of government, as the case may require.
- However, change of actors might be as a result of the following factors:
- Coup d'état: for instance, the overthrow of the Shehu Shagari regime by the Buhari-Idiagbon regime in 1983.
- Expiration of Term: for instance, the exit of President Olusegun Obasanjo after second term in office in 2007
- Ill Health: a typical example is the appointment of President Goodluck Jonathan in acting capacity when President Shehu Musa Yar'adua was severely ill.
- Death: example is the appointment of President Goodluck Jonathan in full capacity as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria after the demise of President Shehu Musa Yar'adua
- Court ruling: example is the removal and re-instatement of politicians by electoral tribunals and court ruling in Nigeria. Dramatic examples are the replacement of Osunbor by Comrade Adams Oshiomole in Edo State; Segun Oni by Kayode Fayemi in Ekiti State; and Segun Agagu by Segun Mimiko in Ondo State, all as a result of the 2007 gubernatorial elections.

NATURE OF SOCIAL CHANGE

- **Social change in whole or part of the society:** A change could affect the whole or entire society. When a change covers the whole society, this may lead to a complete transformation of the people's way of life or their social institutions. For example, the recent democratic system of governance has brought a wide spectrum of changes to the entire Nigerian society.
- But when a change affects a part of the society, it implies that such change is restricted to a section of the society. This change may affect the ways of life or the social institutions of the people in that section of the society.
- **Planned or unplanned social change:** A planned social change entails direct human intervention towards meeting a set of goals. For example, when the federal government promulgated the land use decree in 1978, it was planned to deinstitutionalize the traditional land tenure practices and to foster development.
- But an unplanned social change is an accidental or sudden change. Such a change has no human intervention and its consequences are always very grievous. For example, the changes in socio-economic life style of the Japanese, engineered by the 2004 tsunami earthquake were unplanned or accidental (Geological Society of Australia, 2004).
- **Contact or internally influenced change:** Social change may be induced by contact with external agent or factor. For example, the human sacrifice that routinely followed the death of a village dignitary and the ritual murder of twins was brought to an end with Mary Slessor's contact with the people of Calabar (Enock and Chappell, 2005). In this context, Mary Slessor was an external agent that influenced the change.
- But internally influenced change is a change that may occur without any external influence or contact. Generally, no society is static no matter its seclusion or lack of contact with other societies. Innovations and inventions within the society may bring some form of change.

- **Compulsory or voluntary change:** when a change is compulsory, it is forceful and may be violent in nature. For example, a change brought by military intervention in Nigerian polity is compulsory, forceful and violent because it does not allow Nigerians to have a choice of whether they want the government or not.
- But a voluntary change is a kind of change made consciously from free-will or acting by choice without compulsion or legal obligation. For example, the federal government immunization programme witnessed a voluntary response to change from most mothers in Northern Nigeria. Polio vaccination has been very controversial because some Muslim clerics claimed that the vaccines are part of western plot to sterilize young girls and eliminate the Muslim population.
- **Harmful or beneficial change:** change is inevitable yet people view change with skepticism and fear because of the fear of unknown. It could be harmful, it could be beneficial. When a change is harmful, it is destructive, violent and dreadful. For example, war is a harmful change because it manifests violence and destruction.
- But a change could also be beneficial especially where it raises the standard of living of the people. A change from labour intensive farming to mechanized farming is beneficial especially to boost food production to fight hunger and poverty.

Theories of Social Change

- The founders of sociology, particularly August Comte and Herbert Spencer, looked to the grand sweep of history, searching for an understanding of how and why societies change. Many contemporary sociologists continue to be intrigued by these “big questions.” The major sociological perspectives on social change, is explained as follows:

- **Evolutionary Theory:**

- The doctrine of social progress (change) and a search for underlying evolutionary laws dominated much sociological thinking during the nineteenth century. According to Social Darwinists like Spencer, social evolution resembles biological evolution and results in the world's growing progressively better. In his theory of unilinear evolution, Spencer contended that change has persistently moved society from homogeneous and simple units toward progressively heterogeneous and interdependent units. He viewed the "struggle for existence" and "the survival of the fittest" as basic natural laws. Spencer equated this struggle with "free competition." If unimpeded by outside intervention, particularly government, those individuals and social institutions that are "fit" will survive and proliferate, while those that are "unfit" will in time die out.

- **Another view**

- *The idea that societies undergo changes through evolutionary stages from simple to complex has been demonstrated in the work of **Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies**. **Emile Durkheim (1858-1916)** saw pre-industrial (i.e. traditional) societies organized around what he called 'mechanical solidarity' where there is relatively little social differentiation: the division of labour is comparatively specialized. Most people are involved in hunting and gathering. Social solidarity in traditional societies is based on similarities between individual members. They share the same beliefs and values and to a large degree the same roles. This uniformity binds members of the society together in a close-knit communal life. He saw the preindustrial society evolving into more complex organized industrial society, which he called 'organic solidarity' where there is no uniformity but differences. The society is organized based on division of labour and occupational roles are specialized yet function together to maintain the social unit (Ototo and Ogionwo, 2006).*
- **Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936)** distinguished between two types of social groupings. *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* is typical of a

'community'. It is essentially small and spontaneous so that all members know each other.

Cyclical Theory

- Evolutionary theories, particularly those with a unilinear focus, depict history as divided into sequential stages characterized by an underlying trend. Cyclical theories take a different approach and look to the rise and fall of civilizations. Their objective is to predict the course of a civilization or society. Cyclical theorists compare societies in a search for generalizations regarding their stages of growth and decline. In sum, evolutionalists see humankind as ever striving to reach new heights in a challenging future, whereas cyclical theorists forecast the demise of civilizations.
- **Functionalist Theory:**
- The concept of system is central to the structure-function model of society. A system is a set of elements or components related in a more-or-less stable fashion over a period of time. One of the features of a system stressed by structure-function theorists is its tendency toward *equilibrium*. Although time can be introduced as a factor within the model, American structure-function Sociologists have stressed static over dynamic processes. Structure-function Sociologists like Parsons (1966, 1977) have introduced the notion of evolution to the perspective to broaden the concept of equilibrium to include both developing and self-maintaining properties. The social group is portrayed as living in a state of dynamic or moving equilibrium. The equilibrated social system adjusts itself to disturbances that occur, accommodating them within the functioning structure and establishing a new level of equilibrium. Hence, even though society changes, it remains stable through new forms of social integration.

Conflict Theory

- Conflict theorists hold that basic source of social change. Nowhere does one find a clearer exposition of the conflict perspective than that provided by Karl Marx, particularly as it finds expression in his notion of the dialectic. The dialectic depicts the world in dynamic terms as a world of becoming rather than being. According to Marxian dialectical materialism, every economic order grows to a state of maximum efficiency, at the same time developing internal contradictions or weaknesses that contribute to its decay. Class conflict is a particularly powerful source of change, and Marx saw it as the key to understanding human history. Marx said that all change is the product of a constant conflict between opposites. All development; social, economic, or human proceeds through the resolution of existing contradictions and the eventual emergence of new contradictions. The outcome of the clash between opposing forces is not a compromise (an averaging out of the differences among them), but an entirely new product, one born of struggle. In this manner both individuals and societies change. It is a dynamic process of complex interchanges between all facets of social life. As Marx (1867/1906) observed, “By acting on the external world and changing it, he [the individual] at the same time changes his own nature.”

READING TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

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