

The Role of Research Institutes in Socialist States in Africa

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This paper will present, very briefly, the following argument : that research and research institutes in Africa and the Third World in general, constitute one of the *critical* factor for development. This is especially true for countries aspiring towards socialism in Africa. This view is based on the following reasons :

Firstly in countries which have opted for socialism, research and research institutes have to successfully undertake the twin problems of research and development in a way unprecedented in the history of mankind. The twin problems involve the search for and the discovery of the process of social development. As is well known data and research information on such a process is critically lacking or is unreliable in Africa and other Third World countries. (The other part of this problem is that research and research institutes have to guide or shape strategy of development, of human action.) Secondly, research institutes have to undertake purposeful functional research by (especially) studying and analysing internal economic and social conditions within the confines of the world situation in order to determine the characteristics, variables and criteria for rational economic and political actions within a given country. This is necessary because of the external orientation of the inherited economies of such countries. The problem is further aggravated by the lack of scientific manpower because of the adverse historical experience of the countries during colonialism and even later during neo-colonialism. In particular, there was very little planning for creating research infrastructure during the colonial period. The cumulative result of this neglect has made it difficult for countries which have adopted socialism to undertake serious planning for a radical restructuring of their economies. Hence the weakness of research is an important factor in the problematique of socialist transformation in Africa.

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In order to evaluate research activity and research institutes in Socialist aspiring countries in Africa we have to take into consideration a number of factors. Firstly the colonial economy conserved the labour process and therefore productive forces as well. Economic backwardness was itself a disincentive to research except within the confines of conventionalism which served merely to perpetuate the structural as well as the technical weaknesses of African countries. There is therefore a serious need for the transformation of researchers and research institutes in order for them to fulfil a new task of the restructuring of the inherited economies. This is because African countries suffer generally from institutional weakness. Weak institutions were inherited at the time of constitutional independence and attempts at their transformation in some countries have not fully succeeded. Secondly the adverse and perverted legacy of the colonial education system, (itself conditioned by colonial economies and institutional organization) deeply affected research and the organization of research. The colonial education system rigidly separated education from training. It over-emphasized the training of a colonial administrative middle class with serious effort to make this class supportive of colonialism and at the same time seriously ignored technical and scientific education. Indeed in East Africa, African women were not permitted to read science courses in school until the last days of formal colonialism. Higher education was also highly restricted for Africans except for the few required by the colonial bureaucracy.

A backward educational system inherited at constitutional independence is one of the most debilitating factors against research for socialist transformation. In addition to the glaring lack of technical and scientific manpower, the small intellectual community is itself not homogeneous, but is politically diverse because of the class origin and training experience locally and overseas. In many African countries, the educational system — both at lower and higher levels — is still deeply dominated by ideas which are contradictory to any form of socialist development. Under such educational system, it is very difficult to develop fully a cadre of researchers with critical and creative research attitudes capable of handling complicated social situations of the transition period. Under neo-colonial situation the intelligentsia remains weak and dependent on international linkages — both intellectual and financial. Irrespective of the social origins of the intelligentsia (whether of worker, peasant or feudal origin) they are generally objectively placed to serve the capitalist system — both local and international. It is therefore necessary for the intelligentsia to be liberated, as a precondition, if he is to participate in socialist progress because « the exploitation of talent, of mental workers, which humiliated the intellectuals' human dignity and cripples his mentality, takes forms which are as cruel as the exploitation of physical labour ». Few of our intellectuals realise this objective truth (1). It follows that researchers and research institutions must develop a new « culture of labour, culture of organization and economic organization », of « scientific and technical thought » and of self perfection and self-criticism of each individual research (2).

Finally as a result of the above historical experiences some of the intellectuals in socialist aspiring African States are often weak in serious analytical approach, lack self-confidence and may thus often become opportunist and apologetic in their researches on socio-economic phenomena. Indeed they are sometimes given to intellectual imitativeness and imprecise conclusions when they do not engage in serious and rigorous empirical and theoretical research. Walter Rodney once lamented about the progressive elements

Having adopted Marxism or Scientific Socialism as a framework of analysis one may or may not apply it to one's environment. Besides, Third World intellectuals are very fascinated by models that were historically applicable to societies outside of their own. The principal model was Russia at one time, while later on it became China. There are very few who have had the courage (because it does take a lot of courage and a lot of energy) to deal with their own situations and to come up with the relevant answers (3).

This situation is worsened by the disorganised fractionalised character of progressive elements amongst the intellectuals. The consequence of this phenomenon is the presence of critical shortages of functional and applied research in most socialist aspiring states in Africa. There is therefore a need for the transformation of research and research institutes in order to ensure rigorous scientific research and in order to provide practical solutions to problems of transition so that the ordinary person is then convinced of the necessity of the strategy of socialism and self-reliance. Results of such research must find wider application and circulation in a democratic manner. In other words correct methods of inquiry are required to discover social forces that are potentially progressive and which may be harnessed for socialist reconstruction of society. Our researchers must therefore be equipped with relevant and suitable professional training, socialist consciousness and commitment and fully develop mental faculties and attitudes towards society and social development.

If we are to gain understanding of the laws that govern social change... we have to examine the facts, make generalizations, and check these against other facts. And the chief course of relevant facts is history... By studying it we can hope to learn the laws of social development and then we can apply our knowledge to shape the future — not by wishing that it shall go in such — and — such a way, but by knowing which course of action now will lead in the direction we desire (4).

Thus the objective of our educational system must be to educate and train as well as re-educate and re-train our intellectuals in order for them to be equipped with proper tools of analysis enmeshed into deep knowledge of the theory of social development. This is an urgent assignment because the training of our present intellectuals was not essentially geared to socialist development. That is why much of research is given to economism and short-range perspectives and fundamental research is lacking.

The next major argument arises from the preceding postulations. This is that research activity and education and training must be treated in their totality for three reasons. First, both education and training and research, and research policy are powerful political ideological categories. They are also scientific and technological instruments. In both these aspects, they are not neutral and do serve the interests of the ruling class which normally control the state. In our epoch research and research institutions, as part of the whole educational system, are dominated by and are instruments of imperialist penetration. Transnational corporations have their hold on African universities, on the training of research cadres, on research grants and building and maintenance of research institutions. In addition, it has become fashionable for many expatriates to masquerade as research experts on so called « development » problems of Third World countries. The consequence has been that research has tended to be externally dominated, academic and unrelated to the socialist transformation of the African neo-colonial situation. Secondly both research institutes and the educational system should cater for the specific economic and political needs of a given society. However under capitalism these needs are extremely difficult to resolve since all social needs are subordinated to the generation of profit. Finally research institutes in the total educational system are a dialectical unity : one affects the other and vice-versa. Research and research output is a product of an educational system but may in turn retard or enhance an educational system for socialist development. Conversely an educational system may provide skills, creativity, attitudes and a world outlook which will generate research that serves the interests of the dominant class.

The fourth major point is that research institutes in « Socialist » states in Africa face extremely complex development problems which require urgent but scientifically rational solutions. One of the pressing problems for socialist reconstruction is social and institutional transformation of society. This will necessitate deliberate intervention in the social production and reproduction processes in order to ensure a stable and strong political power base for furthering the socio-economic transformation of society. Secondly institutional and social transformation will be useful in harnessing new social forces for economic growth and putting a break to reactionary forces. All these require direct state intervention. This intervention can only be effective if it is based on clearly discovered criteria obtained through correct research methods.

The other aspect of the development problem which researchers and research institutes have to deal with is the need to establish a coherent economic growth criteria to ensure efficient and symmetrical relationship between micro-macro economic development on the one hand and efficient coordination of sectoral activities on the other. In particular, the question of time (medium or long range perspective) is very important in the implementation of such a plan e.g. in order to monitor relationship between and changes in growth factors. Socialist planning and

implimentation in Africa is aggravated by the lack of such growth factors such as qualified manpower, capital, the over-supply of unqualified labour force, etc. The situation is worsened by rapid population growth, a disproportionate age aggregate ratio and high mortality rate etc (5). Thus the destruction of existing social formation and economic makes it more difficult to shape and mould social attitudes and culture of the masses who have been marginalised by neo-colonialism. This problem is worsened by he adverse existing distribution of material wealth between nations of the world, particularly in the field of research and research infra-structure. This situation is particularly serious in Africa.

In addition there is an urgent need for integration and rationalisation of research institutes in Afrfrican countries which have adopted socialism. Research institutes could benefit if they specialised in specific areas according to topics or problems rather than duplicating each other's efforts. At the moment important topics of research such as statistics, economics, (especially planning), state organization, party and party transformation are extremely weak in socialist states of Africa. The tasks for researchers and research institutes under these circumstances are therefore immense and there is every rason for the need to maximise available resources.

Finally in the strategy for socialist transformation, research institutes have to concern themselves with at least three fundamental problem areas. First, research institutes must contribute to a policy for the creation of a national economy through vertical integration of the agriculture sector into the industrial sector and ensure rationalization of resources, mobilization and use of surplus into an organic and dynamic system. To bring about this the state has to ensure appropriate progress by centrally coordinated development policy and long range planning. Second, rural transformation which is the pre-condition for socio-economic integration, has to be dealt with by researchers. In socialist states in Africa the best form for such transformation has been the establishment of collective production units in order to avoid further differentiation in rural areas and in order to mobilize and rationalise resources. This is not an easy job and involves a lot of political problems. Finally, researchers must determine means and ways of releasing productive forces of society as quick as possible. The principal means of realising this task is industrialization without which no country is known in history to have reached a high level of development. Real industrialization based on socialisation of technical skills promotes the organic development of national economy. This will require among other things political decision concerning choice of technique and indigenization of technology for rural development. These factors necessitate a radical re-orientation of the public education and research systems. In particular since there is a shortage of research personnel, this radical transformation refers immediately to universities in their undergraduate but particularly in their postgraduate programmes. All these mean that socialist state must evolve clear policy for their educational transformation and for their research and its organization (6).

NOTES

1. For this discussion see G.C.K. Gwassa, « The Social Character of Colonial Education and Training : Implications for Education for Self-Reliance in Tanzania ». Paper presented at the Conference on Ten Years of Socialist Transformation in Tanzania. February, 1977. See also *Education for Self-Reliance*.
2. Lenin as quoted in A. Romyantev « Culture, Politics and Revolution » in *Socialism : Theory and Practice* II, 28 (November 1975).
3. See as quoted in G.C.K. Gwassa « On Political Education, Science, Technology and Development in Tanzania ». Paper presented to the National Conference on Scientific and Technological Manpower Development, January, 1977.
4. S. Lilley, *Man Machines and History* quoted in G.C.K. Gwassa *ibid*.
5. See Saleh El-Dsin Abd. Trends in Policy Formulation : Analysis of functions of policy and decision makers and administrators. ECA Conference on Policy, Planning Organization and Management of Integrated Rural Development forthcoming October, 1978.
6. This point is emphasized in Abdul Mueeed's paper to the above conference on « Education and Training for Rural Development ». See also G.C.K. Gwassa « Training for Rural Development in Africa : A Tanzanian Experience » in Commonwealth Secretariat *Training for Rural Development* (1977). See further *Lenin, Collected Works* Vol. 3, p. 288.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article l'auteur considère que la recherche et les activités de recherche en Afrique et dans le Tiers-Monde en général doivent compter parmi les facteurs de développement les plus importants. Ceci résulte de la situation spécifique des pays du Tiers-Monde. Par conséquent, les activités de recherche et les instituts de recherche dans les pays africains à orientation socialiste doivent être examinés à la lumière de l'héritage colonial et néo-colonial ainsi que l'expérience historique spécifique à chaque pays.

Un système d'éducation rétrograde hérité du temps de l'indépendance constitutionnelle est un des facteurs les plus débilissants en ce qui concerne la recherche pour une transformation socialiste. Un autre résultat est la faiblesse de l'intelligentsia dans les pays à orientation socialiste en ce qui concerne l'approche analytique et parfois un manque de confiance en soi ; il existe aussi le danger qu'elle se livre à l'opportunisme dans ses recherches sur des phénomènes socio-économiques. Par conséquent le but des systèmes d'éducation en Afrique doit être l'éducation et la formation ainsi que la rééducation et le recyclage des intellectuels afin de leur fournir les outils d'analyse émanant d'une connaissance profonde de la théorie du développement social. C'est pourquoi les activités de recherche ainsi que l'éducation et la formation doivent être considérées comme un tout.

Dans la stratégie de la transformation socialiste les instituts de recherche doivent contribuer à une politique de création d'une économie nationale par l'intégration verticale du secteur agricole dans le secteur industriel. De même, les transformations sociales doivent être traitées par les chercheurs, et enfin les chercheurs doivent déterminer les moyens et les voies d'une libération rapide des forces productives de la société.