



Human development as a pathway for human and social flourishing in Africa: Insights from Ebenezer Njoh-Mouellè's humanistic philosophy of development

John Verkerli¹, Valentine Banfegha Ngalim², John Paul Nyuykongi³

¹ Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Bamenda, Cameroon

² Professor, Departments of the Philosophy, Higher Teacher Training College, Bambili, University of Bamenda, Cameroon

³ Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Bamenda, Cameroon

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66856/ijhssr.2026.12.3.12257>

Abstract

Despite decades of development initiatives, many African societies continue to face persistent poverty, inequality, youth unemployment, weak governance, and social fragmentation, revealing the limitations of development models centred primarily on economic growth. This paper rethinks human development for human and social flourishing in Africa through a philosophical analysis of Ebenezer Njoh-Mouellè's *De la Médiocrité à l'Excellence: Essai sur la Signification Humaine du Développement*. Using a qualitative philosophical approach based on conceptual and critical textual analysis, it argues that authentic development is the movement from mediocrity to excellence through the cultivation of human potential. Human development, therefore, extends beyond economic progress to the formation of reflective, creative, ethically responsible, and socially engaged persons. The paper identifies education, particularly higher education, as the primary means of nurturing critical consciousness, innovation, cultural identity, and relevant human capabilities for sustainable development. Although Njoh-Mouellè's philosophy pays limited attention to structural constraints, it offers a compelling humanistic framework for reorienting development around human dignity, freedom, capability development, and social responsibility. The study suggests that addressing Africa's developmental challenges requires prioritizing people-centred development through sustained investment in quality humanistic education, creative capability development, critical thinking, and ethical leadership. It concludes that empowering individuals to realize their potential and contribute to the common good provides a sustainable pathway to human and social flourishing in Africa.

Keywords: Human development, human flourishing, humanistic education, Ebenezer Njoh-Mouellè, Africa

Introduction

Development is a multidimensional concept that extends far beyond economic growth and material prosperity. It encompasses the social, political, cultural, intellectual, and moral advancement of individuals and communities, with the ultimate aim of enhancing human well-being. From a humanistic perspective, development should not be measured solely by increases in national income or technological progress but by the extent to which it enables people to realize their full potential and live lives of dignity, responsibility, and purpose. According to Giovanni, development is a social condition in which the genuine needs of a population are met through the rational and sustainable use of natural resources in ways that respect the cultural values and realities of a society ^[1]. This understanding rightly emphasizes equitable access to essential services such as education, healthcare, housing, and nutrition as important foundations for human well-being. Yet, while these material conditions are necessary, they are not sufficient for genuine human development or human flourishing.

Human development has traditionally been understood as a process of expanding people's capabilities and opportunities to live long, healthy, knowledgeable, and productive lives ^[2]. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines it as enlarging people's choices by improving access to education, healthcare, income, and other resources necessary for a decent standard of living. Building on this perspective, Arimah argues that human development empowers individuals to lead meaningful and satisfying

lives by enhancing not only their economic well-being but also their health, literacy, personal freedom, and capacity to shape their own future ^[3]. These perspectives have significantly broadened development beyond economic growth by placing human well-being at its centre.

Human development finds its ultimate purpose in human flourishing, understood as the full realization of human potential and the attainment of a meaningful and dignified life. This idea can be traced to Aristotle, who conceived flourishing (eudaimonia) as the highest human good, achieved through the lifelong cultivation of virtue, reason, and purposeful activity ^[4]. Rather than a temporary state of happiness, flourishing represents a life well lived, marked by moral excellence, meaningful relationships, and personal fulfillment. Building on this classical understanding, Las Heras et al. argue that human flourishing extends beyond material outcomes or psychological well-being to include physical and mental health, happiness, meaning and purpose, moral values, virtue, and strong family and social relationships ^[5]. Similarly, VanderWeele defines flourishing as a multidimensional state that encompasses health, life satisfaction, character, purpose, and supportive social relationships ^[6]. In this sense, human development provides the conditions through which individuals and communities can flourish, making flourishing both the goal and measure of genuine human development.

Within the African context, development has long been assessed through externally defined economic indicators that often overlook the human person as the true purpose of development. Although many African countries have made

notable gains in education and other social indicators, these achievements have not consistently translated into human flourishing. Persistent poverty, unemployment, inequality, weak governance, ethical decline, and limited opportunities continue to prevent many people, especially the youth, from realizing their full potential. As Prados de la Escosura argues, Africa's relatively slow progress in human development reflects the combined effects of weak economic growth, political instability, and stagnating life expectancy, despite improvements in educational attainment ^[7]. These realities call for a fundamental rethinking of development from a human-centered perspective that prioritizes the formation of morally responsible, intellectually competent, creative, and socially engaged citizens rather than economic growth alone.

Although Africa's human development challenges are often explained in terms of poverty, weak institutions, unemployment, and limited resources, these structural factors do not fully account for the continent's development deficits. Axelle Kabou argues that one of the deepest obstacles lies in prevailing mindsets and attitudes, particularly the psychological dispositions that discourage critical self-examination, innovation, and openness to new ideas ^[8]. This perspective resonates with Smith's notion of deficit thinking, which shows how limiting beliefs and entrenched epistemic assumptions can constrain learning, creativity, and social transformation ^[9]. At the same time, Africa's growing youth unemployment and the persistent mismatch between education and labour market demands expose the limitations of development models that prioritize economic outcomes while neglecting the formation of human capacities and skills ^[10]. These perspectives reveal a significant gap in prevailing development discourse: insufficient attention is given to the moral, intellectual, and civic formation of individuals as the foundation of sustainable development.

These challenges call for a broader understanding of human development that goes beyond improving economic indicators or expanding capabilities. Genuine development should be seen as a holistic process of forming individuals with the moral integrity, intellectual competence, creativity, critical consciousness, and civic responsibility needed to lead meaningful lives and contribute to the common good. This shift from material progress to human transformation addresses a major gap in prevailing development thinking. It is precisely this perspective that Ebenezer Njoh Mouellé advances in *De la Médiocrité à l'Excellence...* where development is understood as a journey from mediocrity to excellence through the cultivation of the human person. His humanistic perspective reconceives human development as a transformative journey from mediocrity to excellence, emphasizing that authentic human development is the indispensable foundation for genuine human flourishing in Africa ^[11]. Against this backdrop, this paper argues that Africa's sustainable future depends not only on economic growth but also on the formation of morally responsible, intellectually capable, and socially committed citizens who can drive inclusive and enduring development.

Njoh-Mouellé's Humanistic Approach to Human Development

Humanism is a philosophical tradition that places the human person at the centre of development, emphasizing human dignity, freedom, reason, and moral responsibility. It is

founded on the belief that individuals possess the capacity to improve themselves and their societies through education, critical thinking, creativity, and purposeful action ^[12]. Beyond material progress, humanism is concerned with the cultural, moral, intellectual, and practical dimensions of human life. Johann Frick, for example, views humanism as the foundation of holistic development, arguing that education, rational inquiry, and moral effort are essential for achieving both individual well-being and social harmony ^[13]. Similarly, Orville associates humanism with human emancipation, social justice, and the pursuit of meaningful lives, while contemporary humanist thought emphasizes autonomy, moral equality, and rational inquiry as the basis for human flourishing ^[14]. In this way, humanism fosters not only personal fulfillment and self-actualization but also social justice, mutual respect, and the common good, creating the conditions for individuals and communities to flourish.

Njoh-Mouellé advocates for a human-centered approach to development that prioritizes human potential over material wealth. He argues that true development stems from nurturing individuals who create universally accepted values, challenging reductionist economic models. In his book *Développer la Richesse Humaine*, he critiques materialism, warning against equating material possessions with existential fulfillment, a confusion that can lead to superficial crises ^[15]. Emphasizing the role of education in fostering critical thinking and creativity, he argues that excellence should be accessible to all, not limited to elites, as he remarks that;

Dans un précédent travail (1) j'ai eu l'occasion d'insister sur cette idée qui est pourtant un lieu commun verbal mais qui malheureusement n'a que trop de mal à se voir concrétiser: l'homme doit être la finalité de tout développement. Nous y revenons peut-être dans le présent ouvrage mais sous un autre angle. Nul ne conteste d'ailleurs cela en théorie. C'est malheureusement dans la pratique quotidienne qu'il nous est donné de constater que ce qui devait se limiter à n'être que les conditions matérielles du développement de l'homme, usurpe le statut de finalité dernière du développement ^[16].

Njoh-Mouellé argues that the human person must remain the ultimate purpose of development. While this principle is widely acknowledged, he contends that development policies often prioritize economic growth, technological progress, and material accumulation over human well-being. For him, this reverses the true purpose of development, reducing progress to what societies produce rather than the kind of people they cultivate. Genuine development should therefore be measured by its capacity to form morally responsible, intellectually capable, creative, and socially committed individuals who contribute to the common good. His humanistic critique calls for restoring human dignity, character formation, and personal excellence to the centre of the development process. As he emphatically asserts:

car le véritable développement est celui qui concerne l'évolution de l'homme individuel et non pas cette espèce de dangereux être que devient la nation en acquérant un gigantesque corps physique constitué par toutes les réalisations, toutes ces domestications de la nature, toutes ces artificialités synthétiques et scientifiques, tous ces asphaltes et ces trésors de pierres précieuses enfermées dans des coffres à combinaisons recherchées ^[17].

The above excerpt captures the essence of Njoh-Mouellé's critique of conventional development by arguing that

genuine progress should be measured by the growth and flourishing of the human person rather than by the accumulation of wealth or technological advancement. He challenges the tendency to equate development with economic expansion, urbanization, or modern infrastructure, insisting that these achievements have little value if they do not improve the quality of human life. For Njoh-Mouellè, material progress should serve human development, not replace it. He therefore advances a human-centered vision in which moral integrity, intellectual excellence, creativity, and personal responsibility are the true indicators of development. This holistic understanding resonates with Kwame Gyekye's view that authentic development must integrate material well-being with moral and ethical flourishing^[18]. It also complements Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, which argues that development should be assessed by people's real freedoms and opportunities to live lives they have reason to value, rather than by economic growth alone^[19]. Together, these perspectives reinforce the idea that sustainable development begins with the transformation and flourishing of the human person.

Njoh-Mouellè offers a profound critique of human underdevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa by arguing that its roots extend beyond economic deprivation to a deeper form of intellectual, moral, and cultural alienation. He contends that individuals are shaped by both external forces, such as consumerism, political propaganda, and mass culture; and internal constraints including poverty, ignorance, poor education, and inherited social conditions^[20]. Together, these forces undermine freedom, discourage critical thinking, and trap people in cycles of dependence and mediocrity. For Njoh-Mouellè, genuine human development begins with the awakening of critical consciousness, the capacity to question inherited beliefs, challenge limiting social conditions, and make free and responsible choices. It is through this intellectual and moral transformation that individuals become active agents of their own development and contributors to the common good. Human flourishing, therefore, is rooted not simply in material progress but in the liberation and transformation of the human person. It is in this context that he states:

Dans notre contexte d'aujourd'hui, nous savons que ces forces extérieures sont infinies: slogans publicitaires, propagandes et endocrinement politiques, les diverses modes vestimentaires, idéologiques et autres, les comportements de masse notamment dans l'attrait identique exercé sur les individus par les nouveaux produits de consommation que déversent sur les marchés les grosses industries modernes, etc. Mais nous n'avons pas cité la pauvreté, l'inculture, les diverses éducations de divers milieux, les tares héréditaires qui constituent aussi autant de facteurs d'aliénation non seulement pour l'homme des pays sous-développés mais également pour l'homme des contrées plus prospères du monde...La chaîne dont nous parlions métaphoriquement plus haut n'est pas autre chose que ce contexte engluant et dépersonnalisant. Il faut pouvoir en sortir pour le connaître dans sa vérité inhumaine de la même manière qu'un poisson doit sortir de l'eau pour découvrir ce que signifie exactement pour lui l'élément liquide. Nous disons que cette sortie, ce décrochage représentent le premier pas vers la liberté^[21].

Njoh-Mouellè's conception of human underdevelopment closely resonates with Frantz Fanon's idea of psychological colonization, in which the colonized internalize the values,

aspirations, and worldview of the dominant culture, becoming alienated from their own identity^[22]. For Njoh-Mouellè, true development begins with a transformation of consciousness, an epistemological awakening that enables individuals to recognize the forces shaping their lives and reclaim their autonomy. This perspective also echoes Amílcar Cabral's call for the recovery of cultural identity as the basis for genuine political and social liberation^[23]. From this standpoint, overcoming passive conformity through critical self-awareness is the first and most essential step toward both personal fulfillment and collective emancipation in African societies.

Humanistic Perspectives of Education in Njoh-Mouellè's Philosophy of Human Development

Humanistic education emphasizes the holistic development of learners by valuing personal growth, autonomy, emotional well-being, and meaning-making alongside cognitive achievement. Khatib conceptualizes humanistic education as an approach grounded in respect for learners' dignity, individuality, and agency, arguing that education should foster self-awareness, creativity, and ethical responsibility to support self-actualization and social engagement^[24]. From this perspective, education is more than the acquisition of knowledge; it is a transformative process that nurtures self-direction, creativity, curiosity, emotional intelligence, critical reflection, and social responsibility. By cultivating these qualities, humanistic education enables individuals to realize their full potential and contribute to the common good. This understanding closely aligns with Ebenezer Njoh-Mouellè's vision of development as the cultivation of human excellence, where education serves as the means through which individuals move from mediocrity to excellence and attain authentic human flourishing.

Ebénézer Njoh-Mouellè's reflection on education is rooted on the humanistic understanding of development that places the human person at the centre of social, economic, and political transformation. He rejects dominant development models that equate progress with economic growth or material accumulation, arguing that such approaches fail to capture the realities of human life. By relying on indicators such as per capita income, conventional development frameworks reduce complex societies to numerical measurements while overlooking essential dimensions of human existence, including dignity, cultural identity, social well-being, moral growth, and personal fulfillment. Against this reductionist perspective, Njoh-Mouellè presents education as the foundation of authentic development. Rather than preparing individuals merely to serve economic systems, education should cultivate critical thinking, moral responsibility, creativity, and autonomy, enabling people to realize their full human potential. For Njoh-Mouellè, genuine development is therefore inseparable from an education that recognizes the human person as both the primary agent and the ultimate purpose of all development efforts, this as he opines;

Ce critère est l'humanité de l'homme ; et, dans cette humanité, la rationalité et la liberté comme valeurs déterminantes. Est misérable et sous-homme, celui qui, dans son comportement, ne manifeste pas ces caractéristiques de liberté et de rationalité. Il est pauvre homme et non nécessairement homme pauvre ; c'est-à-dire qu'il est pauvre en esprit. Nous avons vu que c'est pour la même raison que

l'homme naturel de Rousseau est un sous-homme. Il n'a pas suffisamment exercé sa raison, faculté spécifique de l'espèce et ne connaît que le pouvoir de ses instincts et tendances qui le maintiennent étroitement dépendant de la nature ^[25].

The above excerpt captures the essence of Njoh-Mouellè's humanistic philosophy of education by presenting authentic humanity as the result of cultivating reason and freedom. For him, the deepest form of poverty is not economic deprivation but the absence of intellectual and moral capacities that enable individuals to think critically, act freely, and shape their own lives. Drawing on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of the "natural man," Njoh-Mouellè argues that one is not fully human by birth; rather, humanity is progressively realized through the exercise of reason and the conscious pursuit of self-development. In this sense, education is indispensable to human flourishing because it empowers individuals to transcend instinct, achieve autonomy, and fully realize their dignity. As he affirms, «La fin dernière de l'homme est d'actualiser son humanité, de s'accomplir totalement en créant des œuvres qui se proposent en additions au monde.» ^[26]. Human development, therefore, is not simply the accumulation of material resources but a qualitative transformation of the person, expressed in the growth of freedom, responsibility, creativity, and human excellence.

Njoh-Mouellè conceives educational excellence as a humanistic and transformative ideal that extends beyond academic achievement to the holistic development of the person. In rejecting mediocrity, he emphasizes that excellence is a universal aspiration rather than an elitist privilege. For him, education should cultivate critical thinking, ethical responsibility, creativity, freedom, and social commitment, forming reflective and autonomous citizens capable of transforming society. This view aligns with contemporary conceptions of academic excellence, which emphasize not only high performance but also intellectual growth, innovation, lifelong learning, and the application of knowledge to address societal challenges. As Alhosani argues, academic excellence is sustained through quality teaching, research, strategic leadership, and institutional support ^[27]. Thus, for Njoh-Mouellè, educational excellence integrates intellectual achievement with moral responsibility, making education a catalyst for human flourishing and social transformation. He further argues that:

L'excellence ou alors on ne fait rien du tout...Étant donné ce que nous avons déjà indiqué comme caractéristiques de l'homme excellent il s'agirait pour les éducateurs de concevoir l'éducation de la jeunesse africaine d'aujourd'hui dans le sens indiqué; c'est-à-dire s'attacher à développer chez les jeunes le sens critique, le sens des responsabilités, le goût de la création esthétique et l'amour de la liberté. Ce n'est pas le lieu ici d'indiquer un programme de formation du futur citoyen mais...nous dirions que les programmes d'enseignement et les programmes d'activités dans les divers mouvements de jeunesse devraient accorder une place de choix aux sciences, à la philosophie comme pratique de la réflexion, à l'esthétique non pas du point de vue de la théorie de l'art mais du point de vue de la création proprement dite ; les activités de création artistique, nous l'avons déjà dit dans le précédent chapitre, disposeraient les jeunes à aimer la liberté positive et à résister de toute leur culture aux forces matérielles et mécaniques de déshumanisation ^[28].

To realize this educational vision, Njoh-Mouellè advocates a fundamental reorientation of school curricula and youth development by integrating science, philosophy, and the arts. Science cultivates rational inquiry, philosophy develops critical reflection and ethical reasoning, while the arts nurture creativity, freedom, and the capacity to challenge dehumanizing realities. Rejecting utilitarian models that reduce education to technical training or economic productivity, he envisions education as a humanistic process of intellectual, moral, and cultural liberation. This perspective resonates with Paulo Freire's conception of education as dialogical, participatory, and emancipatory, ^[29] as well as Bernard Fonlon's ideal of the educated person characterized by critical inquiry, scientific thinking, and intellectual curiosity ^[30]. Consequently, Njoh-Mouellè presents educational excellence as a universal human ideal that rejects mediocrity and seeks to form reflective, creative, and socially responsible citizens capable of contributing to human flourishing and societal transformation.

Njoh-Mouellè regards art as an essential dimension of education that nurtures creativity, restores harmony, and cultivates the human spirit. Unlike utilitarian approaches that value knowledge primarily for productivity or economic gain, he sees artistic education as fostering aesthetic, ethical, and existential growth, enabling individuals to resist alienation, consumerism, and fragmented living. Through visual arts, music, drama, dance, and literature, learners develop creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness ^[31]. This perspective is supported by Lukaka, who argues that arts education promotes holistic development by strengthening creativity, academic performance, and cultural consciousness ^[32]. For Njoh-Mouellè, the artist works not merely to produce but to express meaning and reveal deeper truths, making art a humanizing force that affirms creativity, dignity, and spiritual wholeness. He captures this vision when he states:

C'est au service de cet homme individuel que doit se mettre le développement. C'est à lui qu'il faut donner le maximum de savoir nécessaire pour qu'il puisse connaître un réel épanouissement. Sa formation, son éducation devront associer très étroitement l'étude et la connaissance des causes réelles des choses et une sensibilisation convenable à la beauté. À la formation scientifique de l'homme de l'Afrique moderne, il faudra par conséquent associer une solide éducation artistique si on tient à éviter la fabrication de marionnettes et de robots humains ^[33].

The above passage underscores Njoh-Mouellè's call for a balanced education that integrates scientific training with artistic formation. He argues that an education that focus solely on science and technology risks producing technically competent individuals who lack creativity, emotional depth, and critical self-awareness, what he metaphorically describes as "human robots." For him, the arts humanize scientific knowledge by fostering imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, and reflective thinking, thereby promoting the holistic development of the individual. This view is essential for nurturing creativity and critical thinking, enabling learners to generate innovative ideas and respond effectively to complex personal and societal challenges.

More so, Njoh-Mouellè redefines the university as the intellectual conscience and "thinking head" of society, responsible for transforming knowledge into solutions that address social challenges. For him, this mission requires

commitment, intellectual rigor, and purposeful engagement rather than ideological activism. Universities should therefore move beyond the transmission of abstract knowledge to align teaching and research with the transformative needs of society, fostering innovation, autonomy, and collective progress. This vision resonates with contemporary perspectives that regard higher education as a driver of human development, scientific advancement, and national capacity. As Tefera and Altbach argue, universities generate the human and intellectual capital needed for development,^[34] While the African Union's Agenda 2063 likewise emphasizes research, innovation, and quality higher education as essential to Africa's transformation^[35]. Njoh-Mouellé thus sees the university as a catalyst for human flourishing and sustainable societal development, arguing that:

L'Université d'un pays sous-développé doit être résolument orientée vers la recherche des solutions à apporter aux problèmes de développement. L'Université est celle qui cherchera par exemple à résoudre le problème de la conservation du vin de palme, qui dans ses écoles d'architecture, cherchera à mettre au point un type d'habitat qui s'adapte au climat et à l'environnement, qui s'attaquera au problème de la sécheresse, qui accomplira toutes sortes d'études et de recherches que lui confierait le gouvernement. Comme vous pouvez le constater, Université militante est tout le contraire d'une Université très vite satisfaite d'elle-même pour se contenter de dispenser un enseignement froid et sans la moindre préoccupation des problèmes de la société globale. Une Université militante c'est celle qui prend au sérieux son rôle de tête pensante de la Cité. Le militantisme suppose la ferveur, la détermination, l'engagement et l'attachement à une vision du monde ou, plus modestement, à des objectifs clairs et précis^[36].

Njoh-Mouellé in the above except conceives higher education as a humanistic enterprise that promotes both human flourishing and societal transformation. Rejecting the idea of the university as an isolated centre of abstract knowledge, he advocates for a "militant university" that responds to local challenges through socially relevant teaching and research. By addressing practical issues such as food preservation, climate-responsive housing, and drought management, universities become society's intellectual conscience, producing knowledge that enhances human dignity and collective well-being. This vision aligns with Biao's emphasis on lifelong learning, self-worth, and community engagement,^[37] While complementing Gyimah-Brempong et al.'s focus on human capital and economic development^[38]. However, as Cloete et al. observe weak research capacity, inadequate funding, and poor institutional coordination continue to limit the developmental role of African universities^[39]. Together, these perspectives affirm that higher education is essential for cultivating intellectually capable, ethically responsible, and socially engaged citizens who can contribute to sustainable human flourishing.

In all, Njoh-Mouellé's humanistic conception of education emphasizes reflection, discernment, and cultural responsibility as foundations for meaningful transformation. He argues that education should not promote change indiscriminately but must critically evaluate what should be modernized and what deserves preservation, asserting that "...avant que l'éducation et l'activité quotidienne n'achèvent de transformer les mentalités, il faut

s'assurer de ce qu'il convient de changer ou de moderniser et de ce qui mérite d'être sauvegardé."^[40] For him, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge and skills but the formation of the whole person rationally, ethically, and culturally so that learners become active agents capable of balancing tradition and innovation. This vision resonates with humanistic education theories that emphasize learner-centered development, self-realization, empathy, critical thinking, and moral growth. His approach presents education as a transformative process that nurtures human potential while preserving the cultural foundations necessary for authentic and collective human flourishing.

Critical Appraisal of Njoh-Mouellé's Humanistic Perspectives of Development

Despite the strength of Njoh-Mouellé's humanistic vision of education as a pathway to human flourishing, it faces certain limitations, particularly in its normative and philosophical orientation. His emphasis on autonomy, freedom, creativity, and human excellence provides a compelling ideal of education but offers limited practical guidance for curriculum development, assessment, and institutional accountability^[41]. As Korostenskienė notes, humanistic approaches often encounter difficulties in accommodating the standardization and measurable outcomes demanded by contemporary educational systems^[42]. Furthermore, Njoh-Mouellé's focus on individual self-realization and moral development may understate the communal dimensions of learning that are central to many African conceptions of personhood, where human flourishing is deeply connected to social responsibility and collective well-being. Humanistic education also tends to assume conditions of freedom and opportunity that may not exist in contexts marked by poverty, inequality, and institutional constraints^[43]. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the value of Njoh-Mouellé's contribution; rather, they highlight the need to complement his philosophical insights with practical pedagogical strategies and socially grounded approaches that can transform humanistic ideals into concrete educational practices for individual and collective flourishing.

Although Njoh-Mouellé's conception of excellence provides a profound humanistic foundation by emphasizing intellectual growth, moral responsibility, and the realization of human potential, it can be critiqued for paying insufficient attention to the institutional conditions required to sustain such excellence. While he views excellence primarily as a personal and ethical achievement rooted in the transformation of the individual, Jalal highlights the importance of continuous professional development, innovative pedagogy, and supportive learning environments in improving educational outcomes^[44]. Similarly, Jurdi, Rasheed, and Radhakrishnan argue that excellence is not only a matter of individual aspiration but also a systemic process shaped by effective governance, strategic planning, and quality assurance^[45]. Myer further demonstrates that institutional culture, collaborative practices, and visionary leadership are essential in creating environments where individuals can flourish^[46]. From this perspective, Njoh-Mouellé's humanistic approach risks remaining largely aspirational unless it is complemented by concrete structures that enable learners and educators to develop their capacities. Therefore, while his emphasis on human dignity and self-actualization remains essential for human

flourishing, a comprehensive understanding of educational excellence requires integrating personal transformation with the pedagogical, organizational, and cultural conditions that make excellence achievable in practice.

Conclusion

To sum it up, reconsidering human development for human and social flourishing in Africa through Ebenezer Njoh-Mouellè's humanistic philosophy requires placing the human person at the centre of the continent's development agenda. For Njoh-Mouellè, human development is the movement from mediocrity to excellence through the cultivation of human potential. Meaningful development begins with forming individuals who think critically, act ethically, and contribute responsibly to the well-being of their communities. In this sense, human development is a humanistic process that expands people's capabilities, freedoms, and opportunities to live meaningful and dignified lives. At the heart of his philosophy is the conviction that the human person is both the means and the ultimate end of development. Rejecting purely materialistic conceptions of progress, he interprets Africa's underdevelopment not merely as economic deprivation but as a crisis of consciousness marked by dependency, diminished creativity, and the uncritical adoption of external models. Human development, therefore, becomes the foundation for human and social flourishing by nurturing reflective, innovative, and morally responsible citizens capable of transforming both themselves and their societies. Education occupies a central place in Njoh-Mouellè's humanistic philosophy because it is the primary means which can transform individuals from mediocrity to excellence to realize their full human potential. He conceives education as a humanistic and transformative process that cultivates critical reflection, ethical responsibility, cultural awareness, and intellectual autonomy rather than merely preparing individuals for employment or economic growth. From these perspectives, his humanistic educational perception, therefore, becomes a pathway to human flourishing in nurturing morally responsible, creative, and socially engaged individuals capable of contributing to the common good of their communities. He also redefines the role of higher education, positioning the university as society's intellectual conscience, where knowledge, research, and innovation are directed toward solving local challenges, promoting social justice, and advancing sustainable human and social development. Human development from our analysis of Njoh-Mouellè's humanistic perspectives offers a practical pathway to human and social flourishing in Africa to address the continent's interconnected challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality, weak governance, and social fragmentation through the development of people rather than the pursuit of economic growth alone. It requires sustained investment in quality education, development of creative capabilities and critical thinking, freedoms, and opportunities to lead meaningful and productive lives. In the African context, education should be understood not merely as preparation for employment but as a humanistic process that cultivates critical thinking, ethical responsibility, innovation, and active citizenship. By empowering individuals to transform themselves and contribute to the well-being of their communities, human development becomes the driving

force for inclusive, sustainable development and a genuine pathway to human and social flourishing across Africa. Nevertheless, Njoh-Mouellè's humanistic approach also invites critical reflection. While his emphasis on excellence, autonomy, and moral development provides a powerful philosophical foundation for human flourishing, it sometimes gives limited attention to the structural conditions that enable or constrain individual realization. Poverty, political instability, weak institutions, inequality, and limited access to quality education remain significant barriers to human development in many African societies. The capability approach developed by Sen and Nussbaum can strengthen Njoh-Mouellè's perspective by emphasizing that human flourishing requires not only personal transformation but also social, economic, and political arrangements that create genuine opportunities for individuals to exercise their capabilities.

References

1. Reyes GE. "Four Main Theories of Development: Modernization, Dependency, World-System, and Globalization." *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas*, 2001;4:1-15.
2. United Nations Development Program [UNDP]. Human Development Report, 1990, 10.
3. Arimah BC. "Poverty Reduction and Human Development in Africa." *Journal of Human Development*, 2004;5(3):399-415.
4. Annett AM. "Human Flourishing, the Common Good, and Catholic Social Teaching." In *World Happiness Report 2016: Special Rome Edition*, edited by John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs, 38-53. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2016.
5. Las Heras M, Grau-Grau M, Rofcanin Y, eds. *Human Flourishing: A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Neuroscience, Health, Organizations and Arts*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023, 1-2.
6. VanderWeele TJ. On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*, 2017;114(31):8148-8156.
7. Prados de la Escosura L. Human Development in Africa: A Long-Run Perspective. *EHES Working Papers in Economic History*, 2011, (8), 8.
8. Kabou A. *Et Si l'Afrique Refusait Le Développement ?*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1991, 159.
9. Smith T. "Making Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education." *SELU Research Review Journal*, 2016;1(2):50.
10. Economic Commission for Africa. *New and Emerging Challenges in Africa*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2012, 11.
11. Njoh-Mouellè E. *De la Médiocrité à L'Excellence: Essai sur la Signification Humaine du Développement*. Dakar, Sénégal : Nouvelles Editions Numériques Africaines, 2013, 8.
12. Nauert CG. *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 23.
13. Frick J. "On the Survival of Humanity." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2017;47(2-3):344-367.
14. Orville H. "New Humanism and Sustainable Development." *CADMUS*, 2015;2(5):90-100.
15. Njoh-Mouellè E. *Développer La Richesse Humaine*, Yaoundé : Edition Clé, 1980, 19.

16. Ibid. 5.
17. Ibid. 7.
18. Gyekye K. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 15.
19. Sen A. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 4.
20. Njoh-Mouelle E. *De la Médiocrité a L'Excellence*, 2013, 83.
21. Njoh-Mouelle E. *De la Médiocrité a L'Excellence*, 2013, 83.
22. Fanon F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. C. Farrington, Trans. New York: Grove Press, 1963, 210-211.
23. Cabral A. *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974, 61.
24. Khatib M. "Humanistic Education: Concerns, Implications and Applications." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2013;4(1):45-51.
25. Njoh-Mouellé E. *De la Médiocrité a L'Excellence*, 2013, 6.
26. Ibid. 60.
27. Alhosani H, Al Riyami H, Alarabi S, Ayasrah E. "Contemporary Perspectives on Academic Excellence In Higher Education." *Journal of Educational Development*, 2023;45(2):112-129.
28. Njoh-Mouellé E. *De la Médiocrité a L'Excellence*, 2013, 129.
29. Freire P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, 61.
30. Fonlon BN. *Genuine Intellectuals: Academic and Social Responsibilities of Universities in Africa*. Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2009, 86.
31. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). *Visual Arts: Arts Education Curriculum*. Published By The Stationery Office of the Government of Ireland, 1999, 2.
32. Lukaka D. "Art Education and its Impact on Creativity and Critical Thinking Skills: A Review literature." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2023;1(1):1-9.
33. Njoh-Mouellé E. *De la Médiocrité a L'Excellence*, 2013, 116.
34. Teferra D, Altbach PG. "African Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century." *Higher Education*, 2004;47(1):21-50.
35. African Union. *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. Addis Ababa: AU Commission, 2015, 27.
36. Njoh Mouellé E. *Jalons III: Problèmes culturels*. Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 1986, 131.
37. Biao I. "Higher Education and African Development." *Educational Research*, 2014;5(3):107-115.
38. Gyimah-Brempong K, Paddison O, Mitiku W. "Higher Education and Economic Growth in Africa." *Journal of Development Studies*, 2006;42(3):509-529.
39. Cloete N, Bailey T, Pillay P, Bunting I, Maassen P. *Universities and Economic Development in Africa: Pact, Academic Core and Coordination*. Cape Town: African Minds/CHET, 2011, 15-17, 37-39.
40. Njoh-Mouellé E. *De la Médiocrité a L'Excellence*, 2013, 51.
41. Ashworth P, Gerrish J, McManus A. "Humanist Ideology and Nurse Education. 2. Limitations of Humanist Educational Theory in Nurse Education." *Nurse Education Today*, 1997;17(3):196-202.
42. Korostenskienè J. "Toward the Humanistic Paradigm in Education: A Case Study." *Journal of Education, Society & Multiculturalism*, 2022;3(2):50-60.
43. Untari L. "An Epistemological Review on Humanistic Education Theory." *Leksema: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 2016;1(1):9-15.
44. Jalal A. "The Concept of Teaching Excellence in Higher Education." *Journal of Higher Education Service Science and Management*, 2020;3(2):1-10.
45. Jurdi NA, Rasheed FM, Radhakrishnan. "The Concept of Academic Excellence: A Macro Analysis." *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 2019;81:69-74.
46. Myer C. "Creating Excellence Through School Culture: The Target, the Team, and the Tactics." *Excellence in Education Journal*, 2012;1(1):49-77.
47. African Union Commission. *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, 2015.
48. Annett AM. "Human Flourishing, the Common Good, and Catholic Social Teaching." In *World Happiness Report 2016: Special Rome Edition*, edited by Helliwell JF, Layard R, Sachs JD, 38-53. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2016.
49. Arimah BC. "Poverty Reduction and Human Development in Africa." *Journal of Human Development*, 2004;5(3):399-415.
50. Ashworth P, Gerrish J, McManus A. "Humanist Ideology and Nurse Education. II. Limitations of Humanist Educational Theory in Nurse Education." *Nurse Education Today*, 1997;17(3):196-202.
51. Biao I. "Higher Education and African Development." *Educational Research*, 2014;5(3):107-115.
52. Cabral A. *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.
53. Cloete N, Bailey T, Pillay P, Bunting I, Maassen P. *Universities and Economic Development in Africa: Pact, Academic Core and Coordination*. Cape Town: African Minds and CHET, 2011.
54. Economic Commission for Africa. *New and Emerging Challenges in Africa*. Addis Ababa: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2012.
55. Fanon F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
56. Fonlon BN. *Genuine Intellectuals: Academic and Social Responsibilities of Universities in Africa*. Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2009.
57. Freire P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970.
58. Frick J. "On the Survival of Humanity." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2017;47(2-3):344-367.
59. Reyes GE. "Four Main Theories of Development: Modernization, Dependency, World-System, and Globalization." *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas*, 2001;4:1-15.
60. Gyekye K. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
61. Gyimah-Brempong K, Paddison O, Mitiku W. "Higher Education and Economic Growth in Africa." *Journal of Development Studies*, 2006;42(3):509-529.

62. Jalal A. "The Concept of Teaching Excellence in Higher Education." *Journal of Higher Education Service Science and Management*, 2020;3(2):1–10.
63. Jurdi NA, Rasheed FM, Radhakrishnan. "The Concept of Academic Excellence: A Macro Analysis." *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 2019;81:69–74.
64. Kabou A. *Et Si l'Afrique Refusait le Développement?* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991.
65. Khatib M. "Humanistic Education: Concerns, Implications and Applications." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2013;4(1):45–51.
66. Korostenskiën J. "Toward the Humanistic Paradigm in Education: A Case Study." *Journal of Education, Society and Multiculturalism*, 2022;3(2):50–60.
67. Las Heras M, Grau-Grau M, Rofcanin Y, eds. *Human Flourishing: A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Neuroscience, Health, Organizations and Arts*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023.
68. Lukaka D. "Art Education and Its Impact on Creativity and Critical Thinking Skills: A Review of Literature." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2023;1(1):1–9.
69. Myer C. "Creating Excellence Through School Culture: The Target, the Team, and the Tactics." *Excellence in Education Journal*, 2012;1(1):49–77.
70. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. *Visual Arts: Arts Education Curriculum*. Dublin: The Stationery Office, Government of Ireland, 1999.
71. Nauert CG. *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
72. Njoh-Mouellè E. *De la Médiocrité à l'Excellence: Essai sur la Signification Humaine du Développement*. Dakar: Nouvelles Éditions Numériques Africaines, 2013.
73. Njoh-Mouellè E. *Développer la Richesse Humaine*. Yaoundé: Éditions CLE, 1980.
74. Njoh-Mouellè E. *Jalons III: Problèmes Culturels*. Yaoundé: Éditions CLE, 1986.
75. Orville Hd. "New Humanism and Sustainable Development." *CADMUS*, 2015;2(5):90–100.
76. Prados de la Escosura L. *Human Development in Africa: A Long-Run Perspective*. EHES Working Papers in Economic History, no. 8. Madrid: European Historical Economics Society, 2011.
77. Sen A. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
78. Smith T. "Making Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education." *SELU Research Review Journal*, 2016;1(2):50–58.
79. Teferra D, Altbach PG. "African Higher Education: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century." *Higher Education*, 2004;47(1):21–50.
80. United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
81. Untari L. "An Epistemological Review on Humanistic Education Theory." *Leksema: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 2016;1(1):9–15.
82. VanderWeele TJ. "On the Promotion of Human Flourishing." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 2017;114(31):8148–8156.