

Deriving from the Overseas Development Institute's Africa Power and Politics Programme, *Governance for Development in Africa* makes a strong argument to distinguish between good governance and developmental governance. It does so not to present the two forms as mutually exclusive but rather to make a case that effective developmental action in generalised African conditions requires something more proximate, more realistic, and in a sense more modest than the broader and more abstract desiderata of good governance, based as it is on evocations of transparency, participation, and empowerment. The book rests within an emerging genre of research on Africa which has made two interconnected and important moves: to reject the developmental pessimism that a certain essentialist view about African politics has relied upon, and to work from a kind of institutional realism that is mainly interested in governance practice and its own dynamics.

To unpack this context a little, consider the ways in which post-Cold War research has bent towards a rendition of African politics based on dysfunction, state collapse, 'tribalism', and despair. With varying degrees of subtlety, this approach frames African development in its negation (collapse, failure, corruption) or through a kind of sublimation in which ideologically powerful redemption narratives seem to ignore 'actually existing Africa' by framing African development through a kind of liberal ideological imperialism. A good deal of the latter is encompassed in the norm 'good governance', which persists as a kind of meta-norm for more discrete development thinking and aid practice that emanates from Western donors of various kinds. One might caricature these two representations as eschatology and renaissance respectively, and neither seems especially interested in development except as a kind of idealism, decried for its absence or evoked as the telos of a new aid modality.

So, what of this emerging genre within which this book is located? The premise here is that one should start with concrete social practices and consider the constraints, opportunities, and developmental practices therein. This is a tradition that puts greater value on fine-grained and proximate research; it is more oriented towards a political realism within which *a priori* values and templates are de-emphasised (but not entirely forgotten) in favour of something more 'vernacular'. As in the work of Kelsall (2013) and Whitfield *et al.* (2015), there is a space left for development practice that is based in part on neo-patrimonialism, 'going with the grain' (Andrews 2013, Levy 2014) of existing socio-cultural relations, the development of hybridity, synergy, and 'pockets' of developmental success. This work denies that Africa is a developmental disaster and it derives modest optimism from a 'pragmatic' focus on institutions and collective agency. It also remains open to the possibility that governments – or agencies within governments – have genuine

Development and Governance

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Governance for Development in Africa: Solving Collective Action Problems

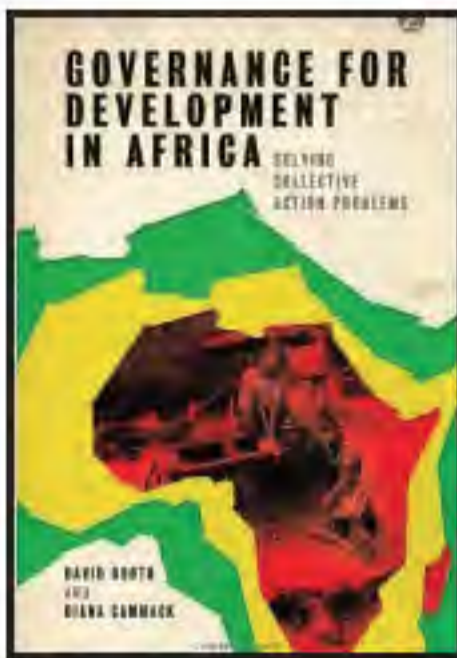
by David Booth and Diana Cammack

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developmental intent, and crucially that developmental intent is not necessarily enhanced by formally democratic political processes. This work relates to the influential frameworks of Mushtaq Khan and more broadly to an understanding of development history in which development is a phenomenon that tends to take place before fully-fledged electoral democracy. Finally, it frames development itself not as economic growth or even better social provision but rather as a socio-economic transformation that leads from smallholder agriculture to larger-scale and more capital-intensive forms of production (cf. Henley 2015). To summarise the emerging genre: development is taking place in Africa moderately, slowly, uncertainly, but nevertheless palpably. It is not ideal or seized by a telos of success. It is vernacular and based in hard-headed development purpose and the strategic allocation of rents. It is largely indigenous, not global. It requires authoritative political backing from states. Much of this perspective can be seen in impressive detail in Oqubay's study of Ethiopia (2015).

This perspective seems to me to be a great deal better than both eschatology and renaissance. Booth and Cammack contribute to this genre by focussing on collective action problems within the construction of public goods. The issue at hand is how often times public provision suffers from poor coordination, uncertain resourcing, and weak political backing. This is not a problem easily understood through orthodox rational choice approaches within which there are incentive misalignments. Rather, Booth and Cammack set a more cultural and political framework within which sometimes – and only sometimes – public cultures, institutions, and political enforcement create efficient and stable forms of provision that enjoy the acceptance (not necessarily participation) of the public; in a nutshell: institutional coherence, political leadership, and local/vernacular problem-solving (p. 58).

The book draws on a range of country case studies but is largely the tale of two eastern African countries: Malawi and Rwanda. The former is largely identified as troubled and the latter as moderately



successful. The notion that Malawi has suffered all manner of crises and uncertainties over the last twenty years or so is hardly controversial. The characterisation of Rwanda as a success is certainly considerably more so. Indeed, it is striking that the richest empirical chapter (on maternal health care) could be read as a narrative of how Rwanda got

it right. Although there are interesting arguments about how the statistics concerning Rwanda's development exaggerate, no one but conspiracy theorists claims that the entire edifice of evidence for developmental progress is a myth. Two further issues follow from the clear successes in Rwanda relating to maternal health provision. One is in what ways and to what extent Rwanda's authoritarianism is the source of successful development, or to put it in Booth and Cammack's more analytical language, the effective repository and enforcer of 'strong upwards accountability' for development success (p. 62).

The more one thinks about Rwanda's development, the more one finds oneself looking at the RPF government and to that extent one wonders how much of this development success is specifically Rwandan. This would repay some more attention, not least because some of the contextual factors used to explain a lack of developmental problem-solving in Malawi – high levels of social suspicion, recent and turbulent population movements, generalised and severe poverty – are very much present in Rwanda's recent history and arguably constitute precisely the context that has shaped the RPF's developmental efforts. This is the second issue: perhaps a little richer descriptive narrative of post-colonial history and its influence would help clarify the authors' carefully-couched comparative insights.

It is intriguing that maternal health care is given so much emphasis. This is not to deny that this is a vital aspect of social provision. Rather, it is to note that, traditionally, public goods for development tends to focus on a broader set of public goods provision and, if anything, to consider 'infrastructural' public goods as more developmentally pertinent. One might consider water provision, feeder roads, electricity

supply, or cadastral services as major concerns – especially if one is defining development in this transitory fashion. A 'well-being' approach to development would not have to focus on maternal health care. But this reader wanted a little more on other facets of public goods provision and a 'meatier' connection to development. Other public goods are covered but in less detail and sometimes with brief country case study evidence, for example concerning river management and residential security. This ostensible unevenness in comparative case study and public goods provision might simply be a product of the rolling out of a large and 'deep' set of country comparisons by a team of researchers.

Nevertheless, a grey area remains. The fine-grained and fascinating accounts of localised practices and their successes and failure have implications for development, but no more than this. A similar greyness can be found with regards to the association one identifies between the case study material and existing aid strategies. There is a clear starting point here, associated with the research that has emanated from the LSE Crisis States Research Network and the University of Sussex's Institute for Development Studies' Future State programme. The directions drawn from these bodies of research is that aid strategy should be both more modest, more politically realistic (see also the 'political settlements' literature), and more attentive to specific socio-economic conditions. These points are all well-taken; but how might that affect, say, the working up of projects, donor-state relations, or the principles through which aid is enacted? I doubt that the authors would want to be prescriptive and specific in responding to these questions – and for good reason. But some further indications on these matters would have been welcome, not least because countries like Malawi, Niger, and Rwanda are highly aid-dependent.

The book is a great read. It is lucid, concise, and based on a cautious optimism. It is an asset for university courses concerned with good governance in Africa. And, it sets an agenda for further empirical research on public goods, problem-solving and development as well as opening up a theoretical debate about how we might take more realistic approaches to the political economy of Africa's capitalist development.

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