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## **PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

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**ADEBAYO OLUKOSHI, FRANCIS B. NYAMNJOH**  
**Rethinking African Development: Beyond Impasse,**  
**Towards Alternatives**

### **1. Developing Africa**

The theme of development is one which has been central to African socio-economic and political thought and engineering in the period since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, it was also integral to the birth of pan-Africanism, the onset of the national liberation project, and the launching of the post-independence social contract which the nationalists attempted to construct as the legitimising covenant with the peoples whom they had succeeded in mobilising to reject continued colonial domination. From the time of Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, and the other early pioneers of pan-Africanism to the period of Casely Hayford, C.L.R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nwafor Orizu and other second and third generation pan-Africanist thinkers, the issue of how to develop the African continent has been a constant concern in the ongoing quest for the attainment of continental re-birth. In sum, it is a pre-occupation that has been passed from one generation to the other. The nationalist generation whose struggles ushered Africa into the post-colonial period underpinned their push for political power with the hope that independence would enhance the scope for the realisation of the goals of national and continental socio-economic well-being and advancement that the peoples of the continent craved. A doyen of African historians, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, in seeking to underscore the centrality of the theme of development to the social project of the African nationalist movement, once remarked in retrospect that, at one point, it had become so all-engrossing that the feeling was palpable across the continent that the entrances to the state houses were emblazoned with the notice: 'Silence! Development in

Progress? Ki-Zerbo should know. He was a contemporary of many of the pioneer nationalists and pan-Africanists whose efforts defined the African world in the period from the early 1940s onwards. He also played an active role in helping to shape the debates that animated the national liberation project. Furthermore, he witnessed the effort – and its attendant limitations – to translate the developmentalist vision that fired the nationalists into policy as African countries, one after the other, attained their independence. So powerful was the ideology of development that was espoused by the nationalists and so rich its promise that it served as a credible platform for the mobilisation of the entire populace, who in turn bought into it to varying degrees, and with an equally varied menu of expectations.

But the pre-occupation with development that was manifest in the period after the Second World War was not limited to Africa alone. In other regions of the world, the problematic of development was one which occupied a central role as governments and thinkers addressed their minds to the question of how to achieve or cement social and economic progress in the face of rapidly changing contexts and the requirements for accumulation. In Europe, for example, where war and economic depression had combined to take a severe toll on national economic well-being and the quality of life, and where popular pressures were mounting for social inclusion, a distinctive field of Development Studies began to emerge after 1945 as an area of scholarly specialisation. Across significant swathes of Europe and Asia, under the banner of revolution, attempts were made to seek a socialist route to development, one which, it was hoped, would avoid the pitfalls of the capitalist mode of accumulation and its vulnerability to cyclical crises that took a huge toll on human populations. Considering, therefore, the fact that the problematic of development was one which resonated in all parts of the contemporary world, it is not surprising that the body of work which has been generated on the theme has spanned virtually all spheres of human endeavour, with insights drawn from various disciplines and, in most cases, mirroring different aspects of the international scholarly and policy pre-occupations of this conjuncture. The issues that have been covered have been as varied as the kinds of debates that have taken place. By and large, they are also issues which have remained an abiding part of the quest for African development: industrialisation, agrarian transformation, economic stability and growth, international trade, investments, fiscal policy, science,

technology and innovation, unemployment, income distribution, the mobilisation of domestic savings, public expenditure systems, environmental sustainability, gender dynamics, and foreign aid.

And yet, although imbued with a popular base at the dawn of independence, discontent within the ideology and practice of development was quickly to emerge as the first decade of the postcolonial period came to a close. Under the guise of development, and in the name of catching up with the West, many post-independence African governments sought to stifle opposing views and oppositional politics as power became concentrated in the hands of an increasingly detached elite organised into governments of various forms, be they single party, military or civilian-military diarchies. In this environment, 'development' became an omnibus slogan for silencing contrary voices and concentrating power. Citizens who had been mobilised around visions of self-reliance, nation-building, the ideals of equality and social justice, popular participation and democratic accountability, gradually saw the blurring of those visions under the weight of pressures, both domestic and external. Regimes sought one after the other to dampen expectations and demobilise the populace; repression and authoritarian tactics were freely deployed to this end. The post-colonial social contract that was in the making collapsed even before it could be consolidated as the foundation for the exercise of full citizenship. There was clearly more than a passing irony in Ki-Zerbo's observation that, across Africa, as regimes purported to bury their heads in the business of development, their case appeared to be little more than that of the proverbial ostrich that tucked its head in the sand in order to hide itself, forgetting that the rest of its body was in full view to the world. Increasingly, as the gulf between the government and the people widened, only African leaders and their courtiers believed the rhetoric of development that they themselves pronounced. The bulk of the populace, in a mood of *déjà vu*, *déjà entendu*, quietly asked 'when will this development finish?' since, the development of which leaders preached was not one that was any longer recognisable to them.

Various explanations have been proffered as to why the vision of development, such as it was enunciated in the national liberation struggle, failed to materialise as expected and in a sustained manner. For instance, it has been claimed that: a carefully programmed project of neo-colonialism by the departing colonial authorities ensured that independent Africa sank

deeper into dependence; the national liberation project was betrayed by many of the nationalists who inherited state power; economies built on a narrow resource base and sectoral imbalances were particularly vulnerable to external shocks; multinational corporations exploited monopolistic or oligopolistic advantages to the disadvantage of their African hosts; the pressures mounted on African governments soon after independence by the principal protagonists of the East-West Cold War had a destabilising effect; and so on. But, of the many interesting arguments that have been adduced, few have emphasised the point that the policies that were implemented were either crafted by ‘development experts’ seconded from abroad, or borrowed outright from external sources. For, in the end, when we carefully re-read the experience of the 1960s, it should be obvious that the dawn of independence was not accompanied by an investment in independent development thinking for tackling problems that were either peculiar or generic or both. The speed with which foreign aid was woven into the fabric of the domestic policy process after independence and the consequence of that aid in fostering a culture of dependency was to set the stage for a complete erosion, in the 1980s and 1990s, of the capacity of governments to define their priorities and choices in accordance with the exigencies of national development. Foreign aid became the harbinger of foreign models and the soft underbelly of self-reliance. This realisation, together with the rapacious pursuit of narrow commercial interests by donors through the practice of tying aid, is what motivated one commentator to lament: ‘Development, development, what crimes are committed in thy name?’ Nevertheless, the intellectual roots of the deficit of independent development thinking which African countries experienced are much deeper and are connected to the terms in which African researchers were trained to conceptualise the problematic of socio-economic and political transformation.

## **2. Development Studies: Science by Analogy**

As African countries grappled with the challenges of adding substance to their independence, Development Studies inevitably offered its attractions as a scholarly field. As it became gradually conflated with Area Studies, it also became perversely restricted to an exclusive preoccupation

with the difficulties experienced by developing countries, as though they were the only ones that had a problem of development. Perhaps it is here that the welter of problems that have trailed the concept and conceptualisation of development can be located. These problems have a strong definitional component, but they also go beyond simple definitions to strike at the heart of the very ways in which we think about development, irrespective of whether we characterise it as sustainable, sustained, or human development. For, as Development Studies became reduced to a study of the problems of developing countries, theoretical thinking was gradually oriented in directions which essentially sought to address the experiences of, and challenges faced by, African countries by means of analogies that purported to draw from the history and experiences of the developed countries of Western Europe. In this way, the mainstream theory of development became little less than what Mahmood Mamdani, in a different context, once described as 'science by analogy'; the practice of development itself became an elaborate exercise in mimicry and the concept of development was to be the poorer for it. From the influential work of W.W. Rostow and his *Stages of Economic Growth*, which served as the intellectual foundation for much of the output produced by the modernisation approach to development, to some of the more nuanced modernisation critiques of the Rostowian model, development was consciously or unconsciously seen as an exercise in unilinear evolutionism by means of which the countries of Africa were condemned to pass through the different stages which Europe and the United States had already traversed before arriving at 'development'. The challenge before the scholar and policy intellectual was to identify these stages and then determine what African countries and those of other developing regions needed to do in order to go through them successfully, and arrive at the ultimate goal of development. History, culture, geography, and other contextual factors did not matter much in this analytic frame.

An entire generation of African scholars, schooled in the modernisation tradition, devoted its energies to debating the terms of modernisation as set out in the Rostowian paradigm. How were traditional/cultural barriers to modernisation to be broken down? Who were the social actors best positioned to lead the modernisation project between the 'traditional' elites (chiefs and priests) and the non-traditional elites (military oligarchs and civil servants)? What role could foreign investment play in nurturing struc-

tures of modernisation? From Political Science to Sociology, Economics to Anthropology, History and Geography, social scientists were encouraged to explore the problematic of development from the viewpoint of modernisation. But for all the energies invested in these types of questions, there was silence on a critical concern: how was this notion of modernisation fundamentally different from the ideology of the 'civilising mission' on the basis of which colonialism was justified? After all, the idea of this mission was to make the 'native' look more like the European, including, if necessary, through policies of assimilation that included teaching him/her European table manners and dress codes. At its crudest, the modernisation approach reduced the development problematic to a question of how African countries could be made to become more like Europe and the United States. This unilinear evolutionism continues, to varying extents, to influence development thinking on, and development policy-making for, Africa. Thus, when World Bank economists speak about 'leapfrogging' development in Africa or elsewhere through the instrumentality of the fabled free market, when others insist that what Africa requires is a strong dose of Protestant/Calvinist, or Confucian ethic, when otherwise knowledgeable commentators suggest that what Africa needs is to strengthen a culture of trust and build up its social capital, their thoughts, however well-meaning, harken back to the Rostowian model by which it is assumed that the development tracks that must be beaten by nations are already set and cast in terms of the history of Europe and North America. The entire structural adjustment model of the IMF and the World Bank is also framed in that mould; it is only the jargon by which the message is transmitted that has changed.

The emergence of the dependency school and the justifiable diatribe which its leading exponents launched against the modernisation approach represented a concerted effort at a radical break from the dominant thinking about development that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s. It also provided much-needed relief from the suffocating dominance of modernisation perspectives. The dependency school succeeded in demolishing a key pillar on which the modernisation approach rested, namely, the assumption that African countries were 'backward'/'undeveloped'/'underdeveloped'/'traditional' only because of deep-seated domestic structures that were resistant to modernisation – and which were ultimately tied to culture. From Andre Gunder Frank and Ernesto Laclau to Walter Rodney, Samir

Amin and Claude Ake, among others, they showed that there was a close correlation between the mode of integration of Africa and other developing regions into the world system and the state of underdevelopment they were experiencing. Where the modernisation approach denied or downplayed the role of the external in obstructing or distorting domestic accumulation, the dependency school stressed the centrality of the external to domestic outcomes. The more sophisticated among the theorists of the dependency approach went a step further and attempted to establish a dialectic of the internal and external in ways which sought to capture the complex interplay of local and international factors, actors, and politics in conditioning the development process. However, the problematic as posed by many a dependency theorist was one which did not completely free itself from the conceptual frame of the modernisation approach, insofar as they mostly treated underdevelopment mechanically as the flip side of development. In positing itself as the opposite of the modernisation approach, the underdevelopment school ultimately remained within the terrain of the former, the only difference being that it drew a different set of conclusions.

### **3. Structural Adjustment and the Crisis of Development Thinking**

The global political and economic crises experienced during the course of the first and second halves of the 1970s also translated into a crisis for development thinking. Symbolised by the OPEC oil price increases and Middle East conflicts of the period, the crises produced right-ward shifts in the politics of the leading industrial countries of the global North and culminated in the elevation of free market principles to a core position in macro-economic policy-making. The resultant decline of Keynesian economic thinking, side by side with the decline of the dependency school, was accompanied by the rise to ascendancy and hegemony of a neo-liberal economic orthodoxy that was first mooted in the contemporary period by Milton Friedman and his disciples in the Chicago School. Matters were not helped by the collapse of the experiments in socialist economic planning championed by Russia and its COMECON/Warsaw Pact allies. The end of the Soviet socialist model gave force to the claim which champions of the

emerging neo-liberal orthodoxy of the free market, now enthroned in the most important international/multilateral financial institutions, freely made in the course of the 1980s and 1990s: namely, that there was no alternative to their policy reform package. The more exuberant intellectual partisans of this emerging neo-liberal age were to proclaim the end of history and the death of development, in celebration of the market-based counter-revolution that was in the making. The market-based blueprint which they were advancing was already being promoted in Africa as a comprehensive structural adjustment package which was purportedly designed to rescue the continent from the consequences of two decades of *dirigiste* and state-interventionist development, and to pave the way for a market-led framework for accumulation. In order to strengthen the intellectual and political case for structural adjustment, officials and partisans of the IMF and the World Bank spared no effort in promoting a wholesale revisionist interpretation of the economic history of Africa from the 1960s through to the end of the 1970s. Their verdict from this revisionism was that the first 20 years of African independence were lost decades, on account of the 'irresponsible' state-interventionist policies pursued by governments. It is a verdict that offers an insight into the very narrowly economic interpretation of development built into the adjustment model promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions and other donors.

The history of the introduction of IMF/World Bank structural adjustment into the African policy environment is still so fresh in our minds that, like its content, it needs no repetition here. Also, the methods by which the neo-liberal adjustment framework itself was secured are too well-known to merit rehashing. Furthermore, the consequences of structural adjustment – ranging from deindustrialisation to the collapse of incomes and the decline of civil service capacities – remain such harsh realities with which the populace grapples on a daily basis that they need no detailed presentation here. Suffice it then to note that for 25 years, that is, from the period since the early 1980s to date, the structural adjustment model has either defined policy choices made by African leaders outright, or underpinned the priorities set for the continent. This turn of events came about, not because it has proved to be impeccable in conceptualisation or successful in practice but because the autonomy of the entire African policy system had been eroded and its structures – or what is left of them – hijacked. Thus

it is, that in spite of the fact that structural adjustment has been a signal failure on virtually all fronts – a failure to which the World Bank has itself admitted – Africa has remained stuck with the macro-economic prescriptions of the Bretton Woods institutions as if in fulfillment of the claim that there is no alternative to the model. But the ideological position that denies alternatives in life – even when they seem remote – is one which destroys all critical thinking and carries an authoritarian load that should be resisted. And when it pertains to such matters as development, it is important for the African academy to challenge itself and make a bold push to reclaim the right, both to independent thinking about development and the domestic and/or global policy spaces for the exercise of that thinking. No matter how we look at the issue, no people can develop themselves by the good will of others, however genuine, or the charity of others, however generous. And it is this, together with the 25 years lost to the careless experimentations carried out by the IMF and the World Bank, as well as the need to address the challenges of continental recovery from the effects of maladjustment, that make it necessary for African scholars to engage with the subject.

#### **4. Beyond the Impasse, Towards Alternatives**

Researchers and policy intellectuals active in the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) have historically been at the forefront of the contestation of much of the received wisdom that has supported the dominant development policies implemented by governments, bilateral donors and multilateral institutions in the period since the end of the Second World War. The translation of that contestation into alternative frames of analysis for the liberation of the continent, however, has remained an unfinished business to which attention must now be focused full-scale and full-time. The urgency of the challenge is located on many fronts, but there is perhaps none more worrisome than the spirited investment which is being made under different guises to argue the case for a second colonialism. Given CODESRIA's history and mandate, it is the one institution which is properly positioned to lead an African counter-counter-revolution to neo-liberal orthodoxy and its pernicious effects, doing so by

marshalling the best of the critical social thought available in the community it was established to serve and represent.

CODESRIA was established in 1973 as an initiative of the African social research community. It was given a specific mandate to extend the frontiers of knowledge production on and about Africa. The specific goals for which the Council was set up and which are stated in its Charter arose directly from the aspiration of the peoples of Africa to achieve all-round socio-economic and political development that would qualitatively improve human conditions across the continent. Its triennial meetings have also become the most significant gathering of intellectuals on the African continent and are convened to take stock of the road, which, as a community, we have travelled and the challenges that lie ahead. At a time when there is a widespread feeling that the contemporary development debate is characterised by a deep-seated poverty of imagination, CODESRIA calls on the African social research community to engage in a collective re-thinking of development with a view to proposing alternatives to the current stalemate in thinking and policy. In this sense, we want to carry the social research community beyond the parameters that have informed development thinking in and about Africa to date, including the more recent Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

This text was first published in a special issue of the CODESRIA Bulletin, No. 3 & 4 (2005), focussing on development alternatives for Africa ([http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/contents\\_bulletin/bulletin\\_3\\_05.htm](http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/contents_bulletin/bulletin_3_05.htm)). It has been slightly changed for our purpose.

## **Abstracts**

The article discusses the role of the developmentalist project within an African context, such project being part both of the national liberation struggles and the descent of most post-colonial states into authoritarianism and economic crisis. Special emphasis is given to the problematic role of Western prescriptions that shaped the fate of the continent – from the modernization approach to the neo-liberal orthodoxy. As a consequence,

the article calls on African social scientists to find new, independent and imaginative ways of thinking about development.

Der Aufsatz befasst sich mit dem „Projekt Entwicklung“ in Afrika, das mit den nationalen Befreiungskämpfen ebenso eng verbunden war wie mit dem Ableiten der meisten postkolonialen Staaten in Autoritarismus und Wirtschaftskrise. Eine problematische Rolle spielten dabei westliche Rezepte – vom Modernisierungsansatz bis hin zur neoliberalen Orthodoxie. Der Artikel ruft daher afrikanische SozialwissenschaftlerInnen dazu auf, neue, unabhängige und unkonventionelle Entwicklungskonzepte zu erarbeiten.

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