

TRANSCENDING THE IMPASSE: RETHINKING THE 'STATE' AND 'DEVELOPMENT' IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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1. Introduction

The 'demise of the development project/theory' (McMichael, 1996), the 'myth of development' (Rivero, 2001); the failure of the 'development industry' (Rihani,2002). These expressions and more in the literature as well as numerous reports/studies (World Bank, 1989; Asante, 1991) eloquently capture the fact that 'development' has come to an impasse or dead end in developing countries especially in Sub-Sahara Africa.

However, alternative strategies have been proposed to transcend the development impasse. These alternative strategies have addressed the problem of the development impasse from both theoretical and empirical perspectives (Sen & Grown, 1986; Sklair, ¹1988; Asante, 1991; Cornia et al., 1992; Schuurman, 1993; Stewart et al., 1993; Himmelstrand et al., 1994; Ake, 1996; Yansane, 1996; Rivero, 2001; Belshaw & Livingstone,2002; Fatou, 2002; Chang & Gabriel, 2004).

For instance Schuurman (1993) is concerned with new directions in development theory while Belshaw and Livingstone (2002), consider strategies for 'Renewing Development' in Sub-Saharan Africa. These strategies can be said to belong to the alternative development school of thought or tradition. According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1998), there are different ways of conceiving what alternative development is about and its role. It can be viewed as a roving critique of mainstream development, shifting in position as the latter shifts; as a loosely interconnected series of alternative proposals and methodologies; or as an alternative development paradigm, implying a definite theoretical break with mainstream development (Nederveen, 1998:345).

In spite of the controversy as regards the relevance of the heading 'alternative development', this paper contributes to the ongoing debate on alternative development strategies in Africa. In fact Rapley (1996) rightly notes (inter alia) that if the political and economic prospects for some countries are growing bleaker all the time, a serious reconsideration of what development is and should entail may be in order. The time for another paradigm shift may be drawing near (Rapley, 1996:158).

1. Transcending the impasse: Bringing in the Developmental State

It is now firmly established in the literature that the post-colonial African state has so far not been an effective instrument for development (Doornbos,1990; Rapley, 1996; Amundsen,1999; Leftwich,2000). In fact one of the core characteristics of the African state is the general failure of this state to implement development objectives and efficient policies to solve Africa's predicaments (Amundsen,1999:459).

Various attempts have been made to account for the failure of the African state in development (Beckman,1989; Ake,1996) and the current 'scapegoat' for the 'failure' of development in Sub-Saharan Africa is 'Bad Governance' (World Bank,1992; UNDP,1997;

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Leftwich,2000). Ake (1996) has suggested that development has never really been on the agenda in Africa and it could be argued that the absence of development on the agenda is due to the nature of the African state.

The African post-colonial state departs in fundamental respects from either the Marxist or Weberian conceptions of the state (Leftwich, 2000). It is variously referred to as: 'patrimonial'; 'neo-patrimonial' (Medard, 1991); 'soft'; 'weak'; 'predatory'; 'overdeveloped' – characteristics which greatly limit its capacity for socio-economic development/transformation (Leftwich, 2000).

Yet it is generally acknowledged today that the state has a crucial role to play in any development/transformation process (Green, 1974; Evans et al., 1985; Killick, 1989; Whitaker, 1992; World Bank, 1997; Leftwich, 2000). The 'developmental state', (Huff, 1995; Johnson,1999; Woo-Commings, 1999), and more specifically the 'democratic developmental state', (White & Wade, 1985; Leftwich, 1996; 1998; 2000; Robinson & White, 1998) would therefore seem to be the most appropriate state model for effective and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The feasibility of the developmental state in Sub-Saharan Africa

According to Rapley (1996), the advocacy of the developmental state in the Third World is an unrealistic option. Rapley (1996:138-154) identifies the factors conducive to the institutionalization of the development state. This paper focuses on those which relate to the 'nature' of the state.

Firstly, 'state strength':

To effectively guide economic development, a state must enjoy the power to direct society and lead it through traumatic changes. According to developmental state theory, the state needs to be relatively insulated against society, giving a highly skilled technocratic bureaucracy the autonomy it needs to impose discipline on the private sector (Rapley, 1996: 138-139).

Furthermore,

Bureaucrats must be able to draft policies that promote national development, not the advancement of private lobbyists. Moreover, governments may have to enact unpopular and even harsh policies in the name of development, and the governors must be in a position to ignore or repress the discontent these policies provoke Rapley,(1996:139).

Secondly, authoritarianism. There is need for an authoritarian regime which can ignore demands from society and repress the population if it becomes too vociferous (Rapley, 1996:140).

Thirdly, class politics. Rapley (1996) asserts that a developmental state depends not only on a productive bourgeoisie, but a local one. In each state said to be developmental, domestic productive capitalists have been closely linked to the bureaucracy (Rapley, 1996: 148).

It would be appropriate at this juncture to address these issues, in order to establish the fact that they do not constitute real obstacles to the institutionalization of the developmental state in Africa.

1. State strength and autonomy.

In his review of the literature on alternative conceptions of the state, Krasner (1984), asserts that Nordlinger (1981) identified state autonomy under different relationships between the preferences of state and societal actors (Krasner, 1984:230-231). Thus Type 1 autonomy refers to situations in which state actors translate their preferences into authoritative action despite divergent societal preferences. They can accomplish this by using the resources of the state to neutralize societal opponents by measures such as deploying public capital, threatening to withhold specific government programs, and masking the state's decision making procedures (Krasner, 1984:231).

Type 11 state autonomy refers to situations in which state action changes divergent societal preferences to convergent ones. The state can use four general strategies to effect such changes: altering the views of societal opponents; limiting the deployment of resources by societal opponents; gaining the support of indifferent actors; and increasing the resources of societal actors holding convergent views (Krasner, 1984:231).

Finally Type 111 state autonomy, refers to situations in which there is non-divergence between the preferences of the state and society. Even under these conditions state oriented accounts can explain authoritative actions at least as well as society-oriented ones. The state can initiate policy and provide access for particular societal groups (Krasner, 1984:231).

This typology of state autonomy applies squarely to the African state.

2. Authoritarianism

Rapley concedes that although authoritarian regimes wield great command through their control of repressive power, it is not clear that they are all that hard or strong in terms of their insulation from society. Authoritarian regimes may have naked power but lack intelligence or enlightenment. In fact, the evidence suggests that authoritarian regimes have not been particularly good at implementing reform or economic-austerity programmes (Rapley, 1996:140). In the African context Ake (1996) states that:

Political authoritarianism prevents the crystallisation of the state or even of a political class. Rather it tends to constitute a plurality of 'informal' primary systems that are largely the repositories of loyalties. It unleashes powerful centrifugal forces that render the polity incoherent and unable to establish a common purpose, including a developmental project, and to pursue it effectively. In short, political authoritarianism is an important reason why the development project in Africa has not been able to take off (Ake, 1996:126-129).

3 Absence of capitalist/bourgeois class

It is argued that capitalism forms the lifeblood of the modern state and that capitalism and patrimonialism are incompatible. Yet African states are patrimonial/neo-patrimonial. The emphasis on the importance of the capitalist class reflects a euro-centric/Western conception of development (Sachs, 1992; McMichael, 1996):

Development is a long-standing European idea, woven from two related strands of thought. One is the Promethean self-conception of European civilization, underlying the Judeo-Christian belief in the progressive human domestication of nature. This

progressivism evolved as the core ideal parallel to Europe's emergence as a world power and was expressed in the capitalist ethos of the endless accumulation of wealth as a rational economic activity (McMichael, 1996:241-242).

Furthermore, reference to the absence of a capitalist/bourgeois class betrays a lack of awareness of the nature of class dynamics (Sklar, 1979; Beckman, 1989), as well as social movements (Mamdani & Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1995) and grassroots organizations in the African context. In fact ideal-type notions of an absent national bourgeoisie stand in the way of an understanding of the process of state and ruling class formation. Pre-occupation with inefficiency, corruption, misappropriation, nepotism, and other 'aberrations', tends to substitute for an analysis of the forces that determine the dynamics and direction of the process (Beckman, 1989:29).

Advocacy for the institutionalization of the developmental state in Sub-Saharan African polities is not actually an unrealistic option as (Rapley, 1996) suggests. What is needed is a strong civil society (Osaghae, 1998), as well as appropriate strategies to enhance the capacity of civil society (Blair, 1997), to contribute to the transformation of authoritarian states in the sub region into developmental states.

2. Transcending the impasse: Rethinking 'Development'

The post-colonial state has pursued a development policy that has contributed to the development impasse. (Ake, 1996). Unlike the East Asian 'developmental state', the post-colonial state in Sub-Saharan Africa has almost completely neglected the rural sector. In fact the real distinguishing characteristic between the East Asia and the rest of the developing world is that East Asian nations choose to develop the rural sector (Grabowski, 1998:114). In fact the rural sector is of strategic importance for the poorer nations of the world. It is the source of primary products (agricultural produce and minerals) for export to the advanced industrial countries and of foodstuffs and labour for the national urban and industrial centres (Long, 1977:1).

Jaycox refers to the rural sector as the 'central sector' and asserts that it produces 50 percent on average in Africa. The rural sector is the location of 70 percent of the poor people living on less than one dollar a day (Jaycox, 1997:30). A classic statement on the importance of the rural sector is that of Guy who 35 years ago asserted that,

It is in the rural sector in many developing countries that indigenous resources of men and land are underused, there that nutrition can be tackled; there that success would do most to slow the immigration to major cities, to provide a market for existing and new industries and services and to give the chance for restructuring education to meet the practical needs of a prosperous and diversified rural community. Finally, it is there that some redress of the gross inequality in income distribution can be started (Guy, 1970:1).

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

1. Poverty reduction;

2. Widely shared growth;
3. Household, national and global food security;
4. Sustainable natural resource management.

Given the development impasse it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach to overcome the development predicaments. This strategic approach would involve 'strategising' or 'mainstreaming' rural development (Weitz, 1971; Waterston, 1974; Haque et al., 1977; Harris, 1984; Ake, 1996; Shepherd, 1998) in national development policy and planning. In fact in the African context, development must first be conceived as rural development (Ake, 1996). Furthermore, the crucial contribution of rural development to overall macro-economic/socio-economic development, and environmental protection (Long, 1977; Jaycox, 1996; World Bank, 1997) is now well established.

It is however interesting to note that rural development policies/programmes have so far been a failure throughout Africa (Heyer et al., 1981:1). Various attempts have been made to account for the failure of rural development. The lack of political will/commitment (Bryant & White, 1981; Jaycox, 1996; World Bank, 1997) has been identified as one of the factors. According to Heyer et al., (1981), rural development as practice has failed as a result of the incompatibility both between the different goals and the means which are almost universally promoted as the ways to achieve rural development. This incompatibility is concealed by a rhetoric, which asserts the mutual interests of rural development agencies, governments, and rural population en masse (Heyer et al., 1981; Williams, 1981).

In fact the fundamental reason for the failure of rural development in Africa is the adoption of an inappropriate development paradigm (Potter, 1971; Mabogunje, 1980; Mackenzie, 1992; Taylor & Mackenzie, 1992; Rihani, 2002). Potter rightly asserts that the classical model of development based on the experience of the developed countries of the West and Japan is the one usually followed by most developing countries. It is however becoming increasingly clear that this classic model of rural development is unrealistic for many developing countries (Potter, 1971, 359).

The new development paradigm must adopt a broader concept of rural development which takes into account the nature of power relations in rural society, that is, those forms of domination that impede or make possible the realization of the goals of that have been set up within the field of rural development (Bengtsson, 1979:61-66), also addresses the issue of democratisation and empowerment therein. Furthermore, any rural development policy must also be concerned with environmental issues because rural development activities that are not environmentally sustainable will not improve long-term wellbeing (Clever, 1997:79). The paradigm proposed by Shepherd (1998) constitutes a comprehensive or holistic approach. It is ambivalent about both state- and market – led versions of development. The state has often not served rural people well, especially the poor and more marginal among them. Indeed it has often been the chief exploiter and represser of rural people and organisations (Shepherd, 1998:22).

3. Rural development ideology

Rural development policy must be legitimated by an appropriate development ideology. According to Potter,

ideology is important in rural development not only because ideologically influenced decisions determine to some extent whether the end products of planning will more closely resemble family farms or factories-in-the-fields, but also the social force needed to overcome social resistance and mobilize a conservative peasantry to participate in development programmes can apparently come in no other way. (Potter, 1971:58).

Thus the 'end of ideology' may be appropriate/true in the context of Western/capitalist polities. Ideology however relevant/crucial in the context of African post-colonial polities. In fact all development concepts are in a sense ideological (Barraclough, 1977; Williams, 1981; Sachs, 1992; Ake, 1996). Furthermore, development has been pursued traditionally within specific ideological guidelines. Contrasting approaches based on capitalism or socialism were the norm until recently, but the capitalist camp has emerged as the victor and development prescriptions now follow the dictates of that philosophy (Rihani, 2002:241).

There is however no general consensus as the nature of the ideology to sustain rural development in the context postcolonial/neo-patrimonial polities. Potter (1977:358) has suggested that nationalism plus some form of socialism is the usual creed in most developing countries. Haque et al., (1977) propose a development philosophy and objectives for Asia which could be adopted and adapted to a rural development ideology in the African context. Haque et al., assert that historically, the only other known method of accumulation is that of human mobilisation for the conversion of surplus labour into means of production. This mobilisation implies (a) collectivist relations of production (b) choice of appropriate technology and (c) self-reliance, which in external relations means economic independence via de-linkage from existing global dominance/dependence relations (Haque et al., 1977:13). The importance of mobilisation has been reiterated by Mabogunje, who asserts that the mobilisation of the total population of a given country is the most critical factor in the construction of a new and more developmental social framework (Mabogunje, 1980:335).

According to Haque et al., (1977) mobilization as an accumulation strategy requires the adoption of collectivist relations of production. Historical experience indicates that specific forms of collectivist relations have specific bearings on development in a wider sense (Haque et al., 1977:14).

This concept of collective rules out the pursuit of the 'animal' spirit of self-interest - (characteristic of capitalism, - McMichael,1996) - whereby one tries to take as much from society as one can without submitting to a collective evaluation of one's share in the give and take (Haque et al., 1977:16). The collective involves creating certain values:

i) Self-reliance is the single most important (Haque et al., 1977:16). This means building up a combination of material and mental reserves that enable one to choose one's own course of evolution, uninhibited by what others desire. It requires psychological and

institutional staying power to meet crisis situations. This staying power is best attained collectively (Haque et al., 1977:17).

ii) Participatory democracy. The collective as we conceive it functions through the active participation of the people. Without this the individual would not belong organically to the collective and the collective self would not to that extent be a reality. The collective and participatory democracy are hence inseparable concepts (Haque et al., 1977:17-18).

iii) Consciousness gap. This requires that the leadership and the masses move in a mutually interacting process that systematically reduces the consciousness gap (Haque et al., 1977:18).

iv) De-alienation. The binding constraint to development are factors that inhibit the fullest expression of man's natural self: identity with work in which he should find pleasure and fulfilment, and with society in which alone he discovers his self, an identity that has been fragmented into elite and the masses, the ruler and the ruled, the privileged and underprivileged, the 'superior' and the 'inferior'. Development then must mean a process of de-alienation, that is liberation from inhibitions derived from the structure and superstructure of society that thus dehumanise its broad masses and prevent them from consummating their fullest potentials (Haque et al., 1977:18).

Conclusion

Rural development is the key to the whole process of development (Haque et al., 1977; Weitz, 1977; Ake, 1996). The way out of the current development impasse in Africa as a whole and Sub-Saharan in particular lies in the institutionalisation of the developmental state and the adoption by this state of a development policy based on the promotion of the rural sector.

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