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Transcending the Impasse: Rethinking the ‘State’ and ‘Development’ in Africa

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the ongoing debate on alternative development strategies in Africa by considering some of the alternative theories of ‘development’ that have been advanced in response to the developmental impasse faced by African states. It argues that a serious re-evaluation of what ‘development’ entails is now required that should involve a clear theoretical break with mainstream development theory. After a brief overview of the main alternative theories of development that have been proposed, the paper argues that the way to transcend the development impasse in Africa is through the concept of the ‘developmental state’. It then discusses the major concepts of the developmental state before considering the feasibility of the developmental state in Africa and the key issues of state strength, state autonomy, authoritarianism and the role of the bourgeoisie. The paper argues for the centrality of democratic rural development for the feasibility of developmental states in Africa and concludes with a call to rethink the concept of development and the developmental state from the point of view of democracy and the collective.

Résumé

Cette étude contribue au débat en cours sur les stratégies alternatives de développement en Afrique en examinant certaines des théories alternatives de « développement » qui ont été avancées en réponse à l’impasse rencontrée par

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les états africains dans ce domaine. Il y est démontré qu'une réévaluation sérieuse de ce qu'entraîne « le développement » est requise maintenant et qui doit déboucher sur une rupture théorique avec la théorie du développement généralement admise. Après un bref aperçu des principales théories alternatives de développement qui ont été proposées, cette étude avance que la manière de transcender l'impasse relative au développement passe par l'utilisation du concept de « l'état de développement ». Ensuite, les principaux concepts de l'état de développement y sont discutés avant d'analyser la faisabilité de l'état de développement en Afrique et les questions clés de force de l'état, d'autonomie de l'état, d'autoritarisme et du rôle de la bourgeoisie. Cette étude démontre le caractère central du développement démocratique rural pour la faisabilité des états de développement en Afrique, et conclut avec un appel à repenser le concept de développement et l'état de développement du point de vue de la démocratie et du collectif.

Introduction

The 'demise of the development project/theory' (McMichael 1996), the 'myth of development' (Rivero 2001), the failure of the 'development industry' (Rihani 2002). These expressions and more in the literature as well as numerous reports and studies eloquently capture the fact that 'development' has come to an impasse or dead end in developing countries, especially in Africa. As a result a number of alternative strategies have been proposed to transcend the development impasse. These alternative strategies have addressed the problem of the development impasse/debacle from both theoretical and empirical perspectives (Sen and Grown 1986; Sklair 1988; Asante 1991; Cornia et al. 1992; Schuurman 1993; Stewart et al. 1993; Himmelstrand et al. 1994; Ake 1996; Yansané 1996; Rivero 2001; Belshaw and Livingstone 2002; Sow 2002; Hope 2003; Chang and Gabriel 2004). For instance, Schuurman (1993) is concerned with new directions in development theory, while Belshaw and Livingstone (2002) consider strategies for 'renewing development' in Africa. These strategies can be said to belong to the alternative development school of thought or tradition. According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1998) there are different ways of conceiving what alternative development is about and its role. It can be viewed as a roving critique of mainstream development, shifting in position as the latter shifts, as a loosely interconnected series of alternative proposals and methodologies or as an alternative development paradigm, imply-

ing a definite theoretical break with mainstream development (Nederveen 1998).

Rapley (1996) rightly notes that if the political and economic prospects for some countries are growing bleaker all the time, a serious re-consideration of what development should entail may be in order. The time for another paradigm shift may be drawing near (Rapley 1996:158). In fact Mbabazi (2005) argues that the search for alternative paths to development in Africa today is more entrenched than ever before, given the changes in the global political economics in the twenty-first century. If Africa is going to ensure that it continues to play any significant role in this new millennium, then there is need to find a model of African democratic development to guide the continent's progress (Mbabazi 2005).

This paper first advocates the institutionalisation of the 'developmental state' and, more specifically, the *democratic* developmental state and then proposes a strategic approach to transcend the development impasse. This approach involves 'strategising' or mainstreaming rural development in national development policy and planning.

Transcending the Impasse: Bringing in the Developmental State

It is now firmly established in the literature that the post-colonial African state has so far not been an effective instrument for development (Doornbos 1990; Rapley 1996; Leftwich 2000). In fact one of the core characteristics of the African state is its general failure to implement development objectives and efficient policies to solve Africa's predicaments. Various attempts have been made to account for the failure of the African state in development (Beckman 1989; Ake 1996), and the current 'scapegoat' for the failure of development in Africa is 'bad governance' (World Bank 1992; UNDP 1997; Leftwich 2000; Ake 1996). Development has never really been on the agenda in Africa, and it could even be argued that the absence of development on the agenda is due to the nature of the African state.

The African post-colonial state departs in fundamental respects from both the Marxist and Weberian conceptions of the state (Leftwich 2000). It has been variously referred to as 'patrimonial', 'neo-patrimonial' (Médard 1991) 'soft', 'weak', 'predatory', 'overdeveloped'—characteristics which greatly limit its capacity for socio-economic development/transformation (Leftwich 2000). Yet it is generally

acknowledged today that the state has a crucial role to play in any development/transformation process. The 'developmental state' or, more to the point, the *democratic* developmental state would therefore seem to be the most appropriate state model for effective and sustainable development in Africa.

Conceptualising the Developmental State

Mbabazi and Taylor (2005) state that the definition of the developmental state runs the risk of being tautological, since evidence that the state is developmental is often drawn deductively from the performance of the economy. However they define a developmental state as one whose ideological underpinnings are developmental and that seriously attempts to deploy its administrative and political resources to the task of economic development (Mbabazi and Taylor 2005). On the other hand, Leftwich (2000) proposes what he refers to as an 'operational' definition of developmental states as follows:

Those states, whose politics have concentrated sufficient power, autonomy, capacity and legitimacy at the centre to shape, pursue and encourage the achievement of explicit developmental objectives whether by establishing and promoting the conditions of economic growth (in the capitalist developmental states), by organising it directly (in the 'socialist' variant), or a varying combination of both.

Leftwich identifies developmental states as those in which 'their political purposes and institutional structures (especially their bureaucracies) have been developmentally driven, while their developmental objectives have been politically driven'. For Leftwich this also means that nationalism will be the core of the 'developmental regime'.

The Feasibility of the Developmental State in Africa

Some reservations have since been expressed in some quarters as regards the feasibility of the developmental state in Africa (Rapley 1996; Leftwich 2000). According to Leftwich developmental states are constituted by particular political forces and processes which are not, nor can they be, easily replicated or created in all developing societies. Rapley (1996) is more categorical. He asserts that the advocacy of the developmental state in the Third World is an unrealistic option, arguing that 'it is doubtful that more than a handful of [African] states could presently

implement a state-led approach to development ... [Most African] governments lack an essential feature of developmental states: in the contemporary jargon, strength or hardness' (Rapley 1996).

Regarding 'state strength' Rapley argues as follows:

To effectively guide economic development, a state must enjoy the power to direct society and lead it through traumatic changes. According to developmental state theory, the state needs to be relatively insulated against society, giving a highly skilled technocratic bureaucracy the autonomy it needs to impose discipline on the private sector ... Bureaucrats must be able to draft policies that promote national development, not the advancement of private lobbyists. Moreover, governments may have to enact unpopular and even harsh policies in the name of development, and the governors must be in a position to ignore or repress the discontent those policies provoke.

In this connection Leftwich (2000) asserts that a shared aspect of all developmental states has been the relative autonomy of the elites and the state institutions which they command. By 'autonomy' is meant that the state has been able to achieve relative independence (or insulation) from the demanding clamour of special interests (whether class, regional or sectoral, where they exist) and that it can and does override these interests in the putative national interest.

Thus it may seem that there is need for an authoritarian regime which can ignore demands from society and repress the population if it becomes too vociferous (Rapley 1996). According to Leftwich, there is little doubt that developmental states, whether democratic or not, have not been particularly attractive states, at least not by either Western liberal or socialist standards. Opposition has not been tolerated, and any organisation or movement that looked as if it would challenge the state and its developmental purposes has been swiftly neutralised, penetrated or incorporated as part of the ruling party. As for class politics Rapley (1996) asserts that a developmental state depends not only on a productive bourgeoisie, but a local one. In each state said to be developmental, productive domestic capitalists have been closely linked to the bureaucracy (Rapley 1996).

State Strength and Autonomy

In his literature review on alternative conceptions of the state Krasner (1984) asserts that Nordlinger (1981) identified state autonomy under

different relationships between the preferences of state and societal actors. Thus 'Type 1' autonomy refers to situations in which state actors translate their preferences into authoritative action despite divergent societal preferences. They can accomplish this by using the resources of the state to neutralise societal opponents by measures such as deploying public capital, threatening to withhold specific government programmes or masking the state's decision making procedures. 'Type 2' state autonomy refers to situations in which state action changes divergent societal preferences to convergent ones. The state can use four general strategies to effect such changes: altering the views of societal opponents, limiting the deployment of resources by societal opponents, gaining the support of indifferent actors and increasing the resources of societal actors holding convergent views. Finally 'Type 3' state autonomy refers to situations in which there is non-divergence between the preferences of the state and society. Even under these conditions state-oriented accounts can explain authoritative actions at least as well as society-oriented ones. The state can initiate policy and provide access for particular societal groups. This typology of state autonomy applies squarely to the post-colonial African state. Furthermore, it is compatible with the literature on the policy process in the context of the developing countries (Smith 1973; Grindle and Thomas 1989). Leftwich (2000) asserts that in democratic or partially democratic developmental states the key factor for this autonomy appears to have been the dominance of single-party rule brought about by repeated victory in elections since the 1960s, as in Singapore, Malaysia and Botswana. However it could be argued that the golden era of single-party regimes and military rule in much of Africa offered a unique opportunity for state strength and autonomy, yet this did not translate into the establishment of developmental states.

Authoritarianism

Rapley concedes that although authoritarian regimes wield great command through their control of repressive power, it is not clear that they are all that hard or strong in terms of their insulation from society. Authoritarian regimes may have naked power but lack intelligence or enlightenment. The evidence suggests that authoritarian regimes have not been particularly good at implementing reform or economic austerity programmes (Rapley 1996). Unfortunately the much-touted 'au-

thoritarian advantage' has not shown up in Africa (Mkandawire 2005), and indeed, as Edigheji (2005) points out, African countries would have been among the most developed countries in the world if there were any positive correlation between undemocratic regimes and development. In fact Ake (1996) states that in the African context:

Political authoritarianism prevents the crystallization of the state or even of a political class. Rather it tends to constitute a plurality of 'informal' primary systems that are largely the repositories of loyalties. It unleashes powerful centrifugal forces that render the polity incoherent and unable to establish a common purpose, including a developmental project, and to pursue it effectively. In short, political authoritarianism is an important reason why the development project in Africa has not been able to take off.

Absence of a Capitalist/Bourgeois Class

Apart from shortfalls in Third World bureaucracies the economic and political weaknesses of indigenous capitalists in much of the Third World seem to preclude developmental states from emerging in many more countries at this time. Africa in particular faces dim prospects (Rapley 1996). Furthermore it is argued not only that capitalism forms the lifeblood of the modern state, but also that capitalism and patrimonialism are incompatible. Yet African states are patrimonial/neo-patrimonial. The emphasis on the importance of the capitalist class reflects a Eurocentric/Western conception of development. According to McMichael (1996):

Development is a long-standing European idea, woven from two related strands of thought. One is the Promethean self-conception of European civilization, underlying the Judeo-Christian belief in the progressive human domestication of nature. This progressivism evolved as the core ideal parallel to Europe's emergence as a world power and was expressed in the capitalist ethos of the endless accumulation of wealth as a rational economic activity.

Furthermore, reference to the absence of a capitalist/bourgeois class betrays a lack of awareness of the nature of class dynamics (Sklar 1979; Beckman 1989) as well as of social movements and grassroots organisations in the African context. In fact Beckman rightly states that notions of an absent national bourgeoisie stand in the way of an understanding of the process of state and ruling class formation. Preoccupation with

inefficiency, corruption, misappropriation, nepotism and other 'aberrations' tends to substitute for an analysis of the forces that determine the dynamics and direction of the process (Beckman 1989).

In view of the issues addressed here it would be no exaggeration to assert that the institutionalisation of the developmental state in Africa is feasible. Of course developmental states in Africa cannot be or will not be similar to those found in Asia (Mbabazi 2005). What is needed is appropriate political and institutional design (Robinson and White 1998). The leap from neo-patrimonial regimes to a developmental state is one fraught with difficulty and one that is likely to be a slow process. But it is not impossible (Taylor 2005).

Transcending the Impasse: Rethinking 'Development'

There is some consensus in the literature on the feasibility of the developmental state in Africa. However this literature does not seem to pay adequate attention to the nature or type of development project/agenda to be pursued by the developmental state. This point deserves serious consideration, because it has been suggested that Africa's developmental failure is due either to the fact that development has never been on the agenda or that African states have adopted/pursued a wrong and/or inappropriate development agenda. It seems to be either explicitly or implicitly taken for granted that the developmental state must of necessity adopt a capitalist development agenda. For example Leftwich (2000) argues as follows:

Most (and the most successful) developmental states have been those that have thrived in mixed capitalist economies, since one of the key characteristics of this state type is its determination and ability to stimulate, direct, shape and cooperate with the domestic private sector and arrange or supervise mutually acceptable deals with foreign interests.

But to suggest that the developmental state must adopt a capitalist development agenda amounts to a form of reductionism or determinism reminiscent of Rostow's stages of economic growth. In the African context development must be construed initially as rural development generally and, more specifically, as *agricultural* development. Thus the developmental state in Africa must adopt a rural development agenda. This is compatible with developments in East Asia. Without painting a rosy or romantic picture of the East Asian experience, what distinguishes East Asia from the rest of the developing world is that East Asian na-

tions chose to develop the rural sector. In fact the rural sector is of strategic importance for the poorer nations of the world. It is the source of primary products (agricultural produce and minerals) for export to the advanced industrial countries and of foodstuffs and labour for the national urban and industrial centres (Long 1977).

Thus Jaycox (1997) refers to the rural sector as the 'central sector' and asserts that it produces 50 percent on average in Africa. The rural sector is the location of 70 percent of the poor people living on less than one dollar a day (Jaycox 1997). A classic statement on the importance of the rural sector is that of Guy (1970), who over 35 years ago asserted that:

It is in the rural sector in many developing countries that indigenous resources of men and land are underused, there that nutrition can be tackled; there that success would do most to slow the immigration to major cities, to provide a market for existing and new industries and services and to give the chance for restructuring education to meet the practical needs of a prosperous and diversified rural community. Finally, it is there that some redress of the gross inequality in income distribution can be started.

In fact the importance of rural development today has been reiterated by the World Bank (1997). According to the bank, sustainable rural development can make a powerful contribution to four critical goals:

- Poverty reduction
- Widely shared growth
- Household, national and global food security
- Sustainable natural resource management.

Thus the crucial contribution of rural development to overall macro-economic/socio-economic and political development as well as environmental protection is now well established (Long 1977; Jaycox 1996; World Bank 1997; Grabowski 2005). The World Bank also asserts that its objectives of poverty reduction, widely shared growth, food security and sustainable natural resource management cannot be met unless rural development in general and a thriving agricultural economy in particular are nurtured and improved (World Bank 1997).

Given the development impasse it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach to overcome the development predicaments. This strategic

approach would involve strategising or mainstreaming rural development in national development policy and planning (Weitz 1971; Waterston 1974, Haque et al. 1977; Harris 1984; Ake 1996; Shepherd 1998). Furthermore, in the context of Africa, rural development is the most appropriate policy framework for addressing the question of social inclusiveness (Mkandawire 2005). Nevertheless rural development policies and programmes have so far been a failure throughout Africa (Heyer et al. 1981). Various attempts have been made to account for the failure of rural development. Lack of political will and commitment has been identified as one of the factors (Bryant and White 1981; Jaycox 1996; World Bank 1997). According to Heyer et al. (1981) rural development has failed in practice because of the incompatibility between the different goals and the means which are almost universally promoted as the ways to achieve rural development. This incompatibility is concealed by a rhetoric, which asserts the mutual interests of rural development agencies, governments and the rural population (Heyer et al. 1981; Williams 1981).

In fact the fundamental reason for the failure of rural development in Africa is the adoption of an inappropriate development paradigm (Potter 1971; Mabogunje 1980; Mackenzie 1992; Taylor and Mackenzie 1992; Rihani 2002). Potter rightly asserts that the classical model of development based on the experience of developed countries is the one usually followed by most developing countries. However it has become increasingly clear that this classic model of rural development is unrealistic for many developing countries (Potter 1971). The new development paradigm must adopt a broader concept of rural development which takes into account the nature of power relations in rural society, that is, those forms of domination that either impede or make possible the realisation of the goals of rural development (Bengtsson 1979). The new paradigm must also address the issues of democratisation and empowerment; approach rural development policy must not be reduced simply to an agricultural development policy as in the NEPAD approach (Gemandze 2004). According to Waterston (1974) agricultural development is essentially a sectoral activity concerned with occurrences within the agricultural sector. In contrast rural development is multisectoral:

[B]esides agricultural development and rural industry [it includes] the establishment or improvement of social overhead facilities or infrastructure (schools, clinics, roads, communications, and water supply), and

welfare services or programs, which could be for disease control, improved nutrition, widening adult literacy, or family planning (Waterston 1974).

Furthermore any rural development policy must also be concerned with environmental issues; rural development activities that are not environmentally sustainable will not improve long-term well-being (Clever 1997). The paradigm proposed by Shepherd (1998) constitutes a comprehensive or holistic approach. It is ambivalent about both state-led and market-led versions of development. The state has often not served rural people well, especially the poor and marginalised. Indeed it has often been the chief exploiter and repressor of rural people and organisations (Shepherd 1998).

Rural Development Ideology

The question of ideology is important not only for the institutionalisation of the developmental state (Leftwich 2000; Mbabazi and Taylor 2005) but also for the legitimation of rural development policy. According to Potter (1971):

Ideology is important in rural development not only because ideologically influenced decisions determine to some extent whether the end products of planning will more closely resemble family farms or factories-in-the-fields, but also the social force needed to overcome social resistance and mobilise a conservative peasantry to participate in development programmes can apparently come in no other way.

Thus the 'end of ideology' may be appropriate/true in the context of Western/capitalist polities, but ideology remains relevant, indeed crucial, in the context of African post-colonial polities. In fact all development concepts are in a sense ideological (Barraclough 1977; Williams 1981; Sachs 1992; Ake 1996). Furthermore development has been pursued traditionally within specific ideological guidelines. Contrasting approaches based on capitalism or socialism were the norm until recently, but the capitalist camp has emerged as the victor; development prescriptions now follow the dictates of that philosophy (Rihani 2002).

However there is no consensus on the type of ideology to sustain rural development in the context of post-colonial/neo-patrimonial polities. Potter (1977) has suggested that nationalism plus some form of

socialism is the usual creed in most developing countries. Haque et al. (1977) propose a development philosophy and objectives for Asia which could be adopted and adapted to a rural development ideology in the African context, arguing that, historically, the only other known method of accumulation is that of human mobilisation for the conversion of surplus labour into means of production. This mobilisation implies (a) collectivist relations of production (b) choice of appropriate technology and (c) self-reliance, which in external relations means economic independence via de-linkage from existing global dominance/dependence relations (Haque et al. 1977). The importance of mobilisation has been reiterated by Mabogunje, who asserts that the mobilisation of the total population of a given country is the most critical factor in the construction of a new and more developmental social framework (Mabogunje 1980). According to Haque et al. (1977) mobilisation as an accumulation strategy requires the adoption of collectivist relations of production. Historical experience indicates that specific forms of collectivist relations have specific bearings on development in a wider sense. This concept of collective rules out the pursuit of the 'animal' spirit of self interest characteristic of capitalism (McMichael 1996), whereby one tries to take as much from society as one can without submitting to a collective evaluation of one's share in the give and take (Haque et al. 1977).

The collective involves creating certain values. Self-reliance—in the sense of building up a combination of material and mental reserves that enable one to choose one's own course of evolution uninhibited by what others desire—is the single most important of these values. It requires psychological and institutional staying power to meet crisis situations. This staying power is best attained collectively (Haque et al. 1977). The importance of self-reliance has also been emphasised elsewhere in the literature (Asante 1991; Rist 1997). Another of the important values is participatory democracy. The collective as we conceive it functions through the active participation of the people. Without this, the individual would not belong organically to the collective, and the collective self would not to that extent be a reality. Therefore participatory democracy and the collective are inseparable concepts (Haque et al. 1977).

The collective also requires that the consciousness gap between the leadership and the masses be closed. This requires that the leadership and the masses move in a mutually interacting process that systemati-

cally reduces the gap (Haque et al. 1977). In keeping with this, the collective further requires de-alienation. The binding constraint on development consists of those factors that inhibit the fullest expression of people's natural selves: identity with work, in which people should find pleasure and fulfillment, and with society, in which alone people discover their selves. This sense of identity has been fragmented into elite and masses, ruler and ruled, privileged and underprivileged, 'superior' and the 'inferior'. Development then must mean a process of de-alienation, that is, liberation from inhibitions derived from the structure and superstructure of society that dehumanise the masses and prevent them from consummating their fullest potential (Haque et al. 1977).

Conclusion

The developmental state is not only feasible but imperative in Africa today (Mkandawire 1995, 2001, 2005; Mbabazi 2005; Taylor 2005). Given that rural development is the key to the whole process of development (Haque et al. 1977; Weitz 1977; Ake 1996), the way out of the current development impasse in Africa in particular lies in the institutionalisation of the democratic developmental state (White and Wade 1985; Robinson and White 1998; Leftwich 1996, 1998, 2000) and the adoption by this state of a development policy based on the promotion of the rural sector within the framework of a democratic rural development policy (Fox 1992).

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