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Editorial

This issue of *CODESRIA Bulletin* is divided into two; the first, a completely thematic cluster of essays on RCTs and, the other, a set of

of essays is key to the Council's research agenda. These articles pick up the discussion initiated in *CODESRIA Bulletin* No. 1, 2020 on *Randomised Control Trials and*

Development Research in Africa. That issue of the Bulletin elicited enormous attention and triggered conversations on different platforms from the CODESRIA community and beyond and through private communication from partner institutions. The Council continues to receive correspondence from other organisations in the global South seeking to partner in conducting extended research on RCTs and the appropriateness and applicability of the methodology to development planning in the global South. We get the sense at CODESRIA that there is a desire from our community and partners engaged in development research in the global South to launch a research program on RCTs that constitutes a front for the liberation and/or protection of the social sciences in the global South from the

ravages of unethical experimentation. One pathway to realising this is contained in the call for papers on pages 22 and 28 of this Bulletin.

The articles focusing on RCTs in this Bulletin are an added voice responding to concerns about their use in assessing the impact of development policies, especially

In this issue

- | | |
|--|----|
| <i>Editorial, Godwin R. Murunga & Ibrahim O. Ogachi</i> | 1 |
| 1. <i>The Randomista Rampage in Development Economics: A View from the Trenches, David Ndii</i> | 3 |
| 2. <i>Evidence as Cliché: Using Trials to Tamper with Governance, Seye Abimbola</i> | 9 |
| 3. <i>The Nobel Prizes, Racism, and the Economy of Prestige, Wandia Njoya</i> | 17 |
| 4. <i>Economics Experiments in Africa: How Many and by Whom? Amma Panin</i> | 23 |
| 5. <i>Structural Change, Inequality, and Inclusive Development: Case of Sub-Saharan Africa, Jimi Adesina</i> | 29 |
| 6. <i>'Mandela-wash': How Invoking Mandela's Name Cannot Obscure Past Injustice, Robin Cohen</i> | 37 |

two essays on inequality and inclusive development (Jimi Adesina) and the final article on "Mandela-wash" that discusses how the statue of South Africa's first black president, Nelson Mandela, has been used to excuse, rationalise or simply clean up abhorrent acts of abuse, injustice and plunder associated with legacies of apartheid (Robin Cohen). The first cluster



This quarterly Bulletin is distributed free to all social research institutes and faculties in Africa to encourage research co-operation among African scholars. Interested individuals and institutions may also subscribe. Contributions on theoretical matters and reports on conferences and seminars are welcome.

in Africa. The articles do also raise the need to liberate the social sciences in Africa more generally, and development planning specifically, from the danger of objectification through experimentation. They caution against the tendency to exaggerate the effectiveness of RCTs research outcomes in development economics. In particular, David Ndi questions the claim, often repeated by *randomistas*, and accepted almost as a truism within their circles, that they have overrun the field of development economics. But in fact, their ‘value,’ he argues, is restricted to the arena of foreign aid programmes. Seye Abimbola cautions against the ‘foreign gaze’ that oversimplifies African realities for the sake of fashioning preferred (instead of relevant) policies. Far from providing “evidence to policy,” Abimbola shows that on thorough inspection, RCTs experiments turn out as tools for restructuring of the governance of social policy interventions in ways that disregard the input of local populations. The issues of what works from such experiments, and for whom, is underscored as an important consideration that is not fully addressed by *randomistas*.

Ndi and Abimbola agree on the broad argument that intellectual revolutions are normally the consequence of fierce contestations. In the case of RCTs, no such intellectual debates have happened to subject the claims of the RCTs proponents to intellectual scrutiny and instal RCTs as definitive methodology in development economics or across other disciplines. In the specific case of performance-based financing that Abimbola discusses, “[u]nderstanding the knowledge and evidence needs on complex interventions and phenomena in terms that acknowledge their complexity should be the starting point of inquiry, and not the conclusion.” For Ndi, the adoption of RCTs methodology with little scrutiny of their efficacy has been unheralded mainly “because development economics as a distinct sub-discipline no longer exists, and in effect, the proclaimed revolution is little more than tilting at windmills.”

Wandia Njoya locates the persisting legitimisation of experimentation in historic Eurocentric assumptions about knowledge production in Africa. She notes the failure in RCTs experiments to seriously consider ethical questions, thus overlooking the principle of “do no harm” that is so critical to research design. The article illustrates that the persistent concerns raised against RCTs have emerged from a politics of knowledge production that, almost *apriori*, influ-

ences or even determines who, how and from where experimentation is done. This is a point that Amma Panin illustrates through an assessment of who researches using experiment in Africa.

Taken together, the articles in this issue signpost the mounting and well-known limitations of RCTs, and the broader political economy that has promoted them as the ultimate methodology for designing poverty alleviation interventions in developing countries. The capacity, or lack thereof, for policies derived from RCTs to contribute to long-term structural transformation of Africa’s economies is highlighted in the articles. Perhaps here lies the significance of Jimi Adesina’s piece in this Bulletin in providing useful contextual analysis about inequality and structural transformation that indirectly illuminates the discussion on RCTs. Above all, this Bulletin raises the question of the ultimate beneficiaries from the RCTs industry with all the essays wondering whether it is not the researchers themselves that benefit immensely from a funding regime that is invested in specific and obvious outcomes. As Abimbola and Panin document, most of these researchers come from or are based in the global North. The communities in the global South are reduced to mere objects of RCTs experimentation and interventions and of policies that ignore local knowledge, preferences, and priorities.

One final thought, the scale of RCTs experiments and the fact they are fragmented over space render the validity of their outputs questionable. The literature suggests that RCTs focus on small-scale and very specific evaluations instead of large-scale surveys that entail multiple and complex dimensions. This is problematic for policy interventions aimed at poverty alleviation. Poverty is anything but specific, local or small scale thereby raising the broad question, addressed in some of the essays here, of what would happen to RCTs outcomes if interventions were scaled up to whole populations beyond the treatment groups.

Godwin R. Murunga
Executive Secretary,
CODESRIA

&

Ibrahim O. Ogachi
Acting Head Publications,
CODESRIA

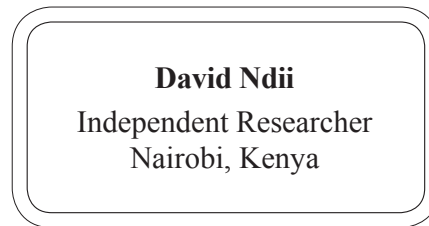
The *Randomista* Rampage in Development Economics: A View from the Trenches

Introduction

The use of Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) in developing country policy research has been proclaimed as a revolution in development economics.¹ The application of RCTs in public policy research is not itself new. Leao and Eyal (2019) characterise the upsurge of RCTs since the turn of the millennium as a second wave.² The first wave is from the 1960s to the 1980s, and the current second wave from then to date. Their survey of the literature reveals that economists are responsible for 80 percent of this second wave of RCT up from zero in the first wave. This finding invites the conclusion that the novelty of RCTs is primarily about adoption by economists.

Within and outside economics, RCTs are on the spotlight for several reasons including contested scientific authority, research quality issues with many RCT studies, and perhaps most importantly, ethics. These concerns are the subject of other essays in this and a previous issue of *CODESRIA Bulletin* (No. 1, 2020); however, this paper takes a different tack. It reflects on the claim that *randomistas* have overrun development economics.

RCTs are primarily an impact evaluation methodology, whose main theatre of action is foreign aid programmes. Development economics, since its advent in



the middle of the last century, has been a “big picture” domain concerned with growth, trade policy, public finance, industrial policy, etc. There is thus a paradox, as to how such a broad field can be revolutionised by a not particularly novel or profound methodology with rather limited applicability. Moreover, intellectual revolutions, paradigm shifts if you like, are characterised by fierce contests between old and new ideas. But no such contest has occurred in the resurgent application of RCTs in development economics. Indeed, the proclamation itself acknowledges that it has come unheralded. This paper contends that this is because development economics as a distinct sub-discipline no longer exists, and in effect, the proclaimed revolution is little more than tilting at windmills.

The paper is organised as follows. First, it provides a synopsis of the economics critique of RCTs; secondly, it chronicles the rise and demise of development economics; thirdly, it comments on the nexus between RCTs and foreign aid; and finally, the paper concludes on the possibility of a new decolonised development economics.

Economics critique of RCTs

The proclamation of a RCT revolution in development economics rests on two equally heroic claims namely that RCTs solved the causality problem in social science research, and consequent to this, that RCTs portend transformation of policy into an exact science as asserted by Duflo:

“It’s not the Middle Ages anymore, it’s the 21st century. And in the 20th century, randomized controlled trials have revolutionized medicine by allowing us to distinguish between drugs that work and drugs that don’t work. And you can do the same, randomized controlled trial for social policy. You can put social innovation through the same rigorous, scientific tests that we use for drugs. And in this way, you can take the guesswork out of policymaking by knowing what works, what doesn’t work and why.”³

The proclamation is also reflected in the mission statement of The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), the RCT citadel, which reads in part “to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence.”⁴ I comment on each briefly.

Gold standard

Research with non-experimental data such as is used in empirical economics, quantitative social science research and epidemiology is plagued by correlation–causality conundrums. Is it investment

that causes growth, or growth that stimulates investment, or is the observed correlation between them caused by other unobserved factors? Why do corruption indicators correlate so strongly with per capita incomes? Is corruption cause or consequence of poverty? Occasionally, social scientists are lucky; they stumble on natural experiments, for example, twins separated at birth enable psychologists to disentangle the effects of nature and nurture on child development.

Randomistas assert that RCTs evidence is of the same standard as the clinical trials that they seek to mimic, which is to say that if observed statistically that significant difference between the treatment and control group exists, the treatment is the only probable cause. This then implies that RCT evidence should invalidate the findings of any other research methodology that is contrary, hence the “gold standard.”

The gold standard claim has been vigorously contested notably by Ravallion (2018) and Deaton (2019). Ravallion provides a particularly poignant counter-example, a “mock” RCT in Denmark that randomly assigned 860 elderly people into a “treatment” and “control” group but no intervention was administered. Eighteen months later, there was a statistically significant difference in mortality rates between the two groups.⁵ Suffice it to say that the field conditions where the claimed gold standard RCTs are conducted are nowhere near as ideal as this. More generally, Deaton argues an epistemological case against evidential hierarchy as being dangerous and unscientific.

“The imposition of a hierarchy of evidence is both dangerous and unscientific. Dangerous because it automatically discards evidence

that may need to be considered, evidence that might be critical. Hierarchies are unscientific because the profession is collectively absolved from reconciling results across studies; the observational study is wrong simply because there was no randomization. The practice of RCT itself has not stood well to scrutiny in terms of research execution but more importantly ethics.”⁶

Policy science

In academic policy research circles, evidence-based policy (EBP) is an article of faith. Thus, within the discourse of RCTs, it is implicit that evidence-based policy is desirable. Even as the hierarchy of evidence is challenged, a hierarchy of knowledge where research evidence is privileged over other types of knowledge such as experiential, local and traditional knowledge is taken for granted. This is an ivory tower delusion. Consider the following two contrasting examples.

Case study #1 US healthcare reform: For close to a decade now the U.S has been grappling with highly charged health care reform debates which befuddle many people unfamiliar with the country’s underlying ideological and cultural politics. Its scientific and policy research establishment is unrivalled globally. Still, the US stands out among wealthy countries in its inability to build consensus on how to fix a very broken health care system.

Case study #2 Period poverty: Period poverty has in recent years emerged as a serious policy issue that has been undermining girls’ education and wellbeing for a long time. While it came to global attention as a problem of poverty in developing countries, it has become evident that it is a challenge in rich and poor

countries alike. New Zealand has for example recently announced to provide free menstrual hygiene management (MHM) products to all school girls, where reportedly 95,000 girls are affected. This is a huge number, given that there are 300,000 teenage (age 13–19) in the country, this figure suggests more than 60 percent of girls are affected.⁷

Kenya began providing free MHM products to disadvantaged girls through the school system a decade ago. In 2016, the education law was amended making universal provision of menstrual hygiene management in public schools. The amendment obliges the State to “provide free, sufficient and quality sanitary towels to every girl child registered and enrolled in a public basic education institution who has reached puberty and provide a safe and environmentally sound mechanism for disposal of the sanitary towels.”⁸ The Government reports spending Sh420m (\$4.2m) on MHM products for 3.7 million girls in 2017/18 financial year.⁹

We are confronted here with two counter-intuitive situations. Mountains of evidence has not helped the US agree that its health system is broken, let alone how to fix it. On the other hand, a poor country, persuaded by moral-ethical sensibility, pioneers a progressive menstrual hygiene management policy, unimpeded by the lack of scientific evidence.

There is an insightful, if unseemly, RCT twist to Kenya’s menstrual hygiene management policy. In an RCT conducted in western Kenya (one of the RCT “epicentres”) reports evaluating impact of “quality” MHM products against a control group that used “usual methods” (the usual methods are not specified) found that quality

products had a positive impact on health outcomes but no effect on school attendance. This study is intriguing and disturbing, for at least four reasons. First, as already observed, the Kenya government provides free products, as does many charitable organisations, begging the question what was categorized as “usual methods” of the control group. Second, it begs the question as to how the study ensured and verified that the control group only used the “usual methods.” Third, the ethics of such an experiment that would have a control group use unsanitary products given the prior knowledge that it entails risk of infection. Fourth, what policy value was envisaged. If gold standard scientific evidence posited that quality MHM products has no impact on health or education, would the *randomistas* recommend public provision of MHM products be withdrawn?¹⁰

The rise and fall of development economics

Development economics refers to a domain of study and practice originating from the diplomatic initiative that shaped the post-war world order, as captured in this reminiscence by one of its pioneers, Paul Rosenstein-Rodan:

“During the Second World War, I proposed in London the formation of a group to study the problems of economically underdeveloped countries instead of the more usual work on current economic problems related to the war. If we were to emerge alive, we should want not to return to the previous status quo but to form a better world. A study group was organized at the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) and worked from 1942 till 1945 on problems of “underdeveloped countries.” This term appeared then for the

first time. My 1943 article in the *Economic Journal* served as a basic document for the group and is now in many anthologies of economic studies of the Third World.”¹¹

The development economics that emerged had two strands. The classical school kicked off by Rosenstein-Rodan framed underdevelopment as capital shortage—a low income, low saving, low investment poverty trap. Rosenstein-Rodan’s “big push” theory was followed by influential contributions in the same vein by Ragnar Nurkse, Arthur Lewis, Albert Hirschman, and Harvey Liebenstein, among others. They saw the problem of development economics then, was how to finance rapid capital accumulation. It should not surprise, as these pioneers were part of the thinking that culminated in the Marshall Plan and Bretton Woods institutions. Nurkse was an economist with the League of Nations while Rosenstein-Rodan was one of the World Bank’s pioneer economists at establishment in 1947.

The second strand situated underdevelopment in the international trade arena. It was seeded by the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis named after Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer who, in 1950, separately published studies showing long term movement of terms of trade against primary commodities vis a vis manufactured goods. Other pioneering contributors include Gunnar Myrdal, Simon Kuznets and Hollis Chenery. This strand grew into the structuralist economics school associated with “heterodox” macroeconomics and fed dependency theory. It gave birth to import substitution industrialisation (ISI) and dependency; although it is far from clear that the pioneers themselves subscribed to the progeny—Prebisch was certainly criti-

cal of the protectionism associated with ISI. Like the classical school pioneers, the structuralists were also pioneer internationalists. Prebisch published his terms of trade study shortly after becoming Executive Director of the Latin America Economic Commission. He went on to become the founding Secretary General of UNCTAD. Singer was one of the first economists to join the newly established UN in 1947 and went on to be UNIDO’s chief economist.

The two strands shared three foundational principles. First, that economic development as they envisaged it was an imperative for disruptive change, and such a process could not be studied using the tools of the classical/neoclassical economics which was concerned with the workings of the “invisible hand.” Second, they also agreed that jump-starting the process required a visible hand—the visible hand of government. Third, they were both structuralist. While the terms of trade school is most associated with “structuralism”, the classical school also turned on a particular structural element—dualism—that postulated the coexistence of traditional/backward and capitalist/modern sectors, the former characterised by surplus labour that could be tapped by the latter at subsistence wages, thereby enabling capitalists to generate a larger investible surplus that a competitive market economy would allow.

By the mid-1960s several developing countries pursuing State-led import substitution industrialisation were running into macroeconomic crises. South Korea was among the first to change course, implementing between 1961 and 1964, the reforms that decades later become known as structural adjustment, setting in motion the trajectory that became the Asian Tigers “economic miracle.” The massive eight-country case study of industrialisation in

developing countries by Little *et. al.* (1970) challenged import substitution, and can be said to have marked the beginning of the end of the post-war development economics.¹² This was followed in quick succession by assaults from mainstream liberal economists notably Anne Krueger and Jagdish Baghwati on protectionism and Ronald McKinnon and Edward Shaw on financial repression, among others.

The economic crisis of the post-1973 oil shock engulfed both developed and developing countries. Margaret Thatcher was elected UK Prime Minister in 1979 amidst a severe stagflation (stagnation and inflation), and Ronald Reagan was elected US President the following year, setting in motion the ascent of the policy regime now known as neoliberalism. It also gave impetus to the liberal development economics, culminating in the “Washington Consensus.” Anne Krueger took over from Hollis Chenery, the last of the pioneer development economists, as the Chief Economist of The World Bank.

The 1990s saw a resurgence of academic interest in economic growth, following the seminal contributions by Romer (1986, 1990) and Lucas (1988) to what is now referred to as new or “endogenous” growth theory.¹³ Solow’s (1957) neoclassical growth model demonstrated that technical progress was the dominant factor in economic growth in the long run but in his model, technology was “exogenous”, something that happened outside the market system. The new growth theory tweaked Solow’s growth model in ways that made the rate of technical progress a feature of the market system.¹⁴ Thus emerged a unified tractable theory of long run growth. It spawned a huge empirical research enterprise that

could explain income differences across countries without recourse to structure and other peculiarities of backwardness—another nail in the development economics coffin. Bevan, Collier and Gunning’s 1994 book *Controlled Open Economies: A Neoclassical Approach to Structuralism* more or less completed the “liberalisation” of development macroeconomics.¹⁵

Lastly, globalisation has disrupted many things and economics is no exception. Development economics was for the most part a discourse on Southern disadvantage whether in terms of trade, access to capital, market efficiency and backwardness. By contrast, economics discourse on globalisation is less about North–South inequality and more about (rich) winners and (poor) losers in rich and poor countries alike, making for such unlikely global bestsellers as Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the 21st Century* and Angus Deaton’s *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth and the Origins of Inequality*.

Aid (in)effectiveness

Foreign aid lives in the shadow of failure. It is now firmly established that sustained economic growth is the most effective means of reducing poverty, yet decades of studies have failed to establish a definitive impact of aid on growth.

As evidence of failure mounted, the aid sector set about looking for alternatives to development assistance (ODA). At the turn of the millennium, microcredit emerged as the “silver bullet.” The UN declared 2005 the International Year of Microcredit. The following year, Mohammed Yunus and Grameen Bank, the microcredit bank he founded, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Donors poured

in money. It did not take very long for diminishing returns to set in. Although microcredit is still a vibrant sector, it has certainly not delivered on the expectations in its halcyon days.

In recent years, the alternative aid sector has been boosted by the entry of the world’s super rich—the phenomenon now known as “philanthrocapitalism. The ideal behind philanthrocapitalism is that instead of passive giving, the entrepreneurial acumen of the super rich can be deployed to add value to philanthropy. Philanthrocapitalists are a big funder and user of RCTs. More importantly, they have become an important source of foreign aid. In 2019, the Global Fund sixth replenishment raised a record US\$14b. Private donors pledged \$1.2b, ranking third after US, UK, and France, more than such big donor countries as Germany and Japan, as well as the European Commission. The Gates Foundation alone pledged \$760m more than Canada (\$700m), the European Commission (\$606m) or Sweden, Norway, Netherlands & Denmark combined (\$738m).¹⁶

Foreign aid has always been ill at ease with the political dimensions of development. Up until the early 1990s, the IMF and World Bank steered clear of corruption citing political non-interference provisions in their articles of association. In truth it was a fig leaf covering their financing of US allied kleptocrats such as Mobutu and Suharto. After the cold war, “governance” (read political) conditionalities became obligatory without amendment of the hitherto forbidding articles. As individual citizens of foreign countries, the philanthrocapitalists are even more constrained to be non-political than either IFIs or bilateral ODA. This imperative dovetails with

the *randomistas* gospel of “policy science.” The narrow focus on aid impact evaluation is manifestation of diminished policy leverage of the edifice that Teju Cole has aptly christened the white saviour industrial complex.¹⁷ Seen from this vantage point, the Randomista rampage in development economics is no revolution. It is its last rites.

Conclusion

Thirty years ago, Vernon Ruttan set out the challenge of the study of development as that of integrating the study of political and economic development, to wit:

“The subject matter of economic development and political development intersect over a broad front. Economic policy is made by incumbent politicians in the context of political institutions. The analysis of the economic impact of alternative policies is the stock in trade of the economist. The choice of the alternative policies that are subjected to economic analysis is influenced by the agendas of political parties and interests. The subject matter of political science includes the political decision process by which policies are adopted and implemented. It also includes the social consequences and the public response to policy. There is a deep fault line that divides scholarship in the two fields. Each field tends to treat the knowledge it draws on from the other as implicit rather than explicit. It seems apparent that the implicit theorising by economists about political development and of political scientists about economic development should be replaced by more explicit attempts to develop an integrated theory of political and economic development.¹⁸

This seems to be the place to start the conversation on a new decolonised development economics.

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Numéro spécial

**Essais contrôlés randomisés
et la recherche de développement en Afrique**

Éditorial

Ce numéro du Bulletin revient sur des travaux en cours qui théorisent le développement économique de l'Afrique. Il porte sur le débat sur les essais contrôlés randomisés (ECR) dans la conception d'interventions de développement pour et en Afrique. Domaine renaissant de curiosité intellectuelle occidentale et d'initiative politique, les ECR ont reçu une attention renouvelée et une validation inattendue. Avec l'attribution du prix

salué par le Comité Nobel pour sa contribution majeure à la réduction de la pauvreté. Cela a catalysé des débats animés et des réfutations d'universitaires, de praticiens du développement et d'experts en politiques publiques qui se poursuivent encore aujourd'hui, y compris sur les plateformes de médias sociaux. Les débats ont porté sur les mérites de l'application d'ECR à la réflexion sur le développement sur le continent. Les interlocuteurs ont constamment tenté de contextualiser la littérature sur les ECR dans la sociologie historique de la production et la diffusion des connaissances, en soulignant également l'impact sur les résultats de développement.

Au-delà du signal du prix Nobel pour la réflexion sur la recherche et le développement, les hypothèses théoriques et idéologiques engendrées par les ECR restent problématiques sur le plan conceptuel et méthodologique. Bien sûr, l'utilisation d'ECR dans la biomédecine, par exemple, a une valeur énorme et a mené à des résultats qui sont au cœur du progrès scientifique. Ce n'est pas le cas de l'économie où les critiques, même lorsqu'ils reconnaissent l'importance des approches expérimentales par opposition aux approches d'observation, mettent en garde contre la tendance à accorder un statut spécial aux ECR¹. « Chaque discipline est constituée par ce qu'elle interdit à ses pratiquants² ». À la base, cette

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Dans ce numéro

Éditorial

1. *Le développementalisme pop en Afrique*, **Grieve Chelwa**
2. *Expérimentation sociale involontaire : réexamen des arguments en faveur d'un moratoire*, **Nimi Hoffmann**
3. *Les essais randomisés : impasse pour le développement de l'Afrique*, **Seán M. Muller**
4. *Services climatologiques pour les petits exploitants agricoles utilisant le téléphone portable : preuves d'un essai pilote randomisé contrôlé au nord du Bénin*, **Rosaine N. Yegbemey**
5. *Confiance, légitimité et perceptions de la communauté sur la randomisation des transferts monétaires*, **Marion Ouma**

Nobel d'économie 2019 à Esther Duflo, Abijit Banerjee et Michael Kremer, ce trio a reçu le prix Nobel pour son travail d'adaptation de méthodes d'ECR dans la conception d'interventions de développement en Afrique, et a été

tion, mettent en garde contre la tendance à accorder un statut spécial aux ECR¹. « Chaque discipline est constituée par ce qu'elle interdit à ses pratiquants² ». À la base, cette



Ce bulletin trimestriel est distribué à titre gracieux à tous les instituts de recherche et facultés africaines. Il a pour objectif de stimuler la discussion, les échanges d'informations et d'encourager la coopération en matière de recherche. Les communications sur les questions théoriques, les rapports de conférences et séminaires, et les études récentes sont les bienvenus.

Evidence as Cliché: Using Trials to Tamper with Governance

For... [] there are experimental methods and conceptual confusion... The existence of the experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems that trouble us; but problem and method pass one another by.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Introduction

In 2018, I was invited by the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* to review a manuscript. It was a systematic review on the impact of decentralised governance on health services. I was happy to have been asked. The protocol for the review was published in 2013,¹ and I had read it with a mix of excitement and scepticism. *Cochrane* places much emphasis on evidence from randomised controlled trials, and the authors had proposed in their protocol to review evidence from experimental and quasi-experimental studies on decentralised governance.² Knowing that decentralised governance (as a policy intervention) is not readily amenable to such methods of inquiry, I wondered where the authors would find the studies to include in their review. Decentralisation is often implemented as part of all-encompassing political reform process in a country.³ So, how do you separate decentralised (experimental) from centralised (control) districts?

I was therefore not surprised to note that the authors were able to identify only one eligible study. But even that study was not really eligible. As I wrote in my review:

“...the authors define decentralisation and centralisation only in rela-

Seye Abimbola

University of Sydney
Australia

tion to governments. The challenge of such a limited definition is two-fold – 1. Decisions of governments to (de)centralise the governance of services between levels of government are made in such a way that it is hard, if not impossible, to subject to experimental evaluation – hence it is not surprising that the authors found no such study that meets their inclusion criteria; 2. The only study that meets the authors’ inclusion criteria does not really meet their inclusion criteria – this study examined decentralisation within an organisation (and not from one level of government to another). The authors have the option of re-writing or reframing their review and how they define (de)centralisation in a broader sense that goes beyond what happens between [or] among governments to [include] the governance structure within organisations.”

When I wrote those open peer review comments, I had thought that most (if not all) experimental studies of decentralised governance will potentially amount to large scale tampering with health system governance. I still think so. However, I have since changed my mind

on the potential to find such studies on decentralised governance. Over time, I came to the view that the name of a well-known health policy intervention *performance-based financing* – which has repeatedly been subjected to experimental and quasi-experimental inquiry,⁴ is a misnomer. It is decentralised governance in disguise, just like purchaser-provider split and community engagement in governance. Whether or not these trials are useful, or should have been conducted, they exist. They should have been considered as eligible for inclusion in that proposed Cochrane review on decentralisation. But I had not thought so at the time. I did not make the link.

Elements – governance as core, incentives as adaptable

With pilots or full-scale programmes in at least 32 out of 46 countries, performance-based financing is one of the most widely implemented health policy measures in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ Its spread is backed by a well-nurtured ‘nexus of strongly dedicated diffusion entrepreneurs’, working in, funded by, or supported through bilateral and multilateral development banks and agencies, especially the World Bank.⁶ Trials have played a central rhetorical role in legitimising performance-based

financing initiatives across Africa. Even though the results of those trials are hardly ever impressive, decisions to scale up the initiative within a country or to spread it to other countries were often made ‘before research results were made available, or in spite of them’.⁷ The literature on performance-based financing does not position *decentralisation* as its core feature, framing it instead by a relatively marginal, and often adaptable feature – i.e. incentives given to health facilities or peripheral governing entities to improve the quantity and quality of their services.⁸

In implementation science, programmes are described as having ‘core elements’ and ‘adaptable elements’. Core elements are features which are directly or primarily responsible for programme impact. Adaptable elements are features that are modified to align with contextual nuances.⁹ The core feature or element of performance-based financing is often framed as the incentive to improve performance. However, at the core of the initiative, is the transfer of power, resources, and responsibilities from central to peripheral actors in the health system.¹⁰ The transfer may occur between the national and sub-national governments, between a government and health facilities, or between a government and community groups (e.g. community health committees).¹¹ Thus, the core feature is decentralisation – ‘performance-based financing’ is decentralised governance by another name. Without decentralisation reforms, health facilities, sub-national governments, or community groups cannot receive, use, and make decisions based on performance incentives.

I put this conceptual confusion down to the problem of gaze, the

foreign gaze.¹² The framing of performance incentives as being at the core of performance-based financing makes it amenable to evaluation through randomised control trials. The alternative is much more difficult. Asking directly for the decentralisation of health system governance, is tantamount to asking for a likely unwelcome wholesale tampering with health systems; a complex, contested, threatening, and long process of reforms, retooling, and negotiations. The ‘simplification’ of performance-based financing lends it, in turn, to the generation of simple and apparently compelling evidence on its effectiveness through randomised controlled trials; and makes it ‘marketable’ to a funder or policy actor at a distance – to the foreign gaze. The language of ‘performance-based financing’ offers decentralisation through the backdoor – *after all, rather than an extensive reform, it is quite a specific intervention*. The core element (i.e. decentralisation) thus becomes a relatively silent consideration.

The non-problem of mixed results

Much like decentralisation,¹³ efforts to quantify the effects of performance-based financing¹⁴ on health system performance have yielded mixed results, and inevitably so. In spite of repeated efforts, (including the use of trials in the case of performance-based financing) to demonstrate their effectiveness, or lack thereof, it has proved to be an impossible and perhaps, unnecessary endeavour. After all, their effectiveness could not possibly be proven one way or another, or proven once and for all. They are complex social (and/or political) interventions. Their effects result from the many interacting and varying behaviours and interests

of the individuals and groups, who design or implement them, or are their targets or intended beneficiaries. Their effects also depend on their design, i.e. decentralisation or performance-based financing in one place is necessarily different from an intervention that carries the same label elsewhere.

While their effects vary from place to place, and from time to time, there may be tendencies and identifiable patterns in how these complex social interventions and phenomena perform when introduced or activated in a particular place or setting.¹⁵ But even those tendencies are always contingent on context. For example, in a setting where X exists, and people have experienced Y and so reason in a particular way Z, favourable outcomes result from decentralised governance or performance-based financing. Hence, for a policy-maker, the question is not so much whether to decentralise governance (in settings where they have the power to do so) or implement performance-based financing, but rather, how will it work in a setting where X does not exist, but rather there is A, where instead of Y, people have experienced B, and so, are likely to reason in way C when decentralised governance or performance-based financing is introduced.

Understanding the knowledge and evidence needs on complex interventions and phenomena in terms that acknowledge their complexity should be the starting point of inquiry, and not the conclusion. Too often, it is the other way around – the studies, often experimental, randomised controlled trials, has been set up, and conducted in multiple places, often at great cost, only to conclude, after their results accumulate over time, that the evidence is mixed. Of course, the

evidence is mixed. It is a misuse of the experimental method. But the practice persists. And the question is why? In the case of performance-based financing, once you see it as decentralised governance, the question becomes even more difficult to answer. Decentralised governance is an ongoing process that involves continued tensions and negotiations and learning. It is never complete. Any evidence on its effectiveness is at best tentative; and generously interpreted, it is cliché; and at worst, it is a disingenuous, cynical (if sometimes useful) excuse for tampering with health system governance.

If the question is, should a country adopt performance-based financing, these randomised controlled trials cannot answer it. If the question is, what kind of performance-based financing a country should adopt, these randomised controlled trials cannot answer it either. And if the question is, how a country should modify its own performance-based financing initiative to suit its context, these randomised controlled trials cannot also answer it. So, what are they good for? Why does randomised controlled trial evidence remain important (even though whether its result is positive or negative, whether it demonstrates effectiveness or not, it has little to say about what is really a reform effort)? Who is the audience of these randomised controlled trials? The foreign gaze? It is perhaps an easier way to convince funders and unsuspecting, distant, governments who will accept the result as *unthinkingly* as its cliché deployment by policy entrepreneurs.

What RCTs enable – foreign, surgical, simplicity

Using randomised controlled trials to assess performance-based financ-

ing initiatives is like judging a cake by the cherry or icing on top of it; the cake here being the core, underlying layers of decentralisation reforms and processes, on top of which the ‘performance incentive’ rests. In these trials, it is the whole package that is being evaluated, even though the evidence is typically presented as evidence on ‘performance incentives’ component. When the evidence is mixed, it is often because the context asserts itself, again and again. So, to know why evidence from randomised controlled trials could have been considered useful at all, one can only infer from the rhetoric implicit in such trials – i.e. that there are benefits to ‘simplifying’ a complex intervention, and to the wishing way of context, such that even when context is to be taken seriously, the aspects of context which are considered are those that readily lend themselves to simplification.

These wishful assumptions relate, in part, to the origin story of performance-based financing. Early evidence came from post-conflict states undergoing or considering sweeping governance reforms.¹⁶ The first scale up effort was in such a peculiar setting – Rwanda – evaluated in a randomised-controlled trial,¹⁷ showing success in improving health system performance, a result which has since been challenged, and has hardly been replicated elsewhere, despite repeated efforts.¹⁸ However, outside such atypical settings with ongoing governance reforms onto which performance-based financing can position itself as cherry or icing on the cake (e.g. Rwanda, Burundi, and Zimbabwe) it is indeed rare for national governments to devote significant domestic funds and other local resources to support, implement or scale-up performance-based financing initiatives.¹⁹ Those funds have typically

come from outside – from donors, notably, the World Bank.²⁰

In the absence of ongoing reforms or a national or sub-national willingness to undergo such reforms, efforts to introduce or scale up performance-based financing (usually accompanied with randomised controlled trials), may therefore require unwelcome tampering with health system governance. And given that existing governance arrangements are typically entrenched, context reasserts itself in the (in)effectiveness of such efforts. Tampering may cause unintended consequences. But masquerading a reform (e.g. decentralised governance) as an intervention (e.g. performance-based financing), may also work as a deliberate backdoor strategy to introduce a necessary and desirable reform into a health system which powerful interests in the system would otherwise have resisted. Regardless of such a coy strategy, the foreign gaze has an appetite for simple, rather than complex interventions, so much that it will simplify a complex intervention.

I experienced this appetite, firsthand, in Nigeria, 2013. I was working at the National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Abuja – the implementing agency for Nigeria’s performance-based financing initiative. I had volunteered to help during the fieldwork for a study. There was sub-optimal uptake of services in pilot health facilities for the initiative. The World Bank wanted to know why. One consistent finding was that where local decentralised governance structures (community health committees) were active, service uptake was high, and where they were not, uptake was low.²¹ However, this was not reflected on the list of recommendations in the draft report shared with the rest of the team by the lead World Bank

consultant. It focussed on a reasonable but much less compelling idea of using transportation vouchers to improve uptake. I raised this glaring omission. The consultant replied that they would correct it. In the final report, there was hardly a mention of community health committees; the focus remained transportation vouchers.²²

The foreign gaze had held on to a tangible, ‘surgical’ intervention – something simple, something that could be readily sold to a funder who is looking or acting at a distance, something that could be proven, once and for all, to have worked. Here is my interpretation of that experience: when you are looking from a distance, you see ‘concrete’ things like money, funds and performance incentives, things that could come from outside, and surgically (or magically) make things better, like transportation vouchers; rather than things that are organic, things that require on-the-ground retooling, negotiations, fixing, learning, something like local community health committees, like decentralised governance. Transportation vouchers are tangible, they can be measured, and evaluated, and implemented in the same format, from place to place, like a traveling model. It is easily imagined as scalable. It is discrete. It is new. It appears attractive at a distance.

What RCTs constrain – rich, organic, learning

If performance-based financing were re-framed as a form of decentralised governance, then how would it be studied? Before I came to this understanding of performance-based financing, I had, myself, conducted an evidence synthesis on how decentralised governance influences health system performance,²³ and I had left

out the literature on performance-based financing. Looking back, this omission leaves me with deep and regretful appreciation of what must be many such potential opportunities for learning that we so easily miss due to how we frame interventions or programmes in a way that makes their adaptable elements seem like core elements. As a result, potential learnings on core elements are not optimised – learning across interventions (that belong in the same “core elements” family) and learning across settings.²⁴ This likely does incalculable harm to our ability to solve the problems that trouble us in global health and development.

However, the evidence synthesis on decentralisation that I conducted began with a premise of complexity. It acknowledged that what is useful evidence is not whether decentralisation ‘works’ but how, for whom, and under what circumstances it ‘works’ or not.²⁵ It acknowledged that what is called ‘decentralisation’ is often limited by a focus on its top-down connotations as an ‘intervention’; that decentralised governance may also be seen as a common phenomenon; as how things are regardless of a formal policy to enact (de-)centralisation as an intervention – e.g. the decentralised ways in which local community health committees govern their local health system; through the exercise of local agency. Hence, one can study decentralisation not only as an ‘intervention’. These conceptual moves meant that I could cast wide the net of studies to include in the evidence synthesis, thus enriching the range of potential insights and learnings.

While none of the included studies was a randomised controlled trial, in retrospect, I realise that trials could have met the inclusion criteria. But such trials are

rare, precisely because decentralised governance involves iterative social and political decision-making processes that resist randomisation. Trials assume standardised interventions across sites; decentralisation is about continuous local learning and adaptation. Unfortunately, the ‘surgical’ appetite of the foreign gaze means that researchers who are inclined to understand from the bottom up, to engage in the organic process of change, may feel the need to apologise for their superior choice, to justify why they ‘have not developed a traditional intervention’,²⁶ and risk being seen as ‘academic lightweight, producing nothing of substance’, or as researchers who ‘answer questions which are dull, not novel (little contribution to the scientific literature), or not generalizable (focused on local issues)’.²⁷

Trials do not entirely preclude asking nuanced questions, but make it much more difficult to ask them. In the context of a trial, such questions are an afterthought (when embedded within the trial), are limited (by the very nature of assumptions made in trials), or are wrong (e.g. when asked in binaries if whether something is good or bad, whether it works or not).²⁸ But what is really important are nuanced questions of process or more fundamental questions of appropriateness, of fairness, of justice, or overarching systems, or of the ongoing, iterative, long-term effects of health system interventions, processes, phenomena, and outcomes that trials are ill-equipped to capture: What does a system need to improve? Are performance incentives (beyond salaries) necessary? Why? Are there locally-informed strategies to address the reasons? Do they require local political engagement? How do you support local political process to generate change?

Much like randomised controlled trials, performance-based financing has generated serious debate.²⁹ Both debates are linked. The opportunity and transaction costs of implementing performance-based financing are cited by those challenging it. They also cite trials showing its failure, just as the other side can easily cite trials showing its success and make the case that any failure is due to ‘context’. It is a cliché debate that shows the limits of trials. Notably, in their defence of performance-based financing initiatives, a group of local health systems practitioners across six African countries did not cite evidence from trials. For them, it is a “reform approach” in “constant evolution” “over time”, which builds capacity at different levels of decentralised governance, to improve “coordination, decentralisation, accountability... including community engagement in ... governance)”.³⁰ To the local gaze, performance-based financing is decentralised governance.

Conclusion

Early 2020, I visited the Cochrane website to check the status of the review on decentralisation. I was keen to see the direction in which the authors had taken their review in response to my and others’ peer review comments. Unfortunately, I found a notice, dated September 2019, stating that the editors of the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, have “withdrawn it from publication” because “this protocol has not been successfully converted into a full Cochrane Review within established timelines due to lack of resources to complete the review.”³¹ The two authors of the review protocol and the potential systematic review are based in Malaysia, which may explain their limited resources. I thought, what a loss. By broadening the scope of

the systematic review and redefining its parameters, their review would have been an opportunity to deepen and enrich the literature on the impact of decentralisation on health systems and services.

However, I am left wondering what the results would look like of a systematic review on decentralisation that includes evidence – both qualitative and quantitative – on performance-based financing initiatives. It could be an extension of the evidence synthesis that I had conducted, or a revision of the planned systematic review, which, for lack of resources, and the preference of the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* for experimental studies, may never be completed. The result of such evidence synthesis or review would have looked different – ‘performance incentives’ would have only featured as one among many contextual factors that may enable or constrain outcomes such as quality, equity, and efficiency. The literature is poorer for lack of (and for not normalising) such a complexity-informed review.³² This is one of the costs of randomised-controlled trials – how it can obscure conceptual connections. We must find ways to count this cost too.

It is important to make sense of the costs of randomised controlled trials in health systems, global health, and development research. In the example that I have presented here, in part due to the rhetorical, if cliché, advantage of randomised controlled trials in feeding the appetite of the foreign gaze, a policy measure that was indeed designed to strengthen decentralised governance is largely mis-named (as performance-based financing), mis-valued (using evidence from randomised controlled trials), and mis-marketed (like a Trojan horse) to governments, as an excuse

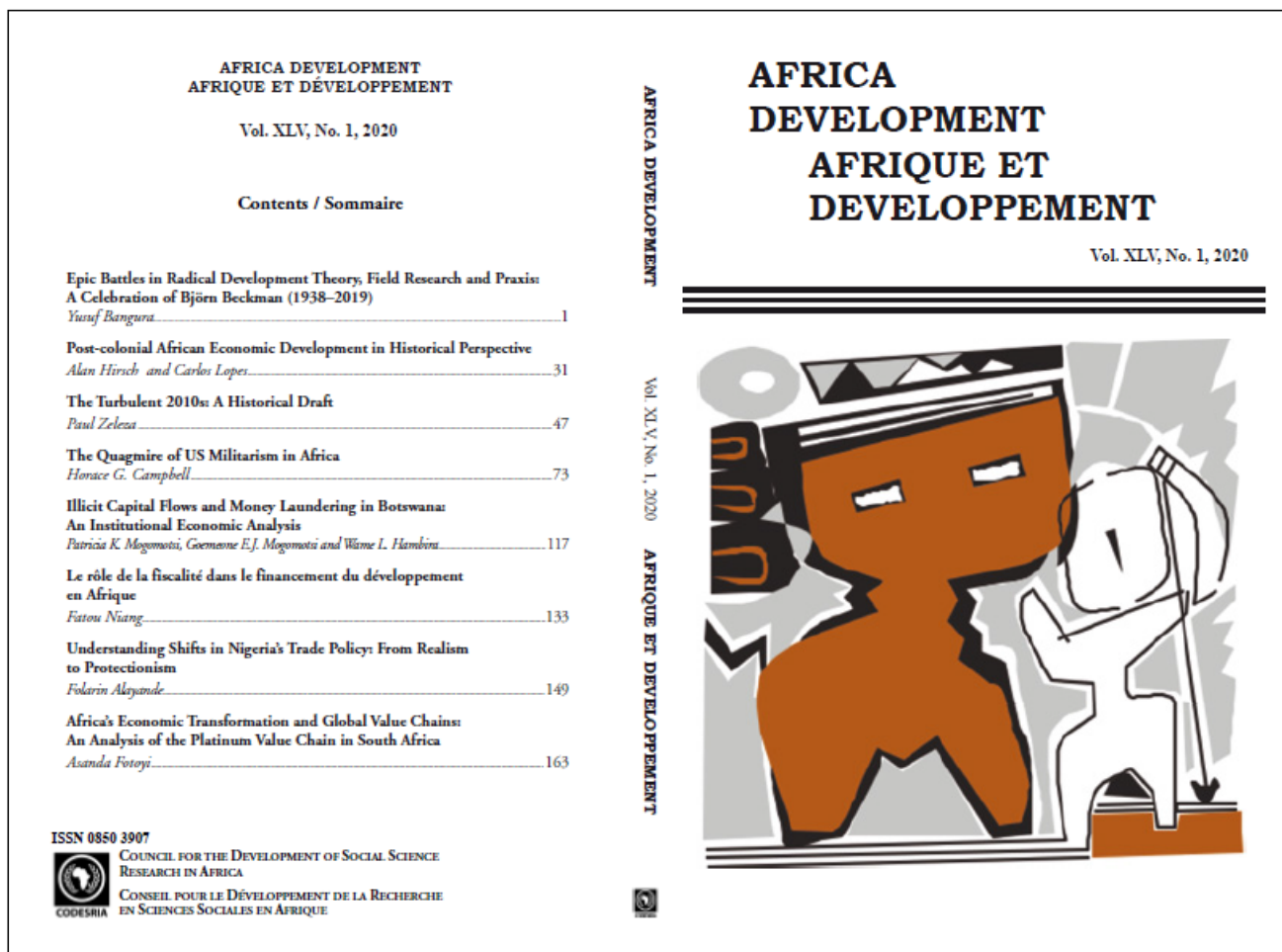
(sometimes desirably?) to tamper with health system governance. The literature on performance-based financing should have been part of the literature on decentralised governance. That it is not, limits the learning that could have taken place between both literatures. The cost of simplification – aided by randomised controlled trials – is that it unwittingly limits learning.

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FORTHCOMING

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Numéro spécial **Hommage à Thandika Mkandawire (1940–2020)**



Chercheur, mentor et bâtisseur d'institutions



Ce bulletin trimestriel est distribué à titre gracieux à tous les instituts de recherche et facultés africaines. Il a pour objectif de stimuler la discussion, les échanges d'informations et d'encourager la coopération en matière de recherche. Les communications sur les questions théoriques, les rapports de conférences et séminaires, et les études récentes sont les bienvenus.

The Nobel Prizes, Racism and the Economy of Prestige

Before Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee won the 2019 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, their use of randomized trials in social experiments among vulnerable populations in the developing world had already raised eyebrows. That the Swedish Academy of Sciences chose to award them the Sveriges Riksbank (and not Nobel) sponsored prize, while disconcerting, is not surprising.

The 2019 laureates were the latest in a line of economists to whom the Sveriges Riksbank has offered the prestige and monetary compensation that comes with the Nobel prizes. However, the point is not merely that their research approach has methodological and ethical faults; it is that this is not the first time that the prize has gone to people whose ideas have had a devastating impact on real people. The gurus of neoliberal economics and free-market policies, such as Frederick Hayek, Milton Friedman, and James Buchanan, are all Nobel laureates, even though their ideas have wreaked havoc on black and other peoples of colour worldwide. And just like in 2019, the Swedish academy ignored the public concerns in their nominations. In the case of Milton Friedman, there was public uproar and international protests, and during the award ceremony, a member of the audience protested when Friedman stood up to receive his award and was promptly carried out of the hall.

Wandia Njoya

Daystar University
Kenya

An ambiguous prize

This chequered history of the Johnny-come-lately to the Nobel Prize in Economics party has led to questions and outright opposition to the economics prize. Hayek's co-recipient, Gunnar Myrdal, whose work was the polar opposite of Hayek's, called for an end to the prize for economics, arguing that economics was not an exact science and was necessarily political; therefore, aspiring for an apolitical discipline was irresponsible (Feldman 2000). Peter Nobel, a descendant of the Nobel family, has repeatedly criticized the economics prize, calling it a "a PR coup by economists to improve their reputation" and an award that is "most often awarded to stock market speculators" (*The Local* 2005).

Peter Nobel's observations would seem to be confirmed by Bo Rothstein, a professor of political science at the University of Gothenburg. In an open letter to the Swedish Academy of Science (Rothstein 2015), he called for a moratorium on the award of the prize until investigations are carried out to determine the link between the economics prize and the rise in corruption worldwide. Citing

his own research and numerous studies, he argued that corruption is responsible for poverty, poor standards of living and even conflict, but corruption abounds because of its link to economics as a discipline and the prestige now compounded by the Nobel prize. Rothstein presented evidence that "studying economics increases tolerance for corruption and fraud" and that economics suffers from "self-isolationism" that makes students severely limited in understanding "the importance of ethics and social norms from disciplines such as sociology, political science and philosophy, where these issues have a central role" (p. 4).

Clearly, the Swedish Academy did not heed to Rothstein's concern, and in 2019, the recipients of the award would embody his observations, and painfully so. The work of Duflo, Banerjee and Kramer, and especially its key ingredient Randomized Control Trials (RCTs), raise ethical and moral concerns for the people who are impoverished by poor policy and governance. Researchers have raised the methodological and ethical issues with using RCTs, even demonstrating the negative impact of such "corrupt experiments" on people (Hoffmann 2018), but Duflo and Banerjee's accolades increase from strength to strength (Chelwa, Hoffmann, & Muller 2019), culminating in the award of one of the world's most prestigious prizes.

Despite the celebration of the laureates' work as an appropriate response to poverty, the world's vulnerable and poor are not the subject of the RCT-driven studies; rather, they are the objects of the studies. The subjects are the donors and banks who are concerned that their philanthropy and policy interventions are not producing the outcomes intended for the people in developing countries. Indeed, Duflo and Banerjee's projects are not about society but about accounting (Chelwa 2020), because the ultimate goal is to provide data and evidence that the donors and philanthropists achieved their mission in giving out their resources for intervention in developing countries. The poor are therefore simply the mirror to reflect back to the rich the image of development or magnanimity that the rich want for themselves.

To illustrate the issue here, I refer to the deworming experiment by Miguel and Kramer (2004) which is cited by Duflo and Kramer (2008) in their presentation to none less than the World Bank. Reporting on a study in collaboration with a deworming project with the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Health (which raises concerns about informed consent, Hoffmann 2020) Miguel and Kramer analyze the administration of deworming medicine across three groups and its impact on school attendance.

There are two major philosophical problems here. One is that health should be an outcome with its own intrinsic value, independent of school attendance. If it was determined that the children needed the medicine, then it should be administered so that the children get well and do everything that children do, including attending school. Administering the medication in

phases for the purpose of answering the researchers' questions is a gross violation of the dignity of the children.

Second, Duflo and Kramer acknowledge that there is a multiplicity of factors that affects children's attendance, but deworming is simpler and cost-effective compared to other interventions to improve school attendance and education, interventions with regard to curriculum, resources and teaching personnel. Surely, do those children not deserve to have their education improved now that they are seated in the classroom? That is not the concern of the article, and presumably not of the donors. The goal is to make a sales pitch to the World Bank: "all that you need in order to obtain visible and provable outcomes of your intervention in complex social issues such as education is to get more children in the seats by providing children with a simple medication."

The retort to my concerns here, which is commonly expressed in Kenyan public life, would be this: "Who cares, as long as the children get the medicine they clearly need?" An additional caustic question would be "What have you done for those children, except complain when they are helped?" Such questions are still locked in the same logic of assuring donors, not of helping the children. Children attend school not simply to fulfil attendance quotas or to meet development goals; they attend to get an education that is appropriate in developing their skills and affirming their humanity for the rest of their lives. Those who limit the achievement of education to the number of children in the classroom, do so in order to tick the MDG box and move on to the next goal to achieve. The concern

about a child's entire life requires seeing the child as a human being; not as a problem to solve. Instead, achievable outcomes are about short-term and selfish targets such as obtaining "useful answers to our policy questions" or "a different and better strategy," as Burtless (2019) would say in defence of the Nobel economics laureates. Indeed, Duflo (2011) constantly deflects similar questions by dismissing them as "ideology and inertia."

But what Duflo's impatience is really attacking can be summed up in one word: politics. Politics is about the commitment to the humanity of all people to their participation in the decisions that affect them. It is a belief in the idea that all people have experiences and knowledge and have something to contribute to society. In fact, what is striking about Duflo's media appearances, for example her Ted Talk, is that her starting point is not the poor and the injustice from which the poor suffer, but the rich who want value for their money. Her implicit argument is that she has correctly identified the problem and its solution, and any questions that stand in the way of administering that solution are "ideology and inertia."

The contempt for the poor in her research, and its celebration by the Swedish Academy, among others who have showered her with accolades, defies belief. When they ignore the problems with methodology and ethics of research, and the impact of that research on real lives in the developing world, and then celebrate that research with the most prestigious of prizes, we are led to reflect on the structure of academy that makes such research popular, and the world that considers that research worth celebrating.

It is to these issues that the rest of this paper now turns. I will argue that the Nobel Prize illustrates ritual celebrations of Eurocentric power which affirm the yet to be broken relationship between the university and European aristocracy.

Celebrity, the Academy and the Aristocracy

It is fair to say that the Nobel Prize is the epitome of prestige and achievement in the academic world. The prize comes with the highest monetary compensation (just under USD 1 million), and the perks include a lifetime of prestige for both the laureate and the host university. In general, winning the prize becomes the brightest medal in the array of other rungs of the academic ladder, such as a rise in the academic hierarchy, publication in well ranked journals and prestigious presses, number of citations and size of grants received, and awards.

It would be expected that when it comes to the Nobel Prize in Economics, the prize would boost these aspects of the careers of its laureates. However, Offer and Soderberg (2016) demonstrate that for most of the laureates, the citation of the laureates peaks around the time of the award and drops. The real impact, they argue, is in the cumulative effect of conferring authority and prestige to the market economics which were championed by conservatives in Sweden and the rest of the Western world and imposed on the developing world.

With the award, the Sveriges Riksbank gave economics the prestige of science, and then “created an aura of authority around the winners” (Offer and Soderberg, 2016: 142). The Mont Pellerin Society, the source of many reactionary eco-

nomics policies which have caused misery in the world, counts several of its economists as Nobel laureates. The Nobel prize literally rescued the career of Hayek, the society’s founder, from a downward spiral of depression, financial insecurity and dispensation to drink (Offer and Soderberg, 2016: 130).

Why would economics need this prestige and authority? From Offer and Soderberg’s analysis, one would conclude that with the pressure for social democracy around the world in the 1960s, the ability to order economic life around private self-interest needed cultural acceptance. The first Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded in 1969, at the end of that decade, and its award in 1974 to Hayek, the founder of the Mont Pellerin Society, catapulted his declining career to the global stage.

This historical significance leads us to speculate that the fast-rising career of the 2019 laureates could have been largely driven by the fact that increasing poverty and inequality of this millennium, in the wake of the depression and market bursts, has exposed the clear failure of market economic policies. To save the reputation of the flawed economic model, the Sveriges Riksbank, as representative of global financial sharks like the World Bank, would leap at the promise of a cheap, cost-effective and apparently painless antidote to global and racialized poverty that ignores politics, ethics and social justice. One can see why the RCT-dominated economics research, with Duflo’s dismissal of social concerns as “ideology and inertia,” would sound like music to the ears of global creditors.

How is this apparent camaraderie between academics and financiers able to achieve an aura of science

and prestige? The answer, I will argue, lies in the symbolic power of Eurocentric aristocratic culture in which the academy and the financial elite remain embedded, and which is now mediated by the media.

The relationship between the aristocracy, the academy and the financial elite is immediately visible from the award ceremony itself. The dress code is strictly white tie, and the Nobel Committee in Stockholm provides a detailed description of what men must wear (although Banerjee wore a dhoti-pajabi with a black coat while Duflo wore a saree). The ceremony is an opportunity for academics to “glam up” and brush shoulders with royalty adorned in studded crowns, tiaras and jewellery, gowns and tuxes, sashes, badges and medals. The gestures are all inscribed in royalty – standing for the entrance of the King of Sweden, classical music played by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, and the menu of the banquet composed of Swedish haute cuisine. The ceremony is televised live.

The Nobel Prize activities and their mediatization essentially package the scientist as a celebrity, but the real celebration is that of Sweden in its class, gender, ethnic and political dimensions. Ganetz (2018) observes that together with the Swedish royal family, the Nobel prize, its ceremonies and especially the banquet, all symbolize “a small nation on the northern fringes of Europe...for one day ... having the attention of the world” (2018: 1060). Further, Ganetz observes, “the notion of the nation of Sweden is whiteness.”

Ganetz’s observations points us to the reality that the Nobel embodies the manner in which race, class and science intersect.

The prize and its celebration ascribe “a high status to science” despite the claims of science to neutrality and universalism (p. 1056). To compound matters further, the Nobel Media was created to use the royal family to popularize the Nobel Prize among the public and turn the prize into a brand (Ganetz 2018).

The cultural, class and historical specificity of the Nobel Prize brings us full circle to the initial concern of this article, which is the overt alienation of African and developing countries in the accolades of the Nobel Committee. It is not just that the celebrated research is problematic for the continent. It is also the fact that despite aspiring for global prestige and universalism, the prize has not feted any of the big names in economic thinking in Africa, such as Samir Amin and the recently departed Thandika Mkandawire. Instead of turning its eye to the macro-economic issues raised by such brilliant economists, the Swedish Academy continues to celebrate researchers who promise that addressing poverty does not need such knowledge but requires controlled experiments. While the ideas of other Nobel economics laureates have been addressing macro-economic issues at a global scale, the Nobel Prize accepted Duflo and Banerjee’s argument that macro-economics in developing countries raises questions “which are too difficult to answer” (Webber & Prouse 2018).

And the overall record of the Nobel Prize in the rest of the disciplines is not much better. None of the Nobel laureates for medicine and the sciences have been resident of the continent when they received, and all but one are of European descent. Similarly, of the eight literature laureates, Wole Soyinka

(winner 1986) is the only black African, and Naguib Mafouz is the only Arab. The others are split between two white Southern Africans (Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee) and Europeans born in African colonies (Claude Simon, Albert Camus and Doris Lessing). The rest of the African laureates all received the prize for peace.

When one considers that that two of the black African recipients to receive the Nobel Prize were scientists exercising their profession (Wangari Maathai was an environmentalist fighting injustice through tree planting, and Denis Mukwege is a doctor treating female victims of rape inflicted as a weapon of war), it suggests a specifically European and aristocratic definition of science that is restricted to laboratories isolated from the public rather than its application for “the greatest benefit to humankind,” to adopt Alfred Nobel’s words. With the kind of resources required to meet such criteria, the Nobel Prize in the sciences is unlikely to feature in the foreseeable future an African scholar based on the continent.

But these contradictions are not simply racial and limited to Africa. They point to an unfinished revolution within Euro-America itself. The need to resort to royalty to celebrate knowledge points to Mayer’s (1981) observation that despite its revolutions and its republics, Euro-America’s knowledge, culture and identity are still dominated by the symbols of the ruling class of the old regime. Mayer argues that the rising bourgeoisie of capitalism and the industrial age ended up deferring to the landed aristocrats for symbols of taste, culture and social status, and the education system was one of the main institutions that facilitated this class assimilation.

Even in France, the country in western Europe that most successfully removed the monarchy, the vestiges of the old regime are still embedded in academic life. The Royal Academies may have been forced to take a two-year hiatus after the French revolution, but they returned simply rebranded under the Institut de France but with the same prestige as before (Bonnet 1983). The members of the Academies under the Institut de France still use royal symbols of *l’habit vert et l’épée* (the green coat and the sword), and the costs of these accessories could go as high as €135,000 (Brunon 2014). In 2015, the academies under the Intitute de France made headlines when the national Court of Audit raised questions about the unchecked expenditures of the Academy, for example on salary hikes and accommodation costs (SudOuest 2015).

Not surprisingly, the class structure remains intact in Britain, with the universities – especially Oxford and Cambridge – serving as the tool of assimilation for the non-aristocratic families to climb the social ranks through education (Whyte 2005). In the United States, these hierarchies are sufficiently distanced from their roots in the aristocracy, but are experienced as a “system of academic celebrity” that ranks researchers over teachers, elite universities above the others, because these rankings are tied to “social status and the generosity of patrons, donors and governments” (van Krieken 2012:7).

The Nobel Prize’s affirmation of research that is politically, ethically and technically flawed points to an equally flawed global system which bestows prominence and accolades on specific types of knowledge through Eurocentric cultural rituals of power. While it is crucial for us

to critique the political message of the 2019 prize in economics, we also need to have a conversation, albeit uncomfortable, about the way the university as an institution is a cog in the wheel of Eurocentric hegemony that contradicts the demands for democracy and social justice all over the world today. The hoops academics must jump through, of professorship, publication, citation, recognition and funding, are not culturally neutral. They are complicit in the structures of hierarchy, inequality and social injustice which the bulk of the world's population is now fighting to uproot.

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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

African perspectives on experimentation in the social sciences

Randomised controlled trials have become the research method of choice for scholars in a number of social science disciplines, including development economics, where both the associated methodologies and research findings have become very influential. So while the first randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in social science were pioneered in the United States in areas such as military propaganda, school class size, and income protection, RCTs are now increasingly conducted on people in the global South by scholars based in the global North. That shift has been associated with a corresponding shift in the types of research questions, how research is carried out, power dynamics in the research process, and the way research findings are used to inform policy – amongst others. While there has increasingly been critical debate about the role of such RCTs in scholarship and policymaking, much of this debate has focused on what scholars in the North have to say on the matter. There has been little space for Southern debates, not least African debates, about the emergence of this new research industry that appears to be having a profound influence on critical societal decisions.

This special issue of *Africa Development* aims to help address this gap. It is dedicated to investigating and understanding the role of RCTs from African and Southern perspectives more broadly. It draws on contributions to two special issues of *CODESRIA's Bulletin* on RCTs, which suggest several lines of enquiry. These include: its influence on African development and development policy; the research-policy nexus; the dynamics of effective research governance; race, power and participants' resistance to experimentation; the intellectual history of RCTs; and comparative perspectives with medical experimentation, amongst others.

Africa Development invites submissions from scholars in Africa and beyond that address these lines of enquiry or seek to develop new lines of enquiry into experimentation in the social sciences. Potential contributors will:

- ▶ First need to submit an abstract of up to 500 words by **23 October 2020** to <https://journals.codesria.org/index.php/ad/about/submissions>
- ▶ Thereafter, selected authors will be invited to submit a full manuscript of between 7000 and 8000 words for peer review by **28 February 2021**.
- ▶ Authors who submitted short pieces to the *Bulletin* in 2020 are strongly encouraged to **resubmit** fully-developed papers to <https://journals.codesria.org/index.php/ad/about/submissions>
- ▶ Guidelines of how to submit manuscripts including style and word limits can be found on the journal's website at https://codesria.org/IMG/pdf/guide_authors.pdf?195/897595ee922512e85da056f837e24ffaa290e0da

Any questions about this special issue can be directed to:

- ▶ Dr Grieve Chelwa,
 - ▶ Dr Seán Muller, and
 - ▶ Dr Nimi Hoffmann, at
- codesriaRCTs@codesria.org

Economics Experiments in Africa: How Many and by Whom?

My main contribution is a counting exercise. In this short article, I count the number of papers in top¹ economics journals that mention an African country; I count the number of these papers that suggest experimental methods; and I count the number of authors using experimental methods who have an institutional affiliation in an African country—this last number is vanishingly small. Given that an economics paper mentions experiments, it is almost twice as likely to also mention an African country compared to an economics paper that does not mention experiments. In the subset of journals under consideration, papers about Africa are 78 times more likely to be written by authors without an institutional affiliation in Africa than to be written by authors based on the continent. Of those, papers using experiments are very slightly more likely to be written by authors without an African affiliation.

The ratios above suggest that African countries provide important locations for economics experiments, but African researchers do not participate very much in the process. The limited space for African researchers in “international” economics journals deserves to be explored on its own (Chelwa 2017); however, the methodology of experiments may add an important angle to this question. As relates to the question of researchers’ affiliations, experiments are

Amma Panin

Université catholique de
Louvain, Belgium

distinct from most other empirical methodologies in one important way: experiments seek to manipulate the environment in which people make decisions and experience outcomes. Dawn Teele describes the distinction: “whereas observational research hopes to make causal inferences by measuring and analyzing variation in the world, [field] experiments induce the variation whose outcomes will later be studied” (Teale 2014). Variation is important for identifying effects; in an experiment, the researcher is the source of variation; this suggests scope for greater scrutiny on the role of the researcher who induces the theoretically interesting variation.

In the case of economics experiments in Africa, the disproportionate number of papers with authors from outside the continent raises questions about the choice of manipulations and the effects on populations, particularly compared to other modes of enquiry that leave subjects relatively unchanged by the researcher. Do researchers proposing an intervention have context-specific intuition about downstream outcomes? This may matter for grappling with the balance of risks and benefits.² Might the choice of questions studied be

affected by the fact that researchers could largely make themselves absent in the long-run when unintended consequences of their interventions play out? Are researchers sufficiently informed about norms, beliefs and motivations that may affect how people respond to induced variation, reducing the internal validity of an experiment? This piece provides a preliminary quantitative description of the number of economics experiments in Africa and the researchers who conduct them. It is intended as an input to further discussion about the questions raised above.

Data and methodology

I scraped two large databases to obtain the data analyzed in this paper: EconLit is an abstracting service maintained by the American Economic Association. It provides abstracts, titles and meta-information for articles published in economics journals. Research Papers in Economics (RePEc) is a large volunteer project to provide decentralized bibliographic information about economics publications, including information pages for different authors. All scripts were written in R statistical software.³

I conducted a search in EconLit for all articles published between 2000 and 2019 in 25 journals. The chosen journals either have a focus on development economics or they are considered to be general interest economics journals. Development economics journals were identified

using a list shared by World Bank economist David McKenzie in a popular annual blogpost⁴ about publishing in the field of development economics. General interest journals were identified from RePEc rankings. Starting with eleven development journals, I sequentially added general interest journals to my search starting with the best-ranked, until I had 25 (an arbitrary round number) journals on the total list.

It is worth noting that journals classified as “general interest” by the international economics community may not highlight the most pertinent economic concerns in many geographic locations. However, these journals are very focal within the broad economics discipline (Heckman & Moktan 2020), particularly the subset of them that frequently occupy the top five positions in rankings; therefore, I include them in this analysis.

The search in EconLit returned 25,926 articles. I run each article through a function that returns a list of all country names mentioned in the abstract and title. The search for country names was sensitive to alternate spellings and demonyms. I then create a variable *mentions_africa* which takes a value of 1 if the abstract and title mentioned the name of an African country and 0 otherwise. Table 1 shows the distribution of *mentions_africa* across different journal categories.

Papers mentioning experiments are similarly classified by a search through the title, abstract and keywords for the mention of words associated with experimental methods: “experiment”, “lab”, “field”, “controlled trial”. The variable *any_experiment* is a dummy variable which has a value of 1 if any of these experiment keywords are

Table 1: Summary value across different journal categories

	Development	“Top-5”	Other general interest
Mean value of <i>mentions_africa</i>	0.22	0.01	0.01
Mean value of <i>any_experiment</i>	0.47	0.55	0.73
Authors matched between datasets, %	49.9	72.3	75.7

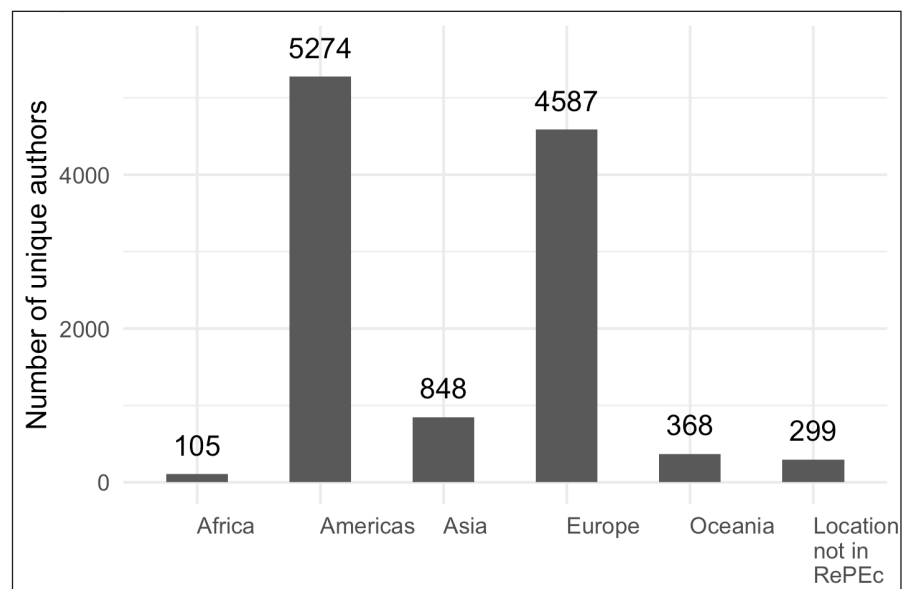
Note: Journal classifications from RePEc rankings and the World Bank Development Impact blog.

mentioned and 0 otherwise. Table 1 shows the distribution of *any_experiment* in different journal categories.

Author locations are scraped from RePEc individual author pages. For every listed RePEc author, I run a script that extracts their institutional affiliation and its location from their webpage. There are 59,027 authors listed on RePEc. There is information about

locations retrieved from RePEc. Sixty-three percent of authors appearing in the articles dataset are successfully matched to the RePEc dataset. This corresponds to 80 per cent of papers in the articles dataset for which I am able to match at least one author. I use this matched dataset (20,747 papers) for all analysis. Figure 1 shows the distribution of author locations in the matched dataset.

Figure 1: 0.9% of matched authors are located in Africa



Source: Author’s own elaborations with data from RePEc

the location of the institutional affiliation for 92 per cent of those. I use a simple string of the authors’ names to match authors in the articles dataset to institutional

Data caveats

There are plenty of caveats to this approach. First, it is tempting to interpret *mentions_africa* as a variable that describes whether a

paper is about an African country. This could be misleading for an article that choose to focus on a general mechanism explored in the paper, for example, rather than the country or countries where the data was collected.

Second, the search terms to classify *any_experiment* may miss terms such as “games” that might also suggest that a paper contains experiments. Potential search terms in this direction were not included because, compared to the words in the more straightforward list, they run a greater risk of incorrectly classifying papers that do not use experiments.

Third, as noted earlier, the selection of journals comprises journals that are highly ranked “internationally”. In practice, this means that they are highly ranked mainly by the people who publish in them—existing social networks and norms determine whose work gets cited. It is not clear that these are the journals that are or should be relevant for authors at African institutions seeking to publish their work. This selection of journals will likely underestimate African researchers’ contributions. Nevertheless, the fact that they are focal amongst a broad range of economists suggests that they are a useful starting point for this analysis.

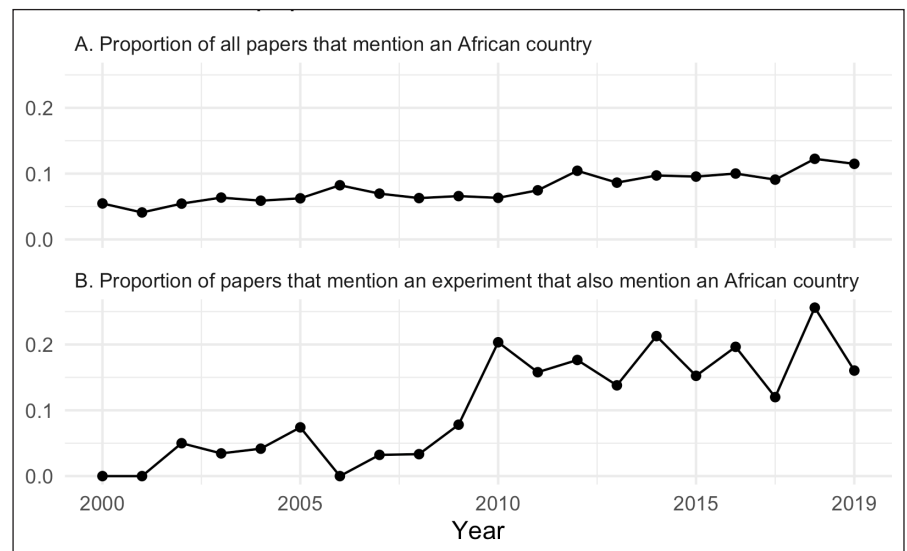
Finally, there is likely to be significant selection in terms of which economists have a RePEc profile. Table 1 shows that authors of papers published in development journals were less likely to be matched to a name in the RePEc database. The suggests another source of underestimation of contributions from researchers with an African affiliation. Affiliations scraped from RePEc are also only correct at the time of

scraping (25 July 2020), although I apply them to papers published at earlier dates.

Who is writing about Africa and how often do they use experiments?

I plot some proportions of interest in Figure 2. Panel A shows the proportion of all papers that mention any African country. The number grows from about 5 per cent in 2000 to 11 per cent in 2019.

Figure 2: Papers using experiments are more likely to mention Africa than other papers



Source: Author’s own elaborations with data EconLit

These numbers should be read with the context that economics papers are likely not to mention any country at all in the abstract or title—only 32 per cent of papers pooled across the years mentions any country. Countries that are mentioned are more likely to be in Africa or Asia. (Some of this effect is mechanical as there are simply more distinct countries in Africa and Asia compared to other regions in the world).

The denominator used to calculate proportions in Panel B is all papers that mention an experiment. The graph shows the proportion

of these that also mention an African country. A comparison of Panel B to Panel A suggests that papers that mention experiments more frequently mention African countries compared to all papers in the article dataset. In Table 2, I present results using the data pooled across years and testing the null hypothesis that the frequencies at which African countries are mentioned is the same when the denominator is only experimental papers as when the denominator

is all other papers that do not mention experiments. The null can be rejected at the 1 per cent level.

I move on to consider authors’ locations. For this analysis, I focus only on papers that mention an African country. I cross-tabulate authors’ locations and whether a paper mentions experiments. Of all papers that mention an African country, only 2.82 per cent have an author with an African institutional affiliation. The vast majority of papers (87%) written about Africa are not experimental and are written by authors without an African

Table 2: Papers that mention experiments also mention African countries

		Paper mentions experiments	
		Yes	No
	Yes	493 (0.9%)	4368 (8.0%)
Papers mention an African country	No	2645 (4.8%)	47050 (86.2%)
χ -squared = 188.83, df = 1, p-value = < 2.2e-16			

institutional affiliation. About 10 per cent of papers that mention an African country also mention experimental methods. These are 1.01 more times likely to be written by an author without an African affiliation compared to papers that do not use experimental methods. This is a small ratio although it is statistically significant (Chi-squared 4.07, 1 degree of freedom, p-value 0.04). The larger concern is the number of papers that mention an African country without having an author affiliated to an African institution.

important for the experimental method.

An important feature of a method that requires a researcher to induce variation is that resources are often required to induce people to change behaviour and to carry out specialized measurements of the induced behavioural changes (Cole et al. 2020). These resources may not be readily available to researchers based in countries that spend less than 1 per cent of their GDP on research and development.⁵ Furthermore, large

researchers control the variation that is analyzed to explain effects. Experimenters' involvement at this stage of a research design invites scrutiny. The correlational analyses presented in this paper highlight that researchers based at institutions outside Africa write papers related to Africa and conduct experiments in Africa at an increasing rate. This suggests one area for increased scrutiny. A body of knowledge about African economies is being built using experiments. How is this affected by the fact that the people who introduce manipulations and analyze their effects do not have an institutional base in the places where their data is generated? Of course geographical distance does not necessarily imply a lack of contextual knowledge or ethical negligence. But the results show that authors from outside Africa are up to 77 per cent more likely to publish papers that mention African countries using methods that intentionally manipulate the environment of their African research subjects. This certainly suggests an area for further discussion.

Table 3: The vast majority of papers that mention Africa are published by authors without and African affiliation

		Paper mentions experiments	
		Yes	No
	Yes	6 (0.12%)	127 (10.0%)
Author works in Africa	No	467 (2.7%)	4,092 (87.2%)
χ -squared = 4.0733, df = 1, p-value = 0.04356			

Note: Analysis conducted only for papers that mention an African country

Does the location of an author matter?

Keeping in mind the caveats discussed above, the results tentatively suggest that within economics, papers that use experiments are more likely to be written about Africa by authors who don't have an affiliation on the continent. Does this matter? I first discuss features of experiments that act as barriers, and conclude with further reflections on why the disparity in publication outcomes is particularly

scale experiments often rely on partnerships with governments or NGO partners (Dufflo 2020). This back and forth between researchers and society can be good, but could also replicate power dynamics that disadvantage researchers embedded in the local environment (Pomeranz et al. 2015).

Experiments introduce changes to their subjects' decision environment in a way that is avoided by most other research methods. In an experiment,

Notes

1. According to criteria which can, and often are, contested (Heckman & Moktan 2020)
2. See Hoffman (2020) for an extended discussion of the ethics of experiments in developing countries.
3. Code used for scraping and analysis will shortly be posted on <https://github.com/ammapanin>
4. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/impac evaluations/state-development-journals-2020-quality-acceptance-rates-review-times-and>
5. <http://uis.unesco.org/apps/visualisations/research-and-development-spending/>

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APPEL À PROPOSITIONS

Perspectives africaines sur l'expérimentation en sciences sociales

Les essais contrôlés randomisés sont devenus la méthode de choix des chercheurs de nombre de disciplines des sciences sociales, dont l'économie de développement, où les méthodologies qui y ont été associées et les résultats de recherche sont devenus très influents. Ainsi, alors que les premiers essais contrôlés randomisés (ECR) en sciences sociales ont été lancés aux États-Unis dans des domaines tels que la propagande militaire, la taille des classes scolaires et la protection du revenu, les ECR sont de plus en plus menés sur des personnes du Sud par des universitaires basés au Nord. Ce changement a été associé à celui des types de questions de recherche, la façon dont la recherche est menée, la dynamique du pouvoir dans le processus de recherche et la manière dont les résultats de la recherche sont utilisés pour éclairer les politiques, entre autres. Il y a de plus en plus de débats critiques sur le rôle de ces ECR dans la recherche et l'élaboration de politiques, mais une grande partie de ce débat porte sur ce que les chercheurs du Nord ont à dire sur la question. Il y a eu peu de place pour les débats du Sud, notamment les débats africains, sur l'émergence de cette nouvelle industrie de la recherche qui semble avoir une influence profonde sur les grandes décisions sociétales.

L'objectif de ce numéro spécial d'*Afrique et Développement* est de contribuer à combler cette lacune. Il se consacre à l'étude et à la compréhension du rôle des ECR du point de vue de l'Afrique et du Sud en général. Il s'inspire des contributions à deux numéros spéciaux du Bulletin du CODESRIA sur les ECR, qui suggèrent plusieurs pistes d'enquête. Il s'agit notamment de son influence sur le développement et la politique de développement africains ; du lien recherche-politique ; de la dynamique d'une gouvernance efficace de la recherche, la race, le pouvoir et la résistance des participants aux expérimentations ; de l'histoire intellectuelle des ECR ; et, des perspectives comparatives avec l'expérimentation médicale, entre autres.

Afrique et Développement sollicite les soumissions de chercheurs d'Afrique et au-delà traitant de ces questions de recherche ou développant de nouvelles pistes de recherche sur l'expérimentation en sciences sociales. Les potentiels contributeurs devront :

- ▶ d'abord soumettre un résumé de 500 mots au plus, avant le **23 octobre 2020**, à <https://journals.codesria.org/index.php/ad/about/submissions>
- ▶ par la suite, les auteurs sélectionnés seront invités à soumettre un manuscrit complet de 7000 à 8000 mots pour examen par les pairs d'ici le **28 février 2021**.
- ▶ les auteurs ayant soumis de courts articles au Bulletin en 2020 sont vivement encouragés à **participer à nouveau**, cette fois avec des articles entièrement développés à envoyer à <https://journals.codesria.org/index.php/ad/about/submissions>
- ▶ des directives sur la manière de soumettre des manuscrits, y compris le style et les limites de mots, sont disponibles sur le site Web de la revue à l'adresse suivante https://codesria.org/IMG/pdf/guide_authors.pdf?195/897595ee922512e85da056f837e24ffaa290e0da

Toute question sur ce numéro spécial peut être adressée au :

- ▶ Dr Grieve Chelwa,
 - ▶ Dr Seán Muller, et
 - ▶ Dr Nimi Hoffmann, à
- codesriaRCTs@codesria.org

Structural Change, Inequality and Inclusive Development: Case of Sub-Saharan Africa¹

Introduction

Explaining Africa's development and well-being has become something of an industry, advancing explanations that range from geography to malaria (Gallup et al. 1999, Gallup and Sachs 2001), genetic diversity (Ashraf and Galor 2013), and neopatrimonialism. It is uncertain what policymakers should make of the claims in these studies: move their countries to more auspicious locations? If as Ashraf and Galor (2013) suggest, a 1 per cent reduction in Ethiopia's genetic diversity would raise per capita income by 27 per cent, would that involve eliminating some of the citizens? Ashraf and Galor's proposition has been much celebrated and critiqued, and none more so in the latter category than Tang (2016), who demonstrated the invalidity of the genetic diversity hypothesis. Neopatrimonialism's flattening of the African political landscape fails to explain the role of 'strong men' in Ethiopia vis-à-vis Equatorial Guinea, or the diversity in economic and social outcomes across time and space in the region, and would equate Mandela and Nyere with Mobutu Sese Seko or Idi Amin (Mkandawire 2015). Divergences in social and economic performances across time and space point to the importance of policy, leadership, and institutions.

Jimi O. Adesina*

College of Graduate Studies,
University of South Africa,
City of Tshwane, South Africa

In this contribution, we examine the experiences of Sub-Saharan Africa with economic development and the challenge of structural transformation of the economies. We further explore the pattern of inequality across different domains—wealth, education, health, habitat, and gender. We end with some indications of policy directions for enhancing inclusive development in the region.

Structural Change and Economic Development

While there has been considerable scepticism about the development project on account of its impulses, cost, and feasibility (or even desirability), the prospect of 'catch-up' (and socio-economic development broadly) continues to animate the global policy environment, and in the 'developing world' more so. The sceptical position, illustrated by Escobar (1995), ascribes the development impulse to Harry Truman; a "dream [that] was not solely the creation of the United States but the result of the specific

historical conjuncture at the end of the Second World War" (Escobar 1995: 4). Valid as it may be, there is a different impulse for the development aspiration, which is epitomised by the spirit of the 1955 Bandung Conference of Asian and African states (Mkandawire 2011). The aspiration is borne out of the humiliating experience of colonial conquest, the optimism of the immediate post-colonial era, the need to create autonomous spaces within the global order, and to enhance economic transformation and human capability. In the African context, these impulses are captured in policy frameworks ranging from the *Lagos Plan of Action* (1980) to *Agenda 2063* (2015). At the heart of these frameworks is a fundamental (structural) transformation of African economies, underpinned by "industrialisation, manufacturing and value addition" (AU 2015: v) as the basis for the sustained improvement of the well-being of the population.

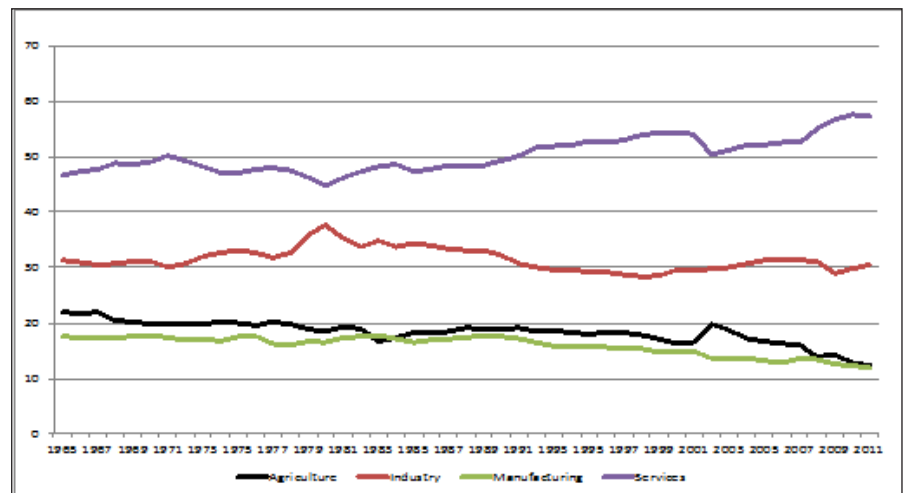
The Lagos Plan of Action, a culmination of four years of consultation and drafting (Adedeji 2002: 37), was triggered by what was seen as a relatively weak performance of African economies, the persistence of colonial structure of production, and disillusion with the 'trickle-down' approach to development. Over the period 1960 to 1975, Afri-

ca's aggregate annual GDP growth rate was 4.5 per cent instead of the target of 6 per cent set in the UN Second Development Decade. Exports grew at 2.8 per cent instead of the target of 7 per cent. On the other hand, import grew at an annual average of 10 per cent instead of the target of 7 per cent (Adesina 2006). The African Union's *Agenda 2063* takes up the aspirations that underpinned the Lagos Plan of Action and the 'nationalist' development intentions.

In between the two periods have been several socio-economic interventions but none more profound and enduring than the neoliberal turn in the policy framing of the economic, social, and political agenda. It set in motion, from the early 1980s, a fundamental shift in Africa's development trajectory—rolling back of the state, denunciations of industrial policy, and a long period of mass entitlement failure on the continent, especially in the Sub-Saharan African region. What it did not do, though, was address the structural problems identified in the Lagos Plan of Action. In addition to the lost decades, the effect has been what Mkandawire (2005) referred to as the maladjustment of African economies.

In broad terms, the composition of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP has changed little between 1965 and the 2010s (cf. Figure 1), although this belies the size of the economies, the shifting rates of growth, the policy impetuses that underpinned growth performance at different phases over the period, and diversity of specific country-level composition of GDP.³ The contribution of the manufacturing value-added in Sub-Saharan Africa to the GDP declined from 17.86 per cent in 1976 to 11 per cent in 2012, before a slight increase to 11.23 per cent

Figure 1: Sub-Saharan Africa—Sectoral Contribution to GDP (%)



Source: World Bank *Africa Development Indicators* Database (2020 online).²

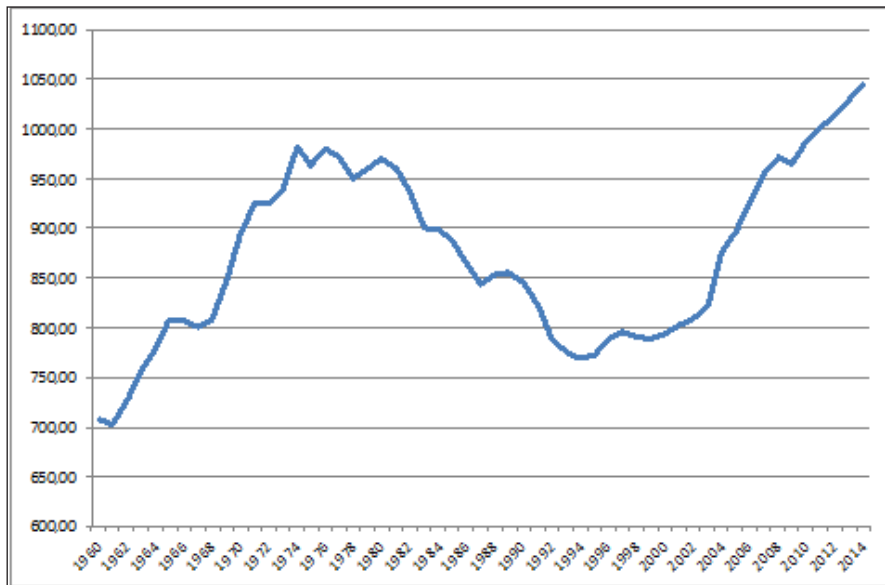
in 2014. The recovery from 16.3 per cent in 1978 to 17.04 per cent in 1980 was offset by a continuous decline after 1980.⁴

A key feature of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP is that it was always dominated by the Service sector, which rose from 46.96 per cent in 1965 to 58.38 per cent in 2014, although across time the composition varied. Financial services and the telecommunication industries play an increasing role in the sector and driving growth (World Bank 2015). Rather than a manufacturing sector-led structural change in the economy, the intensive high skill segments of the services sector are driving change. This has implications for inequality and inclusive development, which we discuss in the next two sections.

At the other end is the expansion in the informal economy. Its share of non-agricultural employment grew from 67.3 per cent in the 1980-84 period to 86.9 per cent in the 1995-99 period before declining to 65.9 per cent in the 2005-10 period (Charmes 2012). There is, of course, considerable variation between countries in the

region. The percentage of persons employed in the informal sector (as a share of non-agricultural activities) ranged from 9.3 per cent in Mauritius to 71.4 per cent in Mali (ILO 2012). Over half of the gross value added (GVA) in the region's non-agricultural GVA came from the informal sector in the 2000s (Charmes 2012). In the same period, the combined GVA for the informal sector and agriculture was 63.6 per cent. This speaks to the dual-track trajectory of economies in the region: a high-investment, high-skill segment and a low-skill, low-investment segment, the latter being the abode of most of the poor, with considerable implications for deepening inequality.

The adverse impact of orthodox neoliberal policies deployed in the region can be assessed from the trend in per capita GDP, measured in constant 2005 US dollars (cf. Figure 2). After a steep rise from 1960 to 1974, when the region's per capita GDP rose to US\$980.63, it went into a steep decline after 1980 (to US\$769.31 in 1994). It was not until 2010—more than two-and-half decades later—that it recovered to the 1974 level. Again,

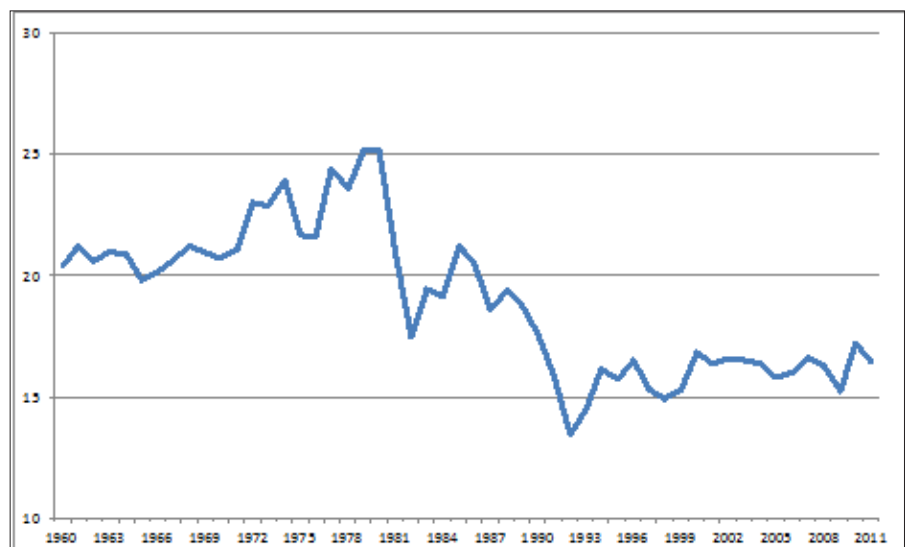
Figure 2: Sub-Saharan Africa GDP per capita (Constant 2005 US\$)

Source: World Bank World Development Indicators Database (2016).

there are significant inter-country variations across the region. Per capita GDP does not tell us much about the well-being of people in an economy, and there is no one-to-one relationship between GDP growth rate or per capita GDP and citizens' well-being. However, the relative translation into well-being and inequality between the periods before and after the early 1980s is instructive. Robust social policy instruments help in translating growth into well-being; especially with active labour market policies, expansive social investment, and public social provisioning. Often, these measures reflect the health of an economy. In the medium to long terms, a healthy economy is essential for sustaining robust and equitable social policy instruments.

If we exclude South Africa, the growth rate of the region's GDP rose from 0.4 per cent in 1961 to 10.4 per cent in 1970, 8.3 per cent in 1974, and an average of 5.9 per cent between 2004 and 2008. The average growth rate from 1980 to 1985 was 1 per cent, with contractions in 1981 and 1983.

Growth would remain unsteady until 1995. More dramatic is the trend in gross domestic savings as a percentage of GDP over the period 1960 to 2011, which experienced a steady increase from 20.4 per cent in 1960 to 25.17 per cent in 1980 to a sharp decline after that (cf. Figure 3). Even with small recoveries, the region has not recovered to anywhere near the level in 1980, much less surpass it.

Figure 3: Sub-Saharan African Gross Domestic Saving (% of GDP)

Source: World Bank Africa Development Indicators Database Online (2020).⁵

After the more recent narratives of “Africa Rising” (The Economist 2011)—which followed an earlier claim of Africa as “The hopeless continent” (The Economist 2000)—the emerging fiscal and balance of payment difficulties, and the resurgence of public debt, in a growing number of African countries speak to the structural weaknesses of the more recent growth path. They talk of the increasing urgency of the structural transformation of the region's economies based on manufacturing-driven industrialisation. In successive reports since 2013, the UN Economic Commission for Africa reiterated the need for economic transformation based on job-enhancing industrial strategy (UNECA 2013, 2014, 2015). The emphasis in the 2016 report is on green industrialisation, which significantly changes the direction and composition of the economies without harming the environment (UNECA 2016). The same vision underpins the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Inequality and the challenge of inclusive development⁶

There is broad consensus that average economic inequality in sub-Saharan Africa is among the highest in the world. Inequality has remained higher in sub-Saharan Africa, in the period from the 1960s to the late 2000s, than the rest of the world, except Latin America. Broadly, income inequality declined from the early 1960s to 1980 (Milanovic 2003, p. 10). Ravallion and Chen (2012) suggest that average income inequality rose from 1981 to 1990, declining between 1990 and 1996 before rising between 1996 and 2008. In each case, income inequality in sub-Saharan Africa was only lower than in Latin America. However, the average rate of income inequality and the trend hide significant variation in the region.

The ratio of the income share of the top 10 per cent relative to that of the bottom 10 per cent for the period between 1995 and 2014 ranged from 1 to 6.62 in Niger (2011) to 1 to 51.22 in South Africa (2011) (African Development Bank 2015). The share of the top 10 per cent in total income ranges from 25.83 per cent in Mali (2010) to 53.78 per cent in South Africa (2011). The countries with the highest income Gini indices are concentrated in Southern Africa.

Using per capita consumption expenditure data for the period 1991/3 to 2011, Cornia and Martorano (2015) found four distinct trends in 29 sub-Saharan African countries with at least four observation data points. In thirteen countries, the Gini trend declined between 1991/3 and 2011. Four countries registered an inverted U-shape trend in which the Gini

index rose before falling. In seven countries, the Gini index rose over the period. In the last group of five countries, the Gini trend took a U shape, with income inequality declining before rising over the period. Of the 29 countries, Ethiopia (2011) had the lowest Gini index at 33.6, while the Gini for Botswana (2009) and South Africa (2011) were 68.6 and 65.0, respectively. It is crucial, however, to know that consumption data are not a good measure of income inequality, much less wealth or asset inequality. Consumption data hides the discretionary incomes and assets of the better off in society.

A more graphic picture of inequality emerges when we consider wealth inequalities. Again, Africa's⁷ wealth inequality level is only second to that of the Asia-Pacific region⁸ (at 89.2). The countries with the highest wealth Gini index include South Africa (84.0), Botswana (81.7), Namibia (81.6), and Nigeria (81.4), all mineral resource-rich countries.

In the field of education, between 1999 and 2011, sub-Saharan Africa registered improvements in several indicators—from net enrolment ratio in primary school (58% to 77%) to gender parity (0.85 to 0.93), respectively. However, the region lagged behind other regions of the world, and between-country indicators vary widely. Across the region in 2012, 16.6 million girls and 13 million boys in the primary school age cohort were out of school (UNESCO 2015). In Nigeria in 2013 a child from the poorest quintile was over 23 times more likely never to have been in school compared with a child from the richest quintile; nine times in Ghana in 2011; twice in South Africa in 2013.

In the area of health, between 1990 and 2012, sub-Saharan Africa witnessed improvements in several indicators, although at levels lower than the global average. Again, there are variations across countries in the region (WHO 2014). While rising across the region, life expectancy at birth varied from 74 years in Cape Verde, Mauritius, and Seychelles to 46 years in Sierra Leone. The three island states are also countries with some of the most developed social policy architectures in the region. Again, while the infant mortality rate declined across the region between 1990 and 2012, the rate varied: from 13 per thousand live births in Seychelles to 182 in Sierra Leone. In Nigeria, much more than spatial location and education level of mothers, wealth inequality is the main driver of health inequality: DTP3⁹ immunisation coverage is more than eight times lower in the poorest quintile than in the richest quintile. At the same time, there is parity or near parity at very high levels of coverage (between 89% and 99%) in immunisation between these quintiles in Burundi and Rwanda (WHO 2014). Across several indicators, wealth, spatial location (rural/urban), and the educational level of mothers are the main drivers of health inequalities (WHO 2014). But underlining these drivers is the extent of the engagement of public authorities in promoting and facilitating the wellness of the citizens.

While national-level inequality matters, especially rural-urban inequality, intra-city inequality tends to be higher than national level indices (UNHABITAT 2010, 2014). The highest levels of urban income inequalities are found in South Africa's major cities, generally above 7 Gini index with Pointe-Noire in

Congo recording the lowest income inequality. Using consumption-based measures, Lomé (Togo) recorded the lowest Gini index at 3, with Maputo and Addis Ababa at over 5 (UNHABITATA 2010: 27). There is a better visual marker of the incidence of urban inequality than the slums in many of the region's urban areas. The size and growth path of slum-dwelling differ across the region. Between 1990 and 2010, countries such as Mali, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria have seen declines in the proportion of urban dwellers that live in slums, while the percentage in Kenya remained steady at 55 per cent. By contrast, countries such as Malawi, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic have seen increases in the proportion of urban dwellers living in slums—to 70 per cent, 81 per cent, and 96 per cent, respectively. However, even for countries that experience declines in the share of urban dwellers living in slums, the absolute number is hardly comforting. For Nigeria and South Africa, for instance, the absolute number of slum dwellers rose from 33 million to 79 million, and from 19 million to 30 million, respectively (UNHABITAT 2010: 29). The implications of state retrenchment, informal sector location, unemployment and under-employment for slum-dwelling are significant, and these speak as well to the challenge of inclusive development in the region.

Gender inequality deserves distinct exploration and here *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2014) provides a snapshot of the gender gap in sub-Saharan Africa along four domains: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. As with other aspects of inequality, there

is enormous between-country variation in the region. Rwanda, Burundi, and South Africa are the three top-performing countries on the overall gender gap index, with Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, and Chad being the worst three performers. However, the performance of countries varies across the sub-indexes. In 2015, Rwanda ranked highest in political empowerment, boosted by being the country with the highest percentage of female legislators in the world: 63.8 per cent of its parliamentarians are women (International Parliamentary Union 2015). Burundi, with a score of 0.86, topped the global sub-index for economic participation and opportunity, followed by Malawi (0.829), Botswana (0.816) and Kenya (0.81). The disparity in gender gap scores highlights the point that gender parity in education, for instance, does not automatically translate into gender equality in other domains. Globally and across the region social institutions (norms, practices, and law) remain critical drivers of gender inequality (OECD 2015). Here again, policy and leadership matter; the degree of mitigation of gender inequality is often a result of focused activism and strong public leadership.

In search of Inclusive Development

Sub-Saharan Africa's recent growth performance has had divergent impacts on poverty and inequality across countries in the region. In countries like Uganda and Ethiopia, the poverty rate has declined significantly. Across the region, however, the number of people in absolute poverty¹⁰ nearly doubled between 1981 and 2015—from 210.4 million to 419.6 million, while those living below the \$2.5/day (or \$3.10/

day) poverty line increased from 319 million in 1981 to 675.8 million in 2011.¹¹ Similar to the level of inequality, the poverty level underscores the challenge of inclusive development. A particularly glaring feature of the 'Africa rising' (*Afrique émergente*) phase is the abysmally low growth elasticity of poverty—the percentage reduction in poverty rates associated with a percentage growth of per capita income. The initial stress on growth and market transactional path to securing well-being produced neither growth nor secured well-being. In more recent times, the accent has been on social assistance in mitigating chronic poverty—ranging from unconditional cash transfers to public works-based programmes. Important as these programmes are in *ameliorating* poverty, the transfers involved, as the World Bank (2014) acknowledged, are “insufficient to lift [people] out of poverty.” Transfers generally cover between 12 per cent (Lesotho) and 27 per cent (Zambia) of beneficial households' income or consumption,¹² and outside Southern Africa are mostly donor-financed.

Sustainable, inclusive development would need to transcend the current narrow focus on poverty (Mkandawire 2010); it would require raising the productive capacity of people in the country, increased social investment (health and education), redistribution, with a focus of addressing gender inequalities. Addressing productivity issues would require in rural areas a focus on smallholder farmers: enhancing their productive capacity, investment in infrastructure, including upstream and downstream support for agricultural production. Countries such as Ethiopia,

Uganda, and Rwanda that managed to match economic growth with poverty reduction, as Arndt *et al.* (2016) noted, paid attention to improving smallholder farmers' productivity. The industrialisation strategies would need to address multiple tasks at the same time: linking agricultural produce with intermediate industries, labour-intensive manufacturing sectors that expand employment with a focus on decent work. The expansion of employment opportunities will need to focus on reducing employment informality, upgrading informal sector production capacity, and linking them to larger production enterprises. Exploiting national and regional markets is the first step in what would be an extended journey in assessing the global market. Connected to the above will be a renewed emphasis on social investment in health and education, broad and gradual extension of social protection coverage, with a focus on universalism. These would require vastly enhanced state capacity for planning, coordination, and implementation.

The idea that geography or genetics predisposes towards abysmal levels of human well-being and economic performance not only runs against human experience but fails to explain the diversity of experiences within Sub-Saharan Africa. Human agency, policy, and leadership matter in advancing inclusive development.

* Jimi O. Adesina is Professor and Holder of the South African Research Chair in Social Policy, College of Graduate Studies, University of South Africa, City of Tshwane, South Africa (E-mail: adesij@unisa.ac.za).

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was prepared for the Division of Social Policy and Development of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It was presented at an inter-agency expert group meeting on "Employment and decent work for poverty reduction, in support of the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017)" in Bangkok, Thailand (4-6 May 2016). This is a revised and updated version of the earlier paper.
2. *Africa Development Indicators Databank* (Online version). Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/africa-development-indicators>. (Accessed 27 June 2020).
3. For our analysis, we have used the World Bank's *Africa Development Indicators* (ADI) database (rather than the *World Development Indicators* (WDI) database), in spite of the limitations. Primarily, the time series we need end in 2011. In contrast, the time series in WDI start in 1970, while data is available till 2018. The WDI dataset makes it difficult to differentiate sufficiently the Sub-Saharan Africa's performances across three critically distinct phases: (a) 1960 and the late 1970s, (b) the lost decades of 1980 to 2000, and (c) the period since 2000. The primary observation is that, across the three phases, the performances have an 'N' shape. This is most evident in the per capita GDP time series (Figure 2).
4. We use data from the *Africa Development Indicators* database for Figure 1 because of the missing data for the period before 1976 in the *World Development Indicators* database.
5. *Africa Development Indicators Databank* (Online version). Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/africa-development-indicators>. (Accessed 27 June 2020).
6. This section draws in part on Adesina (2016. 'Inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa: domains and drivers'), prepared for the ISSC *World Social Science Report 2016*.
7. The Global Wealth Databook (2015) covers 52 African countries, 47 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.
8. Asia-Pacific minus China and India.
9. Three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine.
10. \$1.25/day or \$1.90 from October 2015.
11. World Bank Poverty and Equity Database. Available at: <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/region/SSF>. (Accessed 27-06-2020).
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FORTHCOMING

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON MALI

In this issue

Editorial, Amy Niang (University of the Witwatersrand)

1. *Éléments du dilemme malien*, **Rahmane Idrissa** (University of Leiden)
2. *De quoi le coup d'État du 18 août est-il le nom ?* **Ousmane A. Diallo** (Wilfrid Laurier University)
3. *La gouvernance djihadiste: cas de la katiba Macina dans le cercle de Mopti*, **Yida Seydou Diallo** (University of Bamako)
4. *JNIM v.s. EIGS : aux racines profondes de la divergence*, **Amadou Diallo** (Independent researcher, Bamako)
5. *Struggle, Neglect and Archives*, **Madina Thiam** (UCLA)
6. *Mali corona coup of 2020: symptom of a failed security sector reform*, **Kodjo Tchioffo** (Euclid University)
7. *Les enjeux de la violence dite communautaire au centre du Mali comme facteur important dans la crise actuelle*, **Modibo Galy Cisse** (University of Leiden)
8. *Intervention militaire et constitutionnalisme*, **Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui** (Cornell University)
9. *La problématique de l'inclusivité, des attentes des Maliens au prisme du diktat de la CEDEAO*, **Brema Ely Dicko** (University of Bamako)
10. *De l'éphorie du coup d'État vers une transition peu consensuelle*, **Aly Tounkara** (CE3S, Bamako)
11. *The Many Entanglements of the Malian Conflict*, **Omar Ba** (Morehouse College, Atlanta)
12. *La rupture de l'ordre démocratique comme aboutissement d'une gouvernance chaotique*, **Kawélé Togola** (University of Bamako)
13. *Interview on the Mali situation*, with **Prof. Abdoulaye Bathily** (Dakar, Senegal) conducted by **Amy Niang** (University of the Witwatersrand), transcribed by **Leonide Awah** (CODESRIA)



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‘Mandela-wash’: How Invoking Mandela’s Name Cannot Obscure Past Injustice

Religious Christians believe that the blood of Jesus can wash away our sins. Secular people who actively participate in, or remain silent about, morally reprehensible acts have to be satisfied with lesser beings. In the case of racial injustices, some of us try to wash our history away by calling as defence witnesses the iconic leaders of the oppressed, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and now, notably, Nelson Mandela. By misappropriating their names and even attributing self-held views to them, minor changes for the good are magnified and failures to effect any meaningful change are concealed through complex processes of displacement and collective denial. I want to consider here the case of ‘Mandela-wash’, which was used so commonly after the end of legal apartheid in South Africa and has found new adherents in Oxford in the debate concerning the legacies and benefactions of Cecil Rhodes.

Mandela-wash in post-apartheid South Africa

Mandela stood for reconciliation and reaching out to all population groups. He shook many hands, held his hands aloft and hugged thousands of people. His capacity to allow others to redeem themselves made him the closest we have seen

Robin Cohen*
University of Oxford,
UK

to a secular saint in our lifetimes. Stories of this power abound, but perhaps there is none so touching as the story of Zelda la Grange, a young woman from a middle-class Afrikaner family who became his personal secretary, spokesperson and gatekeeper, and ended up calling him *khulu* [grandfather in Xhosa]. By her own account, she grew up knowing little and caring less about the fate of black people. Yet, when she met Mandela, a sense of guilt at what her fellow Afrikaners had done to him overwhelmed her. As he shook then held her hand, she burst out sobbing and he finally had to stop her by putting his hand on her shoulder and saying, ‘You’re overreacting a bit.’¹

Among la Grange’s many duties, she was tasked with arranging a parade of people, black and white, powerful and powerless, young and old, who were ushered in to meet Mandela at his Houghton residence after he had formally retired from the presidency. After a handshake and, where necessary, a quick Mandela-wash, the sessions were concluded with a photo opportunity. All over South

Africa, CEOs and police chiefs, politicians and nurses, footballers and celebrities, teachers and youth workers proudly display their photos with Mandela. Why did Mandela go along with this? At any moment after 1990, revanchist violence was a constant fear and a terrible cauldron of racial conflict in South Africa could have followed. Reconciliation was not a one-off. It was hard and unremitting work, but it also provided the opportunity to tap those with deep pockets to fund Mandela’s favourite charities – including the Nelson Mandela Foundation, 46664 (named after his prison number), the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund and the Mandela Rhodes Foundation (discussed below).

Zelda la Grange and her colleagues were fielding between 150 and 300 calls and emails a day, so it is hardly surprising that a few chancers and opportunists got past her eagle eye. Here, I want to recall the bizarre and extreme case of Abe and Solly Krok, twin brothers who were trained pharmacists and made pots of money selling skin-lightening creams and quack medicines to the African market. Dingaan’s Blood Purifier and Skelm Worm Syrup probably did no harm, but skin-lighteners certainly did. Early formulas contained mercury and most contain hydroquinone, a bleaching agent that can lead to

skin damage, blotches, ochronosis, poisoning and kidney and liver malfunction.² In a wild career that involved fortunes, foreclosures and family feuds, the twins diversified, speculated, invested in glitzy casinos and, in 1993, crowned their financial shenanigans by being convicted of illegal foreign exchange dealings. Nonetheless, they got their feet through Mandela's door, and this photo proves it.³ The Kroks' profile was so bad they were going to need a pre-wash, a stain remover, a good scrub and several hot washes. Undaunted, they eagerly clambered into the washing machine drum and accelerated their journey to acceptance in the post-apartheid order by

bank-rolling the admirably curated Apartheid Museum. This opened in 2001 and hundreds of school parties, and about 140,000 people visit it each year. The Apartheid Museum certainly helped, but Abe and Solly decided they wanted to go for total redemption with a grotesque proposal to create a free-standing bronze statue of Mandela's hand, 'the beacon of freedom'. The disembodied hand would be 23 metres high, half the size of the Statue of Liberty, and would cost R50 million. Fortunately, somebody sensible killed the proposal. The Krok brothers are no longer with us, but their stubborn stains remain. It seems that a Mandela-wash can only go so far.

Mandela-wash in Oxford

Now to Oxford, where a more recent if decidedly etiolated performance of Mandela-wash has been staged. The ethereal and villainous character in the play is Cecil John Rhodes, mining magnate and imperialist. Scene 1 is Oriel College, one of Oxford University's 39 colleges, where Rhodes episodically studied between 1873 and 1881 and scraped a poor degree. Despite his undistinguished record, the experience was sufficiently memorable for him to have left a large donation, earning him a statue hovering over the college's entrance and a laudatory commemorative plaque on a nearby property belonging to the college. Though there remains some doubt about the good faith of the college authorities, supporters of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, re-energised by the Movement for Black Lives, seem to have succeeded in their demand to remove the statue. The curtain is coming down on this scene but trying to tug it back into the wings were the two leading officers of the university who responded to the Rhodes Must Fall Campaign by conjuring up posthumous forms of Mandela-wash.

Enter the Chancellor, Chris Patten, barely shifting his position from the first round of protests in 2015. In his apology for Rhodes then, he argued that as Mandela had displayed a 'generosity of spirit towards Rhodes and towards history', it was beholden on all Oxford students to reciprocate in kind. They should, moreover, adopt Karl Popper's ideas (a suggestion that quite ignored the many critiques of Popper's critical rationalism). If they did not embrace freedom of thought, he continued, they should 'think about being educated elsewhere'.⁴ In 2020, Chancellor Patten returned



Detail of Mandela's hand, this one from a statue at the Union Buildings, Pretoria
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Former_president_Nelson_Mandela_at_the_Union_Buildings_in_Pretoria_018.JPG

to the fray, declaring that, ‘for all the problems associated with Cecil Rhodes’s history, if it was alright for Mandela, then I have to say it’s pretty well alright with me.’⁵ The chancellor’s rendition of what Mandela believed was based on his recollection of what Mandela had said at a conference at Westminster Hall in 2003.

Enter the vice-chancellor, Louise Richardson, the real head of the university, despite the confusing title. She did not require recollection but claimed that, given his collaboration with the Rhodes Trust, she knew that Mandela would have ‘firmly disagreed’ with the aims of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign. In a blog titled, ‘Abusing Mandela to Absolve Rhodes’, Rahul Rao has critically examined the chancellor and vice-chancellor’s comments, while in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* a number of senior Oxford academics have denounced the vice-chancellor’s brief outing as an amateur medium.⁶

The Rhodes Trust and the Mandela Rhodes Foundation

Scene 2 takes place at Rhodes House, Oxford, the headquarters of the Rhodes Trust. To understand the claims of what Mandela would have supported had he been alive, we need to be more precise – first, about what he actually did support and second, the extent of the collaboration with Mandela in relation to the overall activities of the Rhodes Trust. It is also important, by way of background, to clarify that Rhodes House is neither a department nor a college of the university, despite superficial appearances to the contrary. Only four of the sixteen Rhodes trustees are Oxford academics (the rest are mainly city types), while the website rather nebulously

describes the Rhodes Trust as ‘based at’ the University of Oxford. Given that the trust is at, or perhaps just near, but definitely not of, the University of Oxford, this rather begs the question of why the two most senior office-holders of the university felt the need to comment at all on issues that overwhelmingly pertain to the trust. The answer lies in this entanglement. The Rhodes Trust awards about a hundred fully-funded scholarships a year to scholars who, after the usual scrutiny, are admitted to one of 35 Oxford colleges. The Rhodes Trust also does the administrative work to support 22 Schmidt Science fellows and will shortly do the same for a new cohort of Atlantic Philanthropy fellows. These provide useful additions to the university’s graduate and post-doctoral numbers, which have been historically low compared with those of the top US universities.

Now to the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, which the Rhodes Trust funded in 2003 with Mandela’s agreement, much as he had approved the efforts of many other organizations and individuals whom he judged genuinely committed to redress. Considering the energetic performances of Mandela-wash during the latest Rhodes Must Fall campaign, one might have been led to assume that the financial contributions of the Rhodes Trust are ongoing and even munificent. The *Rhodes Trust Annual Report and Financial Statement of June 2019* tells a different story. It states: ‘The primary commitment of the Trust to the Foundation has been the benefaction of £10 million over 15 years, to provide an initial endowment and to meet the running costs of the Foundation. This commitment has been fully settled by 30th June 2019.’⁷ ‘Fully settled’, that sounded surprising. Just in case I

had misunderstood, I also examined the accounts of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, based in Cape Town, which tell an equally dismal story. Expenses continue, alternative donor income is very limited, and the end of Rhodes Trust funding puts the foundation in a precarious position.⁸

So, for all the loud swish-swishing of soap combining with water, the much-vaunted collaboration is a dead parrot – in practice, we are talking of a zombie connection between the Rhodes Trust and the Rhodes Mandela Foundation. Moreover, even when at full pitch, the financial commitment was only £667,000 each year out of an income (in 2018) of £33,762,650 – in other words, 1.98 per cent of the Rhodes Trust’s current income. The Christian tithe (10 per cent of income) and the Muslim zakat (2.5 per cent of wealth) beat this commitment hands down. Again, over fifteen years, only 18 of the 500 Mandela Rhodes scholars in Africa have gone on to win Rhodes Scholarships in Oxford. This record hardly merits conjuring up the first letter of Mandela’s name, let alone pretending that Oxford has had a thorough Mandela-wash. The trust has barely picked up the liquitab.

In a spirited statement released during the recent Oxford protests, the Mandela Rhodes Foundation itself reminded us that Mandela demanded redress alongside reconciliation and vehemently refuted the idea that his name could be used to sustain Rhodes’s legacy:

When Nelson Mandela agreed to co-found the Foundation with the Rhodes Trust in 2003, he was fully conscious of the tension between his own life and legacy and that of Rhodes. He neither sought to sanitise

Rhodes's image nor redeem him through juxtaposing their names. To use the partnership to justify the continued display of colonial symbols is to fundamentally misunderstand it. ... Mandela's message – expressed clearly in the Mandela Rhodes partnership – is not to forgive, forget, and accept the status quo. It is to work together to strive for social justice, and in this it is not only the responsibility of the oppressed: the oppressors, or all those who continue to benefit from oppressive legacies, must also contribute.⁹

Conclusion: denial and acknowledgement

Why, more analytically, do many people feel compelled to engage in Mandela-wash and other forms of evading responsibility? In his influential work on denial, Stanley Cohen argues that: 'There is no need to invoke conspiracy or manipulation to understand how whole societies collude in covering up discreditable historical truths.' Such elisions, he explains, become easier to effect when atrocities are meted out to people regarded as 'unimportant' or 'living in remote parts of the world'.¹⁰ This subtle form of memory loss afflicted the top officers of the University of Oxford. Because it happened a long time ago to people about whom they did not know, they allowed themselves only the most superficial reading of the Rhodes Must Fall movement. The protests are not just about toppling a rather insipid and insignificant statue on the Oxford high street. Dig a little deeper and we can see that the protesters were shining a light into

our own dark hole of collective amnesia, in which many of us living and working in Oxford (me included, of course) are implicated.

On the street and in the statements of the leading figures of the movement, a less visible but no less intense powerful message goes something like this: We Tswana, Ndebele and Shona, we spiritual sons and daughters of the African miners who toiled in the mines of South Africa, we fellow-seekers of knowledge and historical insight are no longer remote or unimportant. We are here among you as professors, researchers and fellow students. We want you to acknowledge us, to listen to our voices and hear our concerns. No more looking away. No more excuses. No more concealment, displacement, denial. No more averting of eyes, No more washing of hands (Covid excepted). No more plugging of ears with fingers. No more Mandela-wash. Face your own demons and your own history.

* Robin Cohen is Emeritus Professor of Development Studies, University of Oxford, and one of the founding members of the *Review of African Political Economy*.

Notes

1. John Carlin 'Mandela's rock' https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/jun/08/women_nelson_mandela and Zelda la Grange, *Good Morning, Mr Mandela*, New York: Viking, 2014.
2. For the sad history of skin lighteners, see Lynn M. Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: A transnational history of skin lighteners*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2020.
3. For copyright reasons, this photo cannot be reproduced, but see this link here https://www.getty_images.co.uk/detail/news-photo/former-president-nelson-mandela-with-solly-krok-and-his-news-photo/91120732
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/13/cecil-rhodes-statue-row-chris-patten-tells-students-to-embrace-freedom-of-thought>
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/06/10/black-lives-matter-uk-london-protests-george-floyd-statues-racism/>
6. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4754-abusing-mandela-to-absolve-rhodes> and <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2020/06/16/lettersthe-rhodes-must-fall-campaign-follows-ideals-nelson-mandela/>
7. <https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/media/44384/rhodes-trust-consolidated-financial-statements-ye-19-signed.pdf> p. 4.
8. <https://www.mandelarhodes.org/downloads/financial-statements/2018-mrf.pdf> p. 39 and passim.
9. Statement on 15 June. <https://www.mandelarhodes.org/ideas/mandela-rhodes-foundation-statement/>
10. Stanley Cohen *States of Denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p. 12.

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Publications Team

Ibrahim Oanda
Chifaou Amzat
Diama Bèye
Yves Eric Elouga
Sériane Ajavon

For contributions and enquiries, please write to:

Council for the Development of Social Science
Research in Africa
Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop X Canal IV
P.O. Box 3304, Dakar
CP 18524, Senegal
Tel: +221 33 825 98 22 / 23
Fax: +221 33 824 12 89

Email: publications@codesria.org
Web Site: www.codesria.org

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