I\n many parts of the world, poverty, undeterred by the vast technological resources at humanity’s disposal and unfazed by the many declarations of war against it, still ravages the lives of millions. It is the juxtaposition of the obvious human capacity to “make poverty history” and the eternal rhetoric of poverty eradication that causes leaders to bring to wider attention in his book, Sachs, as some have observed, is a rock star of an economist - a labelling that is confirmed both by the media hype surrounding his book and the company he keeps - celebrities of all colours and stripes, billionaires, presidents. This has helped the book reach the attention of a much wider audience than its original readership on poverty and under-development.

Sachs is a man who seems to get one “big idea” at a time, which he then runs with. Many have been turned off by the Spartan way with which he asserts himself and by his use of autobiographical material - often pushed to the outer limits of probity - which often becomes self-serving and lapses into name-dropping. His admirers have been impressed by the passion with which he has taken up arms against poverty and by the can-do chutzpah that he sums up as follows: “When something is needed, it can and must become possible” (p. 147). Sachs sees himself as “an economist making calls”, travelling around the globe prescribing treatments in much the same way that the clinician does. However, behind all this there is an economic logic. To understand that logic one needs to step back and find out where Jeffrey Sachs has been intellectually in recent years and the ideas that have dominated policy discourses during these years. This will help us understand both his policy recommendations and the causal and normative beliefs informing them.

In the early postwar period, thinking about development was dominated by structuralism, which posited that a number of factors - geography, culture, colonial heritage and underdevelopment - severely constrained the functioning of markets. Left to the market, poor countries would be stuck in a “low equilibrium trap” caused by a series of poverty-related syndromes that reinforce themselves through “circular causation”. To get out of this trap, it was necessary to get “big push” which would lead to “take-off”. This called for an active developmental role for the state, and for aid to bridge the “resource gap” and supplement the savings of poor countries. Under the sway of this developmentalist ideology, significant success was achieved in terms of growth and industrialization. However, this growth could be seen in a number of social indicators. The oil crisis and the rise of neoliberalism in some of the major economies led to a serious challenge to this model and ushered in the era of structural adjustment. It was now argued that interventionist policies had led to market distortions and there were attempts at denying that African countries had indeed adjusted, but this proved untenable. By the mid-1980s, African and Latin American countries had made drastic policy shifts: they had reduced inflation and the size of the public sector, liberalized their economies, opened up trade, privatized public enterprise and so on. With some signs of recovery in the early 1990s, the leaders of the international financial institutions went on a road show to proclaim that adjustment was finally working. However, the celebration was turned out to be premature as the “Asian financial crisis” put paid to the signs of recovery. This policy failure underlined the importance of policies that could have been implemented in SSA (Sub-Saharan Africa), the result has been rapid economic growth”.

2. Enter “Good Governance”

By the mid-1980s, more than half of the African countries had structural adjustment programmes administered by the IFIs. At the same time, evidence was mounting that the adoption of Washington Consensus policies was not producing the accelerated development that the Berg Report had promised. Initially there were attempts at denying that African countries had indeed adjusted, but this proved untenable. By the mid-1990s, African and Latin American countries had made drastic policy shifts: they had reduced inflation and the size of the public sector, liberalized their economies, opened up trade, privatized public enterprise and so on. With some signs of recovery in the early 1990s, the leaders of the international financial institutions went on a road show to proclaim that adjustment was finally working. However, the celebration was turned out to be premature as the “Asian financial crisis” put paid to the signs of recovery. This policy failure underlined the importance of policies that could have been implemented in SSA (Sub-Saharan Africa), the result has been rapid economic growth”.

3. Geography Rediscovered

Another response to the failure of policies, and one for which Jeffrey Sachs is a prominent spokesperson, is that “the choice is not between adequate and inadequate governance and institutions, but between adequate and inadequate geography right”. Already in some of his earlier work, Sachs was the culprit, this idea did not really catch on until after the mid-1990s, when it was argued that African countries did not provide the conditions propitious enough to attract both local and foreign private investment. In the more fan-
effort to free the continent from the grip of un-
fortunate geography through health and agricul-
tural technologies specific to their needs. In poor
countries the geographical problems abounding
in poverty stricken Africa, a consequence of the
Washington Consensus was the dramatic reduction in investment in infra-
structure on the grounds that (a) the private sec-
tor would not invest because governments and policies
were to precede investment in infrastructure. The
insistence by African policy makers on increas-
ing investment was dismissed by World Bank economists as "capitalistic fundamentalism." In its
1989 report, the World Bank argued that "lower
levels of infrastructure and other factors do not pose significantly greater con-
straints to development than those of Africa.
" This policy position led to catastrophic
decay in public investments in infrastructure
and contributed to the ineffectiveness of the
policies themselves. How could peasants in-
crease production in response to market liberal-
ization when the road network had collapsed?

Sachs vehemently denies his is a geographi-
cal determinist and, given his rather eclectic in-
tellectual itinerary, he may have a point. He
temporarily insists that support should go to
well-governed countries. Sachs's protestations
seem to be based on a misunderstanding of
geo-
graphical determinism does not mean that soci-
eties can do nothing about their situation; it sim-
ply means that the central agenda of a society is set by its geographical conditions by insti-
tutionalists that if geography has an effect on lon-
term growth, its major impact is due to the long-
lasting effect on institutions, Sachs's response has
been that "institutions don't rule geography.
" His
protestations notwithstanding, Sachs is
firmly rooted in geographical determinism in the
case of Africa (although maybe less so for other
regions of the world). Thus, he states that
"geography has coexisted with economies to give
Africa a particularly weak hand. " (p. 208) and
"Geographic disadvantage is a major reason for
poor to own poor fellows—finally, however that
approach is beginning to change. " (p. 74). He
doesn't say how. We are thus led with an analy-
sis that seems to suggest that policies are the
right tools to redress the geographical and
geographical and some degree of bad governance are the problem. In this he may not be alone. The Group of Eight's meeting in July 2005
far position, promising more resources and in-
sisting on good governance from African lead-
ers. There was no word about the bad policies
that have been rammed down the throats of Af-
ricans for over 20 years with no success. The
Washington folks that brought us deficientary policies and the "low growth trap " left the GI
countries not only unscathed but undeter-
ced to certify countries' qualifications for debt
relief by swallowing the same old nostrums.

5. "Poverty Trap" or "Policy Trap?"

Jeffrey Sachs believes Africa is caught in "the worst poverty trap in the world." More signifi-
cantly he believes that "although predatory go-

governments are often loudly trumpeted by the
development, good governance and market reforms are not sufficient to guarantee growth if the coun-
tries is in a poverty trap. " (p. 195). Such "traps" propose solutions for the lack of "structural
literature in development economics: since people or countries are too poor to save, they
cannot generate the surplus required for invest-
ment. Sachs says there has been a current of
people have experienced the free market to
remain poor and unable to save. There are a
table of numbers with this reasoning. Many
countries have generated higher levels of sav-
ing at lower levels of income than those of Af-
rica today.

Indeed, African countries themselves had
much higher levels of domestic saving in the 1970s. Sachs acknowledges that "by 1990, only
a few administrations had not disappeared, but
enjoyed a peculiar type of stability as a result of
the large, little of the surplus that is there is
exported or wasted on speculative investments
in real estate, shopping malls and treasury bonds.
African countries have a tendency to allow the
Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tubercul-
sis and Malaria. This is perhaps not surprising: determin-
istic approaches have a tendency to downplay
depth. In the worst case, the people affected
by institutions or geography are deemed to be
so programmed by inherited institutions or na-
ture that they cannot be expected to lift them-
up on their own.

6. The Missing Africans

Sachs is at his best when debating the "poverty trap" and "policy trap" models of development ("theo-
dies and misperceptions") about African ca-

capacities, policies, and institutions. He is also
enough of an insider to clearly bring out the
idea that Africa's primary nature of IMF programs,
which if not removed, will frustrate any new

to their return by Jeffrey Sachs to the old
arguments and the concept of "debt consoli-
dation on his sporadic forays into areas where
the poor are reading literature to listen to what
the average, organized, if not well-orchestrated, encounters
with the poor. The result is that the poor emerge as a one-dimensional undifferentiated mass, de-

dicated to free market solutions, to which, anyway, his bottom-up approach has little meaning.

Finally, the book is important not so much for
what it says about poverty as for what it tells us
about the debates on aid, the state of knowl-
edge (or lack of it) about development, and the
perceptions of the role Africans should play in
the development of the continent. If Sachs is
receiving grudging, it is not because of the
originality of his ideas. With respect to Africa's
problems, similar arguments have been made as
by the World Bank. The case for fixing the
problems is not new; it is made by

Kwame Nkrumah, the Lagos Plan of Action and
now by the New Partnership for Africa's De-
velopment (NEPAD). It was the African who

flashed the light on the need for good govern-
tical circles, it may be that Jeffrey Sachs's stand-

ded that are not necessarily the right ones but those
that have the most political resonance in politi-
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Notes

1. The words in inverted commas in the last three
sentences were the staple of "development
" economics in the 1950s and 1960s.


5
Africa has been through a particularly ambivalent experience of modernity. Previous research has tended to emphasize its alien nature in Africa and how it has been resisted. This book seeks to show how this tension and the impulse to modernity have contributed to changing African society over the past one hundred years. The contributors look at how Africans negotiated the terms of modernity during the colonial period and are dealing with it in the post-colonial period. They argue that the African experience of modernity is unique and relevant for wider social theory, offering valuable analytical insights. The cases presented cover labour, land rights, religious conversion, internal migration, emigration and the African diaspora.

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Nyamnjoh’s new book about the heightened xenophobia that both exploits and excludes is an incisive commentary on a globalizing world that reaches down into the grassroots of so many societies with consequences for ordinary people’s lives that have received all too little attention. He meticulously documents the fate of immigrants and the new politics of insiders and outsiders in these Southern African societies, at the same time delivering a telling commentary on the global rhetoric of open societies in an era of increasing closures and exclusions.

This work is an original and perceptive study of issues that resonate in countries across Africa and the globe. As globalizatio n becomes a palpable reality in the bodies of people in transit, citizenship, sociality and belonging are subjected to stresses to which few societies have devised a civil response beyond yet more controls. The latter in turn are subverted and nullified, so that, as in Botswana and South Africa, a world is developing where conflict and flux underlie a superficial global progress.

The institutional forms and process of democracy are spreading in Africa as dictatorial regimes have been forced to give way. But democratic form and democratic substance are two different things. Western derived institutional forms are neither necessarily the most appropriate nor the most practical in the current African context, and rooting democratic norms in African political cultures raises socio-cultural questions. This book draws on the experiences of particular African elections and countries to explore the continuing impact of police state apparatuses; the factors influencing voters’ attitudes and behaviour; the impact of incumbency on electoral competition; women’s participation; and the lack of choice in party pro- grammes. The fundamental issue is whether democratic processes as currently practised in Africa are really making any difference.

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