

Social Sciences and the Development Crisis in Africa Problems and Prospects *

A CODESRIA WORKING PAPER

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The purpose of this paper is *not* to discuss exhaustively the very complicated issue of relationship between social science, research and the present development crises in Africa. The issue needs more space than this brief paper. Our aim is simply to put on the agenda certain important questions and points which we believe should be taken up for serious discussion firstly at the CODESRIA conference in Khartoum, and secondly (perhaps more importantly) among the younger (and older) researchers who are clearly puzzled by the unexpected gap between conventional social science theories and the objective reality of the socio-economic conditions of almost all African countries. We hope that the paper will generate enough discussion so as to advance the cause of a more relevant social science.

The paper is divided into five sections. Firstly we briefly note the basic elements in the colonial legacy at the time of independence. The aim of this is to enable us to confront the African development problem with the ideology of development which has dominated conventional social science to date. A second section, therefore, examines the center-propagated development dogma and its reproduction in Africa over the last two to three decades. A third section briefly attempts to ascertain whether the so-called 'development' performance of the African countries over the last three decades lived up to the rosy predictions of the dominant development paradigm. Noting that the African countries currently find themselves in what we term a 'development crises', we devote a fourth section to raising a number of questions and issues on the specific role of African social scientists and social science research in the crises. Finally, in the last section,

* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the CODESRIA/DSRC Conference in Khartoum, November 1978. A French translation of this paper is available as a CODESRIA Occasional Paper No 2.

we make brief suggestions and guidelines concerning the relationship between research and the present conditions under which African researchers operate.

I - THE INITIAL CONDITIONS - THE COLONIAL LEGACY

Low levels of per-capita income, pervasiveness of mass poverty, poor health conditions, low levels of education as well as of literacy, etc., which characterized all African countries on the eve of political independence, were only the symptoms of the colonial legacy. The roots of the malady were to be found in the nature of the economic, social and political structures inherited from the colonial period. It is the nature of these structures which makes a mockery of the popular notion that African nations, on the eve of independence, were in any way comparable to earlier stages in the development of the currently developed center of the world capitalist system (see section 2).

The logic of colonial development was that the pride of place was given to the external sector. Concretely in Africa, it meant the development of agricultural or extractive sectors *for export*. In this regard, the carrot and the stick (when necessary) were systematically utilized to orient labour and production to these sectors. Food agriculture, for example, was generally neglected except only when it was unavoidable to promote food agriculture in order to cheapen labour. Industrialization either to provide consumption goods or capital goods was systematically refused. The result being, that the small number of industries inherited were simply minor processing industries of the extractive industries, the output of which were likewise exported. The transport, communication and other infrastructure inherited were to serve the imperatives of the externally oriented economy.

Another characteristic of the inherited economic structure was the fact that the most dynamic or critical areas of economic activity, mining, banking, commerce, energy, transport etc. were dominated by well-entrenched foreign private firms; firms which could invariably count on the support (political, military, economic) of their home governments in defense of their «legitimate property rights». The implication of foreign domination for the transfer of surplus from Africa to the developed Center of the capitalist system hardly needs demonstration. Yet the received dogma was for the encouragement of *more* foreign investment !

Massive transfer of surplus abroad through direct transfers of profits, transfer pricing, the banking system mobilizing domestic savings for export, unequal exchange, meant that not only would the level of development of productive forces be uneven but it would, in general, be very low. Thereby, severely limiting the possibilities for technological progress especially in the neglected sectors of the economy.

Colonial domination was only possible through *strict control* over the colonized population and for this purpose highly centralized political institutions had to be created. At the apex were to be found the colonial administrators, at the bottom, the population and at the

intermediate level a newly *created* class of African intermediaries. To ensure the loyalty of the latter, there were the direct appointees and employees of the colonial governments, thus effectively ensuring that, they would be accountable only to the colonial government (as opposed to the population) even when individuals within this intermediary class may traditionally have been representatives of the population. Alongside the intermediaries were to be found groups which emerged to fill spaces created by colonialism (such as middlemen supplying the import export firms, lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc.) and who often than not aspired to greater roles within the system. Thus yet another legacy of colonialism was precisely the creation of classes whose reproduction could only be ensured, not necessarily through colonialism, but through the maintenance of the then existing economic, political, institutional and social structures. If, therefore, it may have appeared that the struggle for independence represented a «harmony of interests» among the various social classes, this «harmony» went only as far as colonialism «as such» and not so far as the need to dismantle the political, economic and social structures.

In addition to the economic domination, the distorted physical and economic structures, the creation of a new class, there was an important ideological factor. The colonial powers through various mechanism, penetrated and convinced the newly-created nationalist class to accept a specific, detailed model of development and the «ideology of development» which buttressed it.

H. 1. - IDEOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND THEIR REPRODUCTION

The distorted physical and economic structures inherited by African countries imposed a heavy burden on the new ruling classes or elites (which took over the states from the colonial powers) as to the options of development strategies they could undertake. One of the factors which aided their choices of development strategies and which has led to the present crises, was the dominant ideology concerning development itself. It is this inherited «ideology of development» which we must now examine. We must do this in order to unload ourselves of this ideological «excess baggage».

A starting point in this process should be an analysis of the emergence of development theory during the process of decolonization. In the late fifties there were, to be sure some theories which sought to provide intellectual respectability to colonial policies. However the dominant trend was for a marked shift in the conceptualization of the process of development. Firstly, colonialism was seen not as a necessary condition to development. It was increasingly viewed as an important restraint on development in that in many countries it inhibited the emergence of the «modernising elites». This view was most clearly voiced by American scholars whose country had no direct interest in old-fashioned colonialism. Secondly, the «Cold War» and the protracted national liberation struggles at the time both called for

a carefully orchestrated process of «decolonization» and the setting into motion of a process of development which would reconcile the newly acquired political independence with the economic dominance of the metropolitan countries on African countries. For this second purpose, development theory had two clearly defined but not mutually exclusive roles. The first one was of a more ideological character and the second one was more praxiological in character.

The praxiological role of development theory was to discuss and elaborate a set of tools for manipulating socio-economic variables in the desired direction. Acquisition of dexterity in the use of these tools (mathematical models, statistical methods etc.) thus became important and with some naive researchers became an end in themselves. It was however, on the ideological level that development theory was to affect African research most profoundly.

At this level, development theory aimed at defining the objectives of development or at least to suppress or trivialize objectives other than those accepted by the dominant classes in both the developed center and in Africa. In this ideological task it became essential for development theory to set up «ideal types» towards which developing countries would strive to move. The «ideal type» for the under developed countries was something very close to the USA socio-economic structures. Accordingly many theories were produced to serve this purpose. Economic theories depicting the virtues of «market economies», sociological theories demonstrating the «universalism» «pluralism» and «social mobility» of American-type economies, psychological theories extolling the mental condition of man in the developed countries («entrepreneurship», high «need-achievement», «individualism») — all these theories were developed as a sharp contrast to the ideal type of the «backward» societies with their «hierarchical», «particularistic», «low motivation», «collectivistic» structures. Given this dominant ideology, the task of social research was therefore supposed to be : (a) to study the process of development in today's advanced nations in the hope of discovering the laws of development ; and (b) to investigate the «obstacles» or hindrances in the internal conditions of underdeveloped countries which had to be overcome if the process of *growth* was to be initiated and achieved.

The other ideological function of development theory was to negate or obviate any alternative patterns of development other than the capitalist one. In view of the demonstrated success of planned industrialization under different socio-economic structures of the socialist bloc it therefore was not enough to loudly proclaim the virtues of capitalism. A more subtle ideological response was required. For example it was necessary to eliminate the need for choice between capitalism and socialism by a systematic trivialization of crucial differences between the two systems and by exaggerating the importance of trivial similarities. The end result of this intellectual process was the declaration of the «end of ideology». This was a brilliantly conceived dogma since by describing the *status quo* and all other alter-

natives as merely metaphysical constructs, it persuaded many, of the irrelevance of radical change and thus reinforced the *status quo*. Consequently this dogma profoundly affected two important areas of development theory, namely, the historical conceptualization of the development process and the fashionable « development planning ».

As far as the historical understanding of development is concerned Rostow's « theory of stages of growth » was to play a very important role. Rostow sought to demonstrate that all societies, regardless of their initial conditions or ideological idiosyncracies were destined to travel the same path — a path along which the USA had travelled the most. In this theory, economic history was shunted on to a single track on which all societies had either travelled or would have to travel sooner or later. The implication of the Rostovian vision on research was that there was a need for research to identify the stages at which various underdeveloped countries found themselves. Never mind how they got there in the first place. It was also implicit that the underdeveloped countries were presently at some point which has already been passed by the developed countries. In some versions of this world view, particularly in the « dualistic theories » of underdevelopment, some special attributes (high population growth rates, « dualism », low man/land ratios, etc.) were conceded to the underdeveloped countries. Nevertheless it was believed that after an initial period during which the effects of these differences would be reduced, these economies would proceed to expand along the path followed by the advanced capitalist countries. The impact of this artful historical amnesia on research and practice in the underdeveloped countries was profound.

Armed with the « end of ideology » dogma, social scientists from all fields were harnessed to the task of accelerating the development process *within* the given institutional framework inherited by African countries, and « development institutes » sprung up in various parts of the developed world, to further this aim. Economists were to identify « key sectors », develop fiscal and monetary tools for increasing savings to accelerate the growth of the key sectors, and to provide the key sectors, and to provide adequate incentives for private investments, etc. Political scientists and sociologists were to search for « modernizing elites » and where these were absent, they were to devise schemes for creating them locally or abroad through scholarships to universities or military academies. Psychologists were to analyse the problems of « the underdeveloped man » to find ways and means to imbuing him with the appropriate psychological attributes such as acquisitiveness, high need-achievement etc. Thus was the role of ideology through social science research.

On the planning side, the dominant ideology was the systematic and vigorous expulsion from its focal concern of anything that smacked of history, especially colonial history. This encouraged a purely technocratic view of planning. Questions as to the class character of the state, or the class content of government policy were scorned upon. Everybody, except for leftist « crackpots » or malcontents, *understood*

that development was measured by GDP per capita, that governments were generally able to draw social welfare functions that took into account the vital interests of all and that such governments generally adopted policies to provide such development through « development planning » and by encouraging international aid, trade and investment. As pointed out by Lall and Streeten (1), there was often the implicit assumption of a fundamental harmony of interests both between different classes within the poor countries and between different nations. « The main conflict was seen to be neither between classes nor between nations but an inter-temporal one : between consumption now and more consumption later, as a result of the saving effort ». Problems of the distribution of gains of development or trade remained largely a concern of Marxists (e.g. Baran, Dobb) some social democrats (Myrdal, Seers) and Latin Americans (Prebisch and the ECLA group). In case this sounds unfair we take the opportunity of quoting at length the assessment of the state of development theory with respect to distributional problems by one of the leading practitioners of conventional « growthmanship », Gustav Ranis. He states the following :

« ...I should emphasize that the current « new orthodoxy » of concern with the downtrodden — echoed in McNamara's speeches and US aid legislation, as well as LDC pronouncements — is indeed of very recent vintage ; as little as five years ago, few academic economists could have seriously placed these items on the agenda of concern without running the risk of intellectual ostracism ; and policy-makers, in rich and poor countries, would have risked even more » (2).

This is an interesting admission not only of the chosen narrow dimensions of the dominant paradigm but also of the repressive character of orthodoxy. It was in this admittedly stifling environment that most of our social scientists were to acquire their knowledge of underdevelopment and the « tool box » for curing the patient. The operation in some cases was successful (high GDP growth rates, rapid industrialization). Unfortunately, however, the patient died.

Given this epistemological background on the ideology of development, we now look more closely at the concrete level of prescription of development strategies.

Prescriptions for Development

As already indicated, « planning » of some sort had become a standard component of the development « tool box ». However there was a fundamental assumption that while detailed planning would be practiced for the public sector, only indicative planning with appropriate incentives would be carried out for the rest of the economy. In general the pattern of planning which was encouraged consisted of large transfers of public funds to the private sector (through « Development Banks », subsidies, tax concessions, loans or provision of

infrastructure on very favourable terms) and of the state performing so-called pioneering activities in lieu of and on behalf of private capitalists (local but mostly foreign). The dominant « strategy » consisted of (a) continued production of primary commodities for export and (b) industrialization through import substitution. An outstanding feature of these twin objectives was their passive acceptance of both the international division of labour and the given structure of income distribution. The import substitution industries were to satisfy the historically generated demand structures which, in turn, were a reflection of the underlying structure of income distribution. As already stated, the dominant development ideology dismissed any concerns over the inherited maldistribution of income and its reproduction by a strategy of industrialization that simply assumed the income distribution (and, therefore, the structure of demand) as given. In some cases, justification for such unequal distribution of incomes was attempted either through *theoretical* models clearly showing that income distribution was the *sine qua non* or the inevitable result of development in the early stages of growth (e.g. the Lewis model of « labour surplus economies ») or by *empirical research* demonstrating that in fact the growing inequality engendered by the adopted strategy was normal in the sense that all capitalist countries had experienced a growth process which entailed increasing inequality at low levels of income and increased equality after crossing a certain per capita income threshold. The empirical work by Kuznets (and its implicit theorising) was the basis for much of the complacency about the growing inequality. A « trickle down » view of the distribution of the fruits of development was generally viewed as the long-run solution to the problem of economic inequalities.

Another fundamental assumption was that the process of import substitution would be carried out with the help of aid or foreign investments. Models stressing the so-called « foreign exchange » gap were developed for planning purposes. This « gap » was to be filled by foreign investments, loans or aid. That these sources of funds — in both their quantity and quality — contributed to creating the gap (through massive surplus transfers ; intensification of import dependence of the accumulation process etc.) was generally not taken seriously. As a result an important aspect of planning was the attraction of foreign capital to fill in the gap. Social scientists, especially economists, were sent abroad on intensive short courses to study ways of attracting foreign investments, to learn how to « sell » their projects to foreign financiers, etc...

Later, with growing evidence on some of the deleterious effects of foreign investments, it was conceded that some kind of « cost-benefit » analysis should be carried out in evaluating foreign investments. On the assumption that the State in African countries was independent and represented the « national interest », it was believed that with sufficient improvements in the State's planning capacity, the African countries would be able to evaluate foreign investments' costs and benefits and achieve optimum gains from foreign investments. The possibility that the State in Africa did not necessarily represent « natio-

nal interests » and that it was not sufficiently autonomous of foreign interests to be able independently to articulate its preferences was hardly considered.

To summarize, the development « strategy » emanating from the dominant paradigm involved continued exports of primary products to earn foreign exchange to cover part of the imports, the « gap » being taken care of by foreign funds, and an import-substitution industrialization based on the *given* structures of income distribution and demand. In a sense terming this set of policies a « strategy » can be misleading if by « strategy » we mean a selection of alternative policies aimed at well-defined objectives. In many cases this « strategy » was forced on African countries just as specialization in primary production was impelled by external events. Furthermore this strategy was the « only strategy » compatible with the internal as well as international power relations. Internally, it was acceptable by ruling groups because it did not call for radical redistribution of income while externally, by giving pride of place to precisely those industries dominated by transnational firms, it placed no hindrance upon the global reach of the transnational conglomerates.

Having discussed the domination of the ideology of development terminating from the center countries, we now briefly examine the reproduction of this ideology in African countries through specific institutions and methods familiar to most of us.

II. 2. - REPRODUCTION OF THE DOMINANT PARADIGM

The immense discrepancy between the predictions and the actual performance of the African countries, as well as the specific response of African social scientists to the dominant development paradigm will be examined later. At this stage, however, we list a few of the factors and conditions facilitating the reproduction of the dominant development ideology in Africa.

(i) *Acceptance by nationalist leaders of the basic tenets of colonial planning* with all that this entailed as far as relations between the State and the private sector was concerned.

(ii) *The overseas training of social scientists and bureaucrats due to lack of adequate training facilities in Africa* (a result of colonial negligence in the educational sphere) and the continued prestige attached to educational institutions abroad.

(iii) *Where local institutions existed, the continued affiliation of these institutions to metropolitan educational and research centres.*

(iv) *The domination of channels of communication (scientific journals, publishing houses etc.) by metropolitan institutions giving the metropolitan educational and research institutes an intellectual hegemony few could withstand.* Through this hegemony, metropolitan institutions and scholars set the standards of scholarship, defined the

values and criteria for evaluating research and delineated the priority areas of research. They were also able to impose a kind of « division of labour » which allotted to the metropolitan centers the more prestigious task of developing the theories and left to periphery institutions and research the more cumbersome and less rewarding task of collecting data which was then « processed » abroad or locally by visiting researchers.

(v) *The infectious optimism of social scientists in the metropolitan countries not only about the resilience of capitalism but also about the dynamism and the basic soundness of such a system.* The « economic miracles » witnessed in the advanced capitalist countries had led to the conviction of the limitless potentialities of social engineering within the capitalist system as had been demonstrated by the success of Keynesian economics in maintaining growth and full employment. Center academics enjoyed an unparalleled position as advisers with their Governments on such diverse matters as foreign policy, counterinsurgency, economic policy and, of course, economic aid and development. And it was not unnatural that African scholars would seek similar roles in their own societies particularly if the Africanization of such advisory roles could be accelerated. In both the center and the periphery this was the age of the « New Mandarins ». Africanization simply demanded that indigenous scholars quickly learn the analytical tools developed abroad and assume the roles temporarily occupied by foreigners.

(vi) *The ambiguous and sometimes uneasy position occupied by researchers in the new African society :* To an extent the dominant development ideology accorded them an important role (« modernizing elites ») and, at least rewards in the early years, meant substantial material rewards. And yet to these rewards were attached severe restraints. In various African countries, the « one party state » (which had often been sanctioned by the dominant ideology's stress on « stability » as a precondition for attracting foreign investment) did not provide a healthy environment for critical research. In several countries retribution for critical thinking was quick and harsh.

(vii) *The lack of appreciation by governments of the value of research* in the development or transformation of societies. In general allocations of funds to research were miserly.

(viii) *The « brain drain » both external and internal.* While the former has received much attention, the « internal brain drain », whereby the researcher is physically in his own country, yet he is professionally employed by foreign institutions (private or public), has received less attention. This had the effect of tying African researchers to tasks foreign to their own societies or whose benefits would accrue to foreign interests.

Given the inherited physical, economic, social and political structures from colonialism, given the class interest of the ruling elites in maintaining these structures (armed, as they were, with the strong center-

generated ideology of development), we may ask whether the so-called development performance of the African countries over the last three decades lived up to the rosy prediction of the dominant development paradigm.

III. - THE PERFORMANCE OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES

During the last two or three decades the prevailing International Economic Order has brought an unprecedented, expansion and prosperity to the developed market economies. During the same period however, the experience of the majority of Third World countries provide a sharp contrast. In Africa in particular, the economies of most countries have deteriorated to the level of serious crises. This situation has adversely affected the life of the majority of the people rather than the small elite. The crisis is manifested in the low rates of growth of total and per capita GDP, increasing income inequality, rising unemployment, lack of structural transformation of the economies, negative rates of growth of per capita food production, ineffective industrial growth, increasing dependence on the World capitalist system, progressively deteriorating terms of trade, growing debts, and instability in the economy.

These aspects of the crisis in Africa's economic development will be briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs. In Africa the annual average rate of growth of real gross domestic product amounted to 4.7 % over the period 1960-70 and 4.1 % between 1970-76. The corresponding rates of growth of real per capita GDP were 2 % and 1.4 % respectively. These rates of economic growth were substantially lower than for the rest of the world, particularly the developed market economies which are the main trading partners of Africa.

As a result of this uneven development of the world capitalist system, the degree of global income inequality has widened even further. Between 1960 and 1970 the average per capita income in the developed market economies increased from \$ 1,500 to \$ 2,980, while in Africa the increase was from \$ 133 to \$ 170, at current market prices. The average per capita income in the Developed Market Economies was eleven times that of Africa in 1960 and increased to eighteen times in 1970.

Moreover the low rates of growth of total and per capita GDP, concealed an even worse performance in the majority of African countries. Between 1960 and 1970, twelve African countries experienced negative rates of growth of per capita GDP, while thirteen countries achieved growth rates of less than 2 %. Between 1970 and 1976 the situation worsened: twenty countries experienced negative annual rates of growth of per capita GDP, and another twelve countries achieved less than 1.4 %. Furthermore the inequality of income in most countries increased, the poor became poorer and the rich got richer. In other words, there was no « trickle down » effect in the few countries which experienced positive growth rates.

The overall dismal performance can be better understood when the sectoral performance is exposed. In the agricultural sector, where

the majority of African people are employed and earn their living, the situation has been disastrous. Between 1960 and 1970 annual rate of growth of per capita food production were negative in 17 countries and this figure reached 29 out of 45 countries for the period 1970-76. This disappointing performance of the agricultural sector, accentuated by drought conditions also led to increased food imports at high prices, thus worsening the precarious balance of payment position of most countries.

The performance of the industrial sector in Africa, while better than that of the agricultural sector, contributed very little to the effective development of most African countries. For a short period 1960-65 the average annual rate of growth of manufacturing output, reached the figure of 10 per cent; higher than in the rest of the world. In actual fact this was mainly a reflexion of a small increment on an initial low level. Between 1965-1975 the corresponding figure dropped to 4.5 per cent which was substantially lower than in the rest of the world. The per capita manufacturing output in Africa increased from \$ 11 to \$ 16 (an increment of \$ 5) between 1960 and 1970 while it increased by \$ 220 in the Developed Market Economies and \$ 430 in the Centrally Planned Economies of Eastern Europe over the same period. Over a period of 20 years i.e. between 1950 and 1970 the share of manufacturing output in Africa's GDP increased from 7.3 per cent to 11.5 per cent, which was far below the corresponding share of manufacturing in the Developed Market Economies which amounted to 32 per cent. The share of Africa in world manufacturing output remained constant at 0.6 per cent over the same period of 20 years.

On scrutinizing the nature of the industrial sector, it quickly becomes clear that we can take little comfort from the relatively better performance of this sector. The manufacturing industries established over the last two decades in Africa (with the exception of a few countries) were basically import substitution industries, producing mostly different types of consumer goods for the limited internal market of the middle and high income privileged groups. Moreover these industries were mainly owned, financed and managed by foreign companies. The production itself had very weak forward and backward linkages with the rest of the economic sectors dependent on foreign capital and even raw materials in many cases. It had little contribution to the growth of the GDP, to the expansion of employment or the spread of industrial technical know-how. It thus contributed very little to the task of transforming and developing the African economies.

The performance of the foreign trade sector partly reflected the lack of substantial growth and positive structural transformation of the economy and partly reflected the adverse effects of the prevailing International Division of Labour. The heavy dependence of African economies on the unstable revenues from one or two primary commodities or minerals continued; the imports are still dominated by both capital and consumer goods, the latter being mainly for the upper income groups. More recently food imports has increasingly assumed a significant proportion of the total import bill. The annual growth of exports

of African countries (excluding oil producing countries) was lower than the corresponding growth promoting factor to the African economies. Furthermore the terms of trade, for Africa (excluding oil exporting countries) deteriorated seriously over the period 1950-75, while the terms of trade for the developed capitalist countries were favourable. The balance of trade was negative for the majority of African countries over the same period. Another feature was that of inflation which accelerated substantially in the later part of the 1960s and in the 1970s. In consequence of the excessive external dependence of the African economies, a good part of this inflation was imported to Africa. Inflation coupled with recession in the developed market economies led to a sharp fall in the value of export commodities while at the same time import prices rose sharply. Another aspect of the deepening crisis of the African economies was the growing debt burden of most African countries. The debt burden of the region rose from \$ 7 billion in 1965 to \$ 28 billion in 1974. Thus the crisis is growing and is affecting all aspects of life — economic, social and political of most African countries, in spite of the favourable natural resources, and favourable balance of population to natural resources.

Prospects for the next two decades

« The ECA Secretariat has attempted an extremely tentative projection of prospects for the African economy. If past trends were to persist and if there are no fundamental changes in the mix of economic policies that African governments have pursued during the past decade and a half and if the current efforts to change fundamentally the international system and relations fail to yield concrete positive results, the African regions as a whole will be worse off relatively to the rest of the world at the end of this century than it was in 1960. Even the overall average rate of growth in GDP of developing African countries would still fall below the target rate set under the Second Development Decade. We estimate the average annual growth rate, based on the above-mentioned assumptions, to be 5.5 % for the rest of the century.

Within Africa, our estimates reveal the prospects of even greater disparities in income and levels of development among the countries »(3.)

This gloomy assessment of the present situation and of the coming two to three decades is based on research carried out by economists who are well known for their past and present confidence in the dominant development theory and its accompanying « tool box » of techniques.

IV. - SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND THE PRESENT DEVELOPMENT CRISES IN AFRICA

Given the dismal performance of Africa's so-called economic development and the consequent serious social and political problems facing African countries, we have to ask the question, « What role have African social scientists played in the last 15 to 20 years in relation to this so-called development process in Africa » ? Have they for

example played a role of providing *scientific legitimacy* to what is presently called development in Africa ? Or on the other hand have they contributed to the understanding of the deeper forces behind the present crises in Africa's development ? That is to say, have they foreseen or predicted the present crises and its consequences ?

As everywhere, social science research in Africa can be categorised into 2 types. The first and the most dominant type, is what we can only call Conventional Development Research. The second is what we refer to as Critical Research.

IV. 1. - CONVENTIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Conventional Development theories of social science emanating from the center countries, is deeply rooted in the experience of European and North American capitalist development. Yet it is this same social science which has dominated African research institutions. The basic characteristic of such conventional development research are (a) they use an *ahistorical* approach, (b) a static functionalist view of social structures, (c) a claim of ideological neutralism cauched in terms of « scientific objectivity »; (d) compartmentalization of social sciences into various « disciplines » and within each discipline, further fragmentation into so-called « specializations ».

In addition each discipline accepts in its own way the dominant paradigm, or elaborates on some special aspects of this paradigm. As a result conventional development research is essentially fragmented in the sense that the micro units, which are its main pre-occupation, are isolated by disciplinary boundaries from their proper socio-economic context. The absence of a holistic view of the social process then becomes the striking characteristic of conventional research guided by the dominant paradigm. Even when attempts at a more holistic view are made (like the so-called interdisciplinary approaches) they are ultimately vitiated by the fundamental weaknesses of the various disciplines, since each discipline in its own way, brings to the totality, its own ahistoricism, its functionalism, and its implicit values disguised under the veil of its parts (as would be the case in a truly holistic approach), « interdisciplinary studies » are more or less the lowest common denominator of the various disciplines. (e) In general conventional research rarely studies fundamental issues of the development process. And when some researchers do, the witness of the fundamental assumptions of conventional social science (functionalism, neutralism, ahistoricism), and the inappropriate methodology developed as a result of the assumptions, the result of such research becomes at best reformist and at worst apologetic. The implicit and sometimes explicit function of conventional research is the oiling of the machine of the given social system. Thus such research logically tends to focus on technical problems on the functioning of the system, on fragmented, unrelated operational problems, which are compartmentalized by disciplinary boundaries, etc. Given this general role of conventional research, it is thus difficult for such research to view scientifically the total development process.

(f) Conventional development research has developed sophisticated techniques in all the disciplines of the social sciences, — in economics, sociology, anthropology, political science and administration, education, linguistics etc. Such techniques, whether as analytical tools or those concerned with the method of conducting research, are interesting and useful, but within the given framework of conventional social science itself. These techniques play an important mystifying role and that their very complexity is often used as a measure of the high scientific quality of the research. This is a very important issue in social science which needs further discussion elsewhere.

As indicated above the basic function of conventional development research is to find out how institutions work or function and to provide technical solutions to any bottle necks. In Africa most of our research therefore focussed on the following areas. (a) Policy formulation — that is to say the collection of data in order to formulate policies regarding the development of different sectors of the socio-economic system. (b) The problems of implementing such policies in society — institutional arrangements and the social administrative problems encountered in the effective implementation of such policies.

(c) The effects of government development policies on different categories of population in the society — such as rural population as opposed to the urban population, the effect of policies on children for example or the youth, women or the unemployed etc.

In general, whatever the area of focus of such research they tend to reach one or other of two conclusions. Either that the development policies are correct and that their implementation is causing no problem to the population, or alternatively, that some specific policy or decision, is faulty, and that its implementation has faced or is faced with certain problems. In this second case, such research tends to advocate certain specific changes and reforms, either in policies or in the mechanism of implementation, with the objective of improving the existing socio-economic system. However, neither type of research raises questions on the basic objectives of the socio-economic system or the development strategies. There are of course, some rare research which raises questions about the social system itself. But these are exceptional cases.

IV. 2. - CRITICAL RESEARCH

In contrast to conventional development research, critical research tends to enquire into the nature and objectives of the very process of social and economic development itself; the history and evolution of the process, its present state and its future movement. In addition such research assumes that the social process and movement in society i.e. the development process, is not harmonious, but is based on conflicts and contradictions between different forces within the society. Central to the methodology of critical research, are such concepts as the mode of production, social formation, class, class alliances and class formation. The above assumptions and methodology are applied in all critical research, whatever the unit of the study, be it the macro-unit of the nation state, the micro-unit of the village or the continent itself. Resear-

chers using this approach often have an explicit assumption that socio-economic systems should be egalitarian and that resources in a given society should be distributed on an equal basis between different groups in society. If it is not, then it should be the aim of the research to expose the maldistribution of such resources. Thus this type of research tends to be highly critical of any development strategies which assume differentiation in income as an essential and permanent feature of the very process of development itself.

The two types of research do not, of course exist separately, each within its own impenetrable shell. In fact, there are many points of tangency determined largely by the identity of the problematic. As pointed out earlier, some social scientists doing conventional development research do focus their analyses on fundamental issues of development and often make important, largely empirical contributions to the understanding of underdevelopment. One need only mention the seminal contributions by such scientists on our knowledge of the magnitudes of poverty and inequality in Africa, the extent of trade penetration of African economies by transnational firms, the problems of trade of our economies, the impact of technological changes in the utilization of our human and natural resources. In these and other crucial areas one finds some of the more radical conventional social scientists contributing basically to the stocks of our knowledge concerning the symptoms of underdevelopment. But such work fails to give a deeper diagnosis of the phenomenon of underdevelopment. The limitations of their approach once again appears at the level of policy formulation or prescription. Here recommendations are made without due consideration to their political feasibility or compatibility with the existing class structure. And here conventional social science lapses into dangerous forms of utopianism by shying away from the examination of the social forces which are supposed to carry out their recommendations. Ultimately, we are left with a voluntarism that presupposes that precisely those social forces responsible for the crises can be induced to carry out the « correct » policies which would eventually affect the interest of those forces. On the other hand, social scientists carrying out critical research have relied on the empirical research produced by the conventional researchers. It ought to be admitted here that critical researchers have been more pre-occupied with the « larger » issues and less with empirical research on particular phenomena, on the micro-level. Furthermore there are also some critical researchers who have applied less rigorously their analyses of social systems emerging in Africa thus tending to accept such systems uncritically and sometimes apologetically.

During the last twenty years, the number of our social scientists has increased considerably and consequently, the quantity and quality of research undertaken by us has also increased in all areas of social sciences. Similarly our institutional control is now almost total compared with the earlier periods after independence. On the whole, the quality of the work produced by our researchers has varied, ranging from excellent and high quality research from the perspective of conventional social science, to rather poor quality research even by the standards of traditional social science.

A survey of social science research in Africa indicates that most of our research is done within the framework of conventional development research. There are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, as explained earlier, there is the dominant role and influence of metropolitan social science and scientists over African institutes, universities, and ourselves as researchers. This is an important factor which should not be ignored. Secondly, there is our often ambiguous and vascilating class position in our own societies. Although most of us individually originate from peasant and working class families, nevertheless, by the time we become social scientists and researchers at the university, research institutes or within government departments our economic position has improved to the level near to the ruling classes of our countries. Furthermore many of us do have important personal, professional, economic and political links with members of the bureaucracy — in the parastatals and states — as well as with politicians. Our position as intellectuals in our societies therefore needs to be carefully examined in that some of us may have provided scientific legitimacy to the development policies which have led to the present crisis while others may have for sometime now, advocated a serious, sincere but unheeded critique of these same policies.

As a group of intellectuals, whose economic position is basically at the same level as that of ruling classes in our societies, and as a group which has strong and diverse linkages with the ruling classes, our role in the development of the present crises is complicated and therefore needs serious examination and analyses. Historically and in many different societies and social formations, there have been different tendencies within the intellectuals as a group. Because of the very nature and function of the group i.e. people who deal with, generate and advocate ideas about the development of society, such a group cannot be homogenous. We believe that this general principle also applies to us as intellectuals or social scientists, in Africa.

Our role in the evolution of the present development crises in our countries need serious analyses and research. It does not lend itself to easy « white and red » labels. Nevertheless we think that there are a number of tendencies within ourselves — as a group of intellectuals.

Firstly there are some of us who not only have direct connections with the ruling classes (bureaucrats, politicians, local bourgeoisies), but who also sincerely believe in the scientific validity of the development model emanating from the metropolitan countries. Those of us who belong to this tendency, have, as intellectuals, obviously provided scientific legitimacy to the development process which has taken place in Africa during the last two to three decades and which has ended in the present crises. Thus those of us who belong to this tendency, are either convinced of the scientific validity of the conventional development theories and therefore will continue to do research on this basis or there are those who, given the present crises, are disillusioned and therefore are prepared to change their « intellectual stand ».

Secondly, there are many of us, who, though have extensive contacts with the ruling classes and whose economic position is quite high,

nevertheless have become disillusioned by the conventional social science research because of the present crises and because of our deep-seated sentiment for the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the poor. For those of us who belong to this tendency, the present crises offers an important occasion not only to support critical research, but also to look more carefully beyond the critique to look seriously at the alternatives to the present crises, as we point out in the last section of this paper.

During the last two or three decades the dominant school in our institutions has had little to say on the deteriorating situation within African countries. Indeed, during the sixties, most of us who belong to the school and along with our European and American counterparts, tended to uphold and defend the ideas that the economic and social development in African countries was on the right path and that there was in fact progress being made. It was only in the late sixties and the seventies, when the objective reality in the form of the deterioration in the economic performance of African countries, and the consequent surfacing of social and political problems, when this dismal reality of the African situation became clear to everyone, that social scientists in Africa and in the center countries began to offer some explanations as to why the situation is not as rosy as they had argued before. Thus a number of theories began to emerge explaining why there has been lack of development and progress. These explanations are well known and can be briefly enumerated as follows :

a) The deteriorating international terms of trade and the rise of every costs is often given as a key explanation to the lack of development and indeed as the cause of the economic deterioration in African countries.

b) The high birth rate in African countries is the main bottleneck hindering development.

c) There was and still is another school which explains lack of development in terms of mis-management and corruption of bureaucrats and politicians.

It is important to note that these explanations first appeared in books on Africa written in Europe and North America and also in many reports of international organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD.

The above « Theories », if they can be called that, neither individually nor collectively really explain the failure of development strategies in African countries. If anything the « so-called », « population problem », « terms of trade problem », the corruption and mismanagement problem, etc. are in themselves significant symptoms, the result of the failure of a particular model of development rather the cause of the failure.

In contrast to the above « explanations » of the development crises, the few scientists undertaking critical research have for some-time given a different explanation. They have pointed out that, (a) the model of development itself is inappropriate for Africa because

its beneficiaires are the foreign firms and the small ruling classes in Africa and its victims the majority of our people; (b) that our ruling classes have failed to change the distorted inherited economy — either by revolutionary method or even through reformism — because they did not (and from the vantage point of their class interests had every reason not to) involve the people in the political system and their participation at all levels of decision-making. Thus the acceptance of the model of development (described earlier) by the ruling nationalist elites after independence was simply an expression of the implicit alliance between them and the foreign firms. Ironically the « development » which logically resulted from this model, has led to the present crisis, which in addition to marginalizing the poor majority is now failing to sustain the ruling classes themselves (because the African economies are in crises). This explanation, based on the analyses of the internal social structure of African countries, has been advocated by a few of our critical researchers for some time now, but as is to be expected, without heed.

As explained earlier, the lack of originality in our dominant social science research in Africa (as compared to the Latin-American situation) and our inability to predict the inevitable failure of development policies adopted by African governments, can partly be explained by the strong influence and domination of the intellectual climate in Africa, and by those few of our intellectuals who supported this domination because of their class position. The latter point is important because despite the dismal economic performances of most African countries, nevertheless some of our intellectuals (whether directly linked to the states or linked to the major institutions of society including higher education) have indeed improved their economic situation compared to what it was in the early sixties. Hence, it is to the interest of this particular section of the intellectuals to provide scientific legitimacy to the process of development out of which it gains economically.

In addition to the above factors, there are also other important factors which have inhibited our African social science from growing into a strong school with indigenous roots and with a strong section which continuously provides a critique of the development experience of the continent (as is the case in Latin America). The most important factor is the recent colonial past from which Africa has emerged. This fact has the following implications.

(i) During the colonial period there was, in many African countries, especially south of the Sahara, a total lack of social scientists and social science institutions. Consequently for a long time after independence the newly trained social scientists and the newly built social science institutions continued to be controlled by social scientists from the former colonial countries.

(ii) As a result of the lack of indigenous social science manpower, there was thus little accumulated knowledge from continuous extensive research by our own researchers which could then be used to generalise the African experience.

(iii) There was and still is very little horizontal linkages between our research institutes and social scientists from different regions of the continent. This is partly because of the strong traditional vertical linkages with the center and also because of the language problem. This lack of homogeneity in communication and also lack of contacts for exchanging experience between our social scientists have thus hindered the growth of our own African school of thought rooted in the African experience.

Despite this powerful status of the dominant and establishment-based social science in Africa, there have always been some of our colleagues who have undertaken what we have called critical research which has seriously questioned the development strategies adopted by African countries. These researchers, who have been very few, were scattered, often marginalised in institutions of higher education. Having no institutional base to undertake research on a collaborative basis and no resources to widely disseminate the results of their research they were thus often ignored and their views sometimes actively blocked. Hence their ineffectiveness. However, in the last few years, because the objective reality of Africa, has by and large, vindicated their general views and findings, more and more African social scientists are now re-examining their own conventional approach to research and at the same time adopting the approach of those undertaking critical research on fundamental issues.

The Alternative : Suggested Guidelines for Social Sciences Research in Africa.

If the performance of African countries has been dismal because of the development strategies adopted in the past, and if the future will be as grim as the establishment-oriented ECA predicts, what then should be our role as African social scientists ? Should we take a minimalist position of simply generating ideas on how to salvage the present situation through reforms ? Or should we work for and advocate alternative development strategies which focus on the well-being of the poor majority and their participation in decision-making at all levels, strategies that hopefully are likely to avoid similar crises now facing African countries ? Whatever the role we as African social scientists play, we believe that we will now and in future work under two broad conditions.

Firstly, the majority of our social scientists will continue to do research in countries which have peripheral capitalist economic systems — that is to say countries which still continue to base their development strategies within the framework of the so-called free markets with government intervention in certain key economic and social sectors. Those of us undertaking research under these conditions should carefully look at the guidelines recently synthesized by a group of Third World social scientists at a workshop on Development Theory.* The guidelines are as follows :

* Workshop on Development Theory, held at Västerhanding, 8-12 August 1978. See SAREC REPORT R3 : 1978.

1. « The basic objectives of development includes the improvement of the conditions of life and the opportunities to develop human capacities of the poor majorities in the under-developed countries, with their participation in decision making at all levels. These aims also include the goal of national independence.
2. Development in this sense implies structural changes fundamentally altering power relationships among social classes and states. Therefore, the overall objectives of development research should be to analyse the nature and functioning of present local, national and international structures and to reveal what social forces might be instrumental in changing them in the directions mentioned above.
3. We realize that research can aid in bringing more clarity and rationality into the debates on development, especially by highlighting the contradictions in processes of social change. We should not delude ourselves into thinking that intellectual perception, and not social forces, determines history. We believe, however, that intellectual endeavours interact with social forces and may influence them in certain crucial moments
4. Conventional development theory is poorly equipped to deal with structural change. This is why critical development researchers on Third World problems have been searching for more adequate theories. Serious theoretical efforts in this direction should be strongly supported.
5. At the same time, development research should be focussed on crucial problems not only as perceived by intellectuals and governments, but also as experienced by the social groups that are now bearing most of the burden of social transformation.
6. Development, like all social processes, implies conflicts. Otherwise, they would be technical, not social and political issues. Development research therefore deals with both problems and policies.
7. Research on development problems, policy alternatives and policy instruments should always take into account the differential implications for various social groups directly or indirectly involved. It is important, for example, to show how women are affected by development.
8. The social forces most likely to bring about the kind of change implied by development are often only poorly represented, or not represented at all, in existing power structures, such as governments and other institutions, whether they be local, national or international. Exactly which these forces, or combinations of forces are differs from one situation to another. Researchers should attempt to identify those classes and groups prejudiced by existing social institutions and trends, and they should design their studies so as to reach these groups.

9. It is now widely recognized that what happens in the developed countries is of crucial importance to development. Additional emphasis should be placed on research designed to better understand how the structures and policies of the developed countries affect development in the Third World and what social forces might be mobilized in the rich countries to support the poor in their struggles.
10. This brings us to the problem of research accountability. Good development research can be used for bad purposes. The researcher, however, should take particular care to design and disseminate his studies in a manner calculated to be used easily by those groups and social forces working for development ».

We agree with and support the above quoted guidelines because we believe they are particularly appropriate to our African situation. We think they will help those of us who are disenchanted with conventional development theories.

There are of course a minority of our social scientists who will be working in countries which have opted for « delinking » from the imperialist world system, reducing their economic dependency, and which have opted for the building of socialist societies. We believe these researchers will face different sets of problems, both theoretical and practical. Firstly there is the very important issue of the nature of socialism itself and secondly there are the many questions concerning the strategies for the « transition to socialism », especially given the present conditions in African countries (inherited from colonialism and often entrenched after independence), and thirdly given the present world situation and the evolution of the balance of forces. We believe these issues need serious study.

« National Self-Reliance » for example has often been proposed as the only viable alternative to the present dependent strategies adopted by many African countries. It is argued that self reliance will lead to « real development », i.e. development for the benefit of the exploited masses and also for the benefit of the nation as a whole, since real national independence is a pre-requisite for development for the masses. We believe that the case for the above assertion, even if it is correct at a higher level of general abstraction (in contrast with the opposite strategy of dependent peripheral capitalist development), has not really been proved yet in practice and that many theoretical aspects of the strategy for self-reliance and its operational problems still need further studies and clarification without which it will be difficult for this strategy to stand up to the present struggle between it and the dominant conventional development thinkings.

The meaning of self-reliance itself is still unclear and often so vague that it can just be an additional rhetoric. The starting point to reduce this vagueness is, in our view, an indepth analysis of the class structures and class struggles operating in African countries, an analysis of the actual social changes at all levels (relations of production,

organization of political power, ideologies, etc.). We believe that this is particularly important in those countries which had intensive popular struggles and which per force had to organize the masses and as a result of which the actual demands of the masses came to the fore front. It is on this ground that it is necessary to have a better understanding of the nature of class alliances and the leadership that can struggle for such strategy, initiate, sustain and develop it.

The coming of the masses to the fore front of the political life, through autonomous organizations, (a pre-requisite for any significant change in the relations of production) indicates the high priority which should be given to research dealing with the democratization of the state, its institutions and the participation of the masses in all levels of decision making.

To be realistic, the real problems start whenever such pre-conditions are, « amorcés » (started), by some positive political move. What should be the strategy for such a popular development in the African countries ? How can a general formula such as « agriculture as the basis and industry as the engine » be concretely implemented ? What type of agricultural development ; what degree of « modernisation » (mechanisation or not etc.) ? What type of industries are to be given priority i.e. those industries in a position to sustain agriculture ? Certainly a balanced critical appraisal of some of the experiences developed in Africa and elsewhere (such as Ujamaa in Tanzania, the cooperatives in Modibo's Mali, the « new farmers » in Nkrumah's Ghana, the reforms of the folsoloma in Madagascar, the Nasser's Egypt cooperatives, the domains of Algeria etc.) is a necessary starting point.

Needless to say, in all these experiences, those which failed as well as those on-going, the bottlenecks of external relations da appears as one of the most serious constraint. This bottleneck is often too quickly reduced to a question of « size » (smallness) of African countries. But the historical experience of larger countries elsewhere do invite us to reflect more systematically on fundamental questions such as the relevancy or not of available « technologies », the ways and means to create a capacity to *absorb* technology and from there connect and develop it according to the actual needs to make it really « appropriate » etc.

Again answers to those real problems in very general terms such as the substitution of the prevailing process of integrating African countries to the present world system, with « collective self-reliance » i.e. economic cooperation amongst developing countries, is not an answer. A critical appraisal of the rhetoric of « collective self-reliance, TCDC and other new fashions in the world of international institutions would help us to understand the real aim of the forces (operating behind this screen) which are pushing these so-called alternative strategies. A lot has to be done in this respect, and the few studies on, for instance, so called « sub-imperialism » are no more than a starting point.

This paper is offered to our brothers and colleagues, as a kind of manifests on the central problem/issue of the relationship between social science and development in the *specific* context of the African situation. We and CODESRIA welcome a debate on this strategic problem facing Africa for the next 20 years i.e. to the end for this century.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sanjaya Lall and Paul Streeten: **Foreign Investment, Transnationals and Developing countries**, MacMillan Press Ltd, London, 1977.
2. Gustav Ranis « Development theory at three-quarters centure » in Manning Nash (Ed.) : **Essays on Economic Development and culture change in Honor of Bert F. Hoselitz**, Economic Development and cultural change, vol. 22, suppl. 1977.
3. A Adedeje, Executive Secretary of ECA, **Africa Guide**, 1978 (Europa publications).