

Review

Building from below and deepening democracy as alternative strategies for poverty alleviation and sustainable development in Africa: Challenges and opportunities

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The march towards democratic progress remains one of the defining developments of the late 20th century. For Africa, it has been (a) the dismantling of colonial governance, (b) the embracement of the monolithic party structure for its development, (c) the return to political pluralism without significant improvements in the improving the quality of life of the vast majority of the people, (d) failure to improve the living standards of the population. These developments provide challenges and opportunities for African states to rethink the kind of developmental strategies so far adopted. It equally begs a simple question – whether political independence was properly initiated and whether the colonial powers were pleased to grant independence to their colonies? Against the backdrop of the shared dissatisfaction with the current pace of poverty alleviation, curbing the vices of corruption and poor development, how can progress be best accelerated in the 21st century in building the necessary capacity for knowledge society in a fast growing knowledge based global economy? Which instruments must be put in place to ensure “Futures Intelligence Capacity” as proactive strategic approaches in overcoming the predicament of a continent rich in natural resources but poor in terms of development and quality of livelihood? The paper goes further to look at serious deficiencies of governance highlighting public cynicism that diminishes public esteem for democracy. It articulates a triple heritage strategic approach of (i) building from below, (ii) deepening the political process, and (iii) focusing on people first as the means of achieving sustainable, equitable growth and development. It argues within this premises that to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to enhance the continent’s role within the global community, emphasis should focus on State-Civil Society-Private Sector interface, operating under the umbrella of partnership, participation and benefit sharing. The failure to govern effectively takes a toll on the legitimacy and stability of democracy and development process. Proactive strategic policy measures are advanced as a way forward and in linking futures study and the various challenges that humankind face.

Key words: Governance, inclusion, participation, partnership, democracy, exclusion, state, civil society, private sector interface, capacity building, future intelligence capacity.

INTRODUCTION

The African continent has undergone numerous changes since Ghana fifty years ago cut the chains of colonial rule. It has been fifty years of tribulations, trials and temptations. Progress as well as failure can be record during the past five decades of the granting of independence to colonial territories. What is clear is that the challenges abound given that the quality of livelihood of the population to a large extent, has known no change.

In some cases, there has been serious deterioration. This is exemplified by the articulation of the united nations millennium development goals (MDGs) of halving poverty by the year 2015. Half-way through the magical year of 2015, though the international community in 2005 hailed the renewed commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, there are studies showing limited national capacity and commitment towards the attainment of the goals

envisaged by the MDGs which comes as reinforcement to national policy initiatives for Africa's transition to a modern state. Why such piecemeal attitude towards issues of fundamental importance to humanity?

Many factors contribute to Africa's state of underdevelopment and marginalisation within the global system: for example, (a) lack of political will and misplaced priorities, (b) poor/absence of a democratic governance system (c) hegemonic and dominating forces of the developed world towards the region, (d) inadequate human resources development, the non-incorporation of civil society (especially the rural population) and the private sector in the development process, (e) poor leadership, (f) poor society's responses towards addressing existing predicaments among other issues.

Facing the realities and addressing the predicaments of transitional polities in Africa requires serious surgical political undertakings, namely: (i) re-instituting democratic governance system: (ii) involvement of the people and other stakeholders, (iii) positive responses from the global community towards the goals and aspirations of the continent, (iv) good leadership. The absence of democratic governance and non-involvement of the people leads to situations where, for example, funds for development remain unspent or siphoned into private accounts or because of a gap in capacity so mundane as to be almost invisible, (v) insufficient skills for project administration and management, bypassing the people in the articulation and implementation of development related activities.

Even when all other things are in place – democratically elected governments, highly qualified civil servants, and supportive donors – the gap in human capacity building and non-commitment towards putting people first can hold back the development enterprise. Centralised and autocratic bureaucratic administrative systems often compound the problem. In many cases, complex donor requirements add to capacity constraints. Therefore, both African countries and the donor communities must address “weaknesses in donor and partner countries, institutional capacities to develop and implement results driven national development strategies” that delivers quality services to the people. It is imperative that efforts should focus on addressing simultaneously and immediately, existing barriers that affect efficient, effective and transparent formulation and implementation of priority development activities currently facing low levels of performance in many African countries. Poor performance is also the result of failing to build from below. Recognising the invisible gap is paramount to sustainable take-off to a developed and respectable continent. Africa is yet to truly recognise systematic improvement in the political, economic, social and cultural well-being of a people within a geographic entities or countries, calling for (a) stable and acceptable political order, (b) improving the material welfare; (c) creating an atmosphere of social cohesion, conflict prevention and

peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Therefore, all stakeholders, ‘*state-civil society-private sector – international community*’ must make concerted, comprehensive and coordinated efforts reinforcing agreed actions and removing barriers to programme implementation. National governments must create an enabling environment for the emergence of a developmental state that accelerates the provision of sustainable quality living standards to the vast majority of people. The people should draw lessons from “*the lost decade of the 1980s*” and to accommodate a different development reality in the 21st century and beyond. It also implies identifying and addressing the bottlenecks which differ from country to country. Though some significant strides have been made, much remains to be accomplished, as the governance and management systems are not solid enough and there are few people with the required substantive and administrative skills. In some countries, complex and inefficient legislation and administrative procedures hold back development efforts. In others, donor interests and other conditionality not only have the potential to skew the selection of priorities, but also to fragment national management systems by obligating recipients to follow diverse procedures, formats and standards (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2002). Such exogenous imposition together with existing internal deficiencies contributes to state failure in Africa.

Support to Africa's capacity to mobilise and manage internal and external resources ultimately contributes to national ability in articulating and implementing the objectives envisaged by MDGs which include:

1. Between 1990 and 2015, halve the proportion of people whose income is less than 1USA\$ a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education by 2015
3. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015;
4. Between 1990 and 2015, reduce the under 5 mortality rate by two-thirds
5. Between 1990 and 2015, reduce the maternal mortality by three-fourths
6. By 2015, have halted and began to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and have halted and begun to reverse the spread incidence of malaria and other major diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability by integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reversing the losses of environmental resources;
8. Develop a global partnership for development

The goals of the MDGs should only strengthen national policies and accelerate the process of attainment even before 2015. Why must African governments only wait for global directives before addressing the plights of their people? What were the reasons of throwing away

colonial rule? Why are leaders frustrating the rising aspirations and expectation of independence? Why are the leaders accumulating at the expense of bleeding their citizens into wanton poverty, misery and underdevelopment? Why are they holding on to power for long without making significant impact on the livelihood their citizens? Why are leaders afraid in relinquishing power? Why can they bring the rest of society on board as active contributing participants and beneficiaries of the development process?

Since policy documents without actions are meaningless, it can be argued that the African condition is not due to the absence of policies, but rather policy failure compounded by the lack of political will and failed leadership in implementing these policies. Policy failures are due to poor conception which excludes the people – ‘the top-down’ and not the “bottom-up” approach of inclusion and involvement. A “bottom-up” or ‘people-focused’ approach remains the best way of fighting the viruses of poverty and exclusion. It is also a challenge for the down trodden population of the continent to wake up to the realities, challenges and changes in a long road towards being the custodians of their destiny,

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopts the system theory framework of “Inputs-Outputs”; and “the conspiracy theory”. The conspiracy theory draws heavy from Achebe’s assertion that

“ African leaders for whatever reason fail to appreciate that the West sees Africa as the rural sector of Europe...to guarantees Africa’s historic role as the supplier of cheap labour and raw materials to Europe...This remains the West’s view of Africa. Definitely the West is hostile to Africa’s development. We continue to fool ourselves if we think the contrary is the case. The west will never develop Africa. Our underdevelopment is dialectically linked to their development. Europe is aware of this historical relationship and cannot do otherwise.”

Conversely, the rulers who replaced the departed colonial master inherited what Achebe terms “*cargo cult mentality*”; perpetuating the vices of white imperialism, best illustrated by Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* (1967).

It questions whether the “*modernisation theory*” and the “*later-comers theory*” provide the way forward to addressing Africa’s state of poverty and underdevelopment. Or whether a new developmental approach based on “*development from below*” encompassing ‘*deepening of democracy, inclusion and sharing*’, provides the most appropriate, comprehensive and concerted way of provide quality livelihood to the people.

But accomplishing this entails visionary leadership. Leadership is Africa’s greatest developmental problem. Nelson Mandela is adamant on this. “*Africa is beyond bemoaning the past for its problems. The task of undoing the past is on the shoulders of African leaders themselves, with support of those willing to join in the continental renewal*”. A view supported strongly by many (Adei, 2003; Amoaka, 2004; Dada, 2007) that “leadership is cause; and everything else is effect”.

Emerging African states embraced the promises of modernisation as a major theoretical prescription for the continent’s development. Modernisation promised a progressive wave of economic, social, and political transformation that would catapult the newly independent states into the global centre stage. So far, that has not happened. After the decades of policy failures modernisation has been placed on the back burner of development debates. Developing from below started with Marxist-based analysis of exploitation and control of the productive resources. The basis of the continent’s participation in global economy must begin with the emancipation of the people, decolonising their colonial mentality and replacing it with a progressive indigenous mentality and a strong political will of being their own masters, and shaping their destiny.

This is a serious commitment requiring an all inclusive priority setting strategic approach of mobilisation, development of human capacity, proper utilisation of resources, social justice and equity in the sharing of national wealth. Two main schools of thoughts have so far emerged, reflecting different opinions about how Africa should proceed on its socioeconomic transformation path. One school that has been tried since independence has been the “the slow-track” or “development from above” or “the trickle-down approach” arguing that Africa must depend from the expertise and handouts of the developed societies to advance its developmental approach For over fifty years, the continent has practiced this approach with no significant change in the living status of the vast majority of the population. The other school advocates a “people-oriented”, “bottom-up” or “trickle- up” which in a way is “fast-track” developmental approach, arguing that by focusing on the people, getting the people involved, and sharing the benefits of society will accelerate the transition from wanton poverty to affluence.

The argument is that as long as Africa remains tied to the aprons of the West with its hidden agenda, as long as the ruling elites are manipulated by fallouts of the crumbs from Bretton Woods Financial Conglomerates (Wold Bank, IMF, IFC, etc.), the continent remains for ever a motley gathering of fragmented and underdeveloped states with the vast majority of the population perpetually remaining poor. The “top-down” approach has been tried for many decades with clearly visible results. The reluctance in adopting a “people-oriented” or “bottom-up” strategy is clear. The greed and victimisation attitude of

the ruling elites inhibits policies that promote social equity, accountability and balanced development in society. Is a process of de-linking and re-linking a way out for the continent to attain to its plethora of problems? Is de-linking possible when the world is fast moving into a global village, and when the continent lacks the technological know-how to propel it into a knowledge-based competitive global economy of the 21st century?

Against the backdrop of the shared dissatisfaction with the current pace of Africa's development, how can progress be best accelerated in the 21st century? In what ways and to what extent will a "people-centred" or "bottom-up" approach accelerate or retard progress in the socioeconomic transformation of the continent. What other mechanisms or institutions should be brought to accelerate the process? These and many other related questions constitute the fundamental premises of departure. Why must there be a paradigm shift? The argument is that the "elite driven- self centred" approach has failed to deliver the goods. Therefore, other alternatives must be sought, not just for seeking sake, but alternatives that will enhance, harness, utilise and deliver quality services to the people.

The choice of a better alternative entails an approach of "de-linking" and "re-linking the continent from the West for sometime and adopting a developmental policy strategy engraved from a process that is "bottom-up", "people-oriented" "pro-poor", pro-democracy", "self-sustaining and independent". This is a tall-order approach which calls for sacrifices, commitment, change in mindset, attitude and behaviour. Without such radical changes, the development process of the continent will for ever remain stalled as envisaged by the developed nations.

DESPOTIC DEVELOPMENT

Political independence was not handed a platter of gold. The struggle implied that the colonial powers implanted certain hidden failure mechanisms which could be characterised as the "Dilemma of Development from Above". Using the potent weapon of colonial powers, and given the vulnerable situation of the colonies turned into 'sovereign states', the former succeeded in triumphing over the political elites as brokers of political power, through whom they could dictate policy strategies and policy measures. The political elites saw neither politics, nor its involvement in it, not as an opportunity to advance the public interest, but more as an opportunity that guaranteed fame, adventure and the promotion of their narrow self-interests. The socio-political and economic order that evolved, apparently adopted concepts which were never translated into reality or where efforts were not made to accomplish even in token terms, basic needs such as health care, water, shelter, and education; these were thwarted by the controlling forces of the West. It

should be remembered that the development strategies inherited by independent countries were crafted by the departing colonial masters. It was development from above which continues unabated today without delivering the require services to the people. *"It should be observed that political elites place heavy emphasis on the acquisition and retention of political power, such that it is unable to achieve most of the goals of development in post-independence era. The strategies of development inherited from colonial administration increased linkages with the Western world, despite the policy of non-alignment: an increasing role for direct foreign investment and mainly from the West, including the adoption and implementation of capitalist ideology or mode of production"* (Dlamini, 2007).

On the other hand, the departing colonial powers must not fifty years after independence be held completely responsible for the predicaments of the continent. First, Africans have not shown that colonialism was wrong and the worse crime ever committed against humanity – the black race: Second, knowing that colonialism was wrong, what has been done to correct the mistakes of the colonial era? Third, who today bleeds the continent more to death – the ruling elites or the colonial masters? Come to think of the billions of state wealth stuck in foreign bank accounts by nationals. Of course, I hold no brief for the misdeeds of the departed colonial powers. We have to face the realities to better understand, articulate and implement an appropriate solution that enriches the quality of life for the vast majority of the population.

Western hegemonic forces ganging up with ruling elites or new imperial African powers intensifies government from above exclusive of the people. The incentives from the west to perpetuate corruption in Africa are eloquently voiced by Olojede (2006). "The dirty secret of the western world is that government and banking institutions, in Europe and America find it convenient to let Africa's ruling kleptocracy make off with the family silver, so long as it ends up in the bank accounts in London, Washington and Switzerland. Just a couple of years ago, during an unrelated investigation of Riggs National Bank in Washington, Congressional investigation found that Exxon Mobil secretly deposited more than US\$ 700 million in the personal accounts of President of Equatorial Guinea, Terdoro Obiang Nguema Mbasago. These deposits which could not be adequately explained as anything other than corruption, never led to any Exxon Mobil executives being tried for contravening US Law". Many other cases abound but silently swept under the carpet. Such developments add to the destruction of the country, plunging many people into poverty and stepping up a click of affluent members of the society.

It goes without saying that the incentives to initiate bribery and corruption in high places emanates basically from outside; and like the 'top-down' development approach is strongly driven by external forces for self interests. The people are not involved in fashioning their

development process. The focus is on three interrelated fronts. The first is the political dimension, where a democratic governance system must see day-light, replacing the monolithic, one party dominated governance system, with the people having no say in the election and dethronement of their representatives. The second is the economic dimension where. The economic indicators are that majority of the African population are still living in wanton poverty, evidenced by the high rate of infant mortality; poor shelter, low literacy rate, low life span, and most people living on less than One USA\$ per day. Grinding poverty and struggles have become part of the daily realities of hundreds of millions of people in Africa. The third is the state of scientific and technological backwardness where people are still tied to archaic technological implements. There is a slow process of tapping into indigenous knowledge relating such human potentials into the development process.

Even though the images about affluence and poverty do apply to all societies, irrespective of their levels of political, economic social and technological development, poverty and underdevelopment is more pronounced in Africa. As we read of wealthy people in the “developed” North, so also we find many people in the North depending on food banks and being homeless and other social problems due to the reshaping of the welfare system. In Africa, people are confronted with sad images of conflict and war victims, images of famine and malnourished children, conflict-ravaged communities complemented by a small class of affluent elites trying to out beat their western counterparts. Looking at the context of wealth and poverty notwithstanding, it is vital to account for the contrasting realities and images in North and South, particularly in Africa. If people are to go by the modernisation theories or perspectives, the dominant paradigm in the aftermath of Second World War, Africa, following the attainment of independence should not be in its present debilitating social, economic and technological situation and shape. Many decades of the ‘modernisation theory’ has not redeemed humankind from the scourges of inequalities. The existing state of rising inequalities suggests the failure of the modernisation in terms of addressing the needs of the majority of people in Africa. The sad side of the story is people in Africa are poor in the midst of plenty. This provides the context to raise serious and pertinent questions on the developmental approach Africa should adopt. Outstanding here is the urgent need for a paradigm shift in thinking and perspective within the backdrop of the existing state of poverty, underdevelopment and exploitation of both the human and natural resources of the continent, and the failure of the ruling elites to realise their mistaken developmental path.

The paradigm shift is necessitated following the many dimensions of poverty as manifested in the African context, with each reinforcing the other. This makes Africa to be falling behind on all fronts, leading to an

Africanisation of global poverty. While other parts of the world are achieving high quality livelihood, Africa is worse off in respect of many dimensions of human well-being: namely:

1. A high percentage of people living below the poverty line;
2. Low life expectancy
3. High income inequality
4. High proportion of illiteracy / low primary school enrolment;
5. Low female gender empowerment with gross violations of their human rights;
6. Poor health and shelter facilities;
7. Low human capacity development and high rate of weak institutional institutions;
8. High relative gap in terms of development between Africa and the rest of the developing world. African remains the least development but potentially endowed continent with vast untapped natural resources.

It is evidently clear from the above that numerous facts inter-relate to the dismal progress of the continent, call it enshrined stylised facts that include the following:

- a. Political instability and the absence of inclusive governance system destabilising growth and development on the continent;
- b. Infrastructural development of the continent is seriously lacking;
- c. Economic growth has been dismal in all African countries;
- d. The growth performance of African countries over the years is far slower than in other parts of the developing countries;
- e. Low process in human development and the lack of quality institutions;
- f. The gross marginalisation of the continent is the most visible on the socio-economic level

These are all challenges for serious structural reforms in Africa, by Africans for Africans. On the whole, human well-being out comes in Africa are inferior for all dimensions compared to the rest of the world. In some countries the gap is significant (income poverty and education enrolment) while for others (female empowerment in decision-making process like parliament, government and public administration) is higher than in other countries. For example, female gender parliamentary representation and in government in Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa is higher than in Cameroon, Chad or Central African Republic. These disparities call for a new developmental approach. Thus any approach on poverty reduction strategy must build from a “bottom-up”, “people-oriented” approach if it is to have any meaning and impact on the well-being of the people at all. It also requires building institutional capacity by

tackling problems especially those plaguing the poor as listed above. Solving Africa's pressing problems (poverty, corruption, mismanagement, human well-being etc) involves close cooperation between governments, civil society, academia, private sector and other bodies – the international community for example. Paradigm shift will equally involve lots of failed attempts, as old habits die hard. The critical element is a political one – the political will and courage of taking the first step in the right direction, with the right leadership and other partners to facilitate the change process and to ensure that it succeeds. The set of options for comprehensive and inclusive actions for implementation depend the process of prioritising the priorities.

A NEW DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

Arguments for a new developmental approach based on “putting people first” provides an inclusive, strategic road-map where in the finally analysis the people will be masters of their destiny. The concept of paradigm shift expounded by (Kuhn, 1962) is very relevant here. Like on the eve of independence when the ‘modernisation’ was waved around like the magic wane for resolving Africa's plethora of problems., today, ‘globalisation’ is increasingly being ‘flagged’ as the theoretical and policy framework that would shore up Africa's prospects for development, an din that regard, represents a paradigm shift, which in my opinion is flawed paradigm as equally noted by (Mander, 1996). There is a compelling and critical to critically situate and selectively problematise Africa's state of underdevelopment in the light of its natural resources and developmental approaches adopted so far.

African countries since the lost decade, and especially following the collapse of the Cold War era, the overwhelming majority of the countries have and continue to experience serious crisis in the socioeconomic transformation process (Pulampu, 2003). Bayart et al. (1998) rightly situate African development within the context of ‘the economic, political, and social consequences of the crises exposed the fragile nature of the African state’. The results of fragility raging from institutional and concomitant political collapse, to high levels of corruption, unemployment, poverty and even antagonism to newly introduced multiparty governance system that apparently did not achieve the long-awaited social development possibilities for the public. In some countries like Cameroon, multi-party political pluralism baptised as “advanced democracy” which has been converted into a “dominant crushing one-party” for greater achievement., whatever that implies, following the 22 July 2007 and 30 September 2007 twin elections [parliamentary and municipal] in the country. A crushing defeat of the opposition but not a crushing defeat in fighting corruption, poverty and bad governance because

those who exacerbate these vices are those manufacturing the defeat of opposition parties against the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box. The economic situation in Africa is worsened by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in tandem with other endemic killer diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and typhoid among others. Interesting, there are many people (internal and external) benefiting from the prevalence of these diseases, and who would directly or indirectly not want to see any form of cure and solutions to these diseases.

The return to multi-party political pluralism ahs not ushered the democratic framework for free, fair, competitive, accountable and transparent elections in order to out genuine democratic governance at work for the services of the people. While some countries like South has made tremendous strides after castigating the evils, vices and viruses of the apartheid system, others like Cameroon are fast embracing and celebrating the return to a monolithic party legislative assembly. The institutionalisation of the phenomenon of President for Life Syndrome (PFLS) is well spelled-out in Bayart (1998). The social ramifications of the political and economic conditions underscore the precarious existence of the African people within a very challenging and rapidly changing global environment (Ali et al., 2006). The overall socio-economic transformation of the African region remains fragile and precarious after many years of structural adjustments and ‘top-down policy (Amin, 2002; Cheru, 2002; Manuel, 2002; World Bank, 2004). The problem in Africa is that most states are weak and limited, not that states try to do everything and account for 50 percent or so of national income, as in other regions. This implies that, while there have often been problems with privatisation, they normally have more to do with flawed processes (non-transparent, discretionary) than with the extent of privatisation. The private sector is weak. There is no interface between the state –civil society- and the private sector, thereby compromising the development process. These developments call for a new developmental approach.

Over the years, following the collapse or the plan that was never implemented (Lagos Plan of Action 1980 to 2000) numerous attempts have been made to reactivate the economic reawakening of the region. Curiously, the World Bank 1981 Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa and the 1989 Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth; The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the recent Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approved by World Leaders at the United Nations (2000). Most of these policy strategy approaches are over laden with “top-down” functional and operational mechanisms without the involvement of the grassroots population giving the impression of limited success. It may be wrong to throw the child with the bath water, but hope that NEPAD can turn-around the collapsing economic status and the slow progress in the democratisation process through its Peer

Table 1. Definition of power and empowerment in practice.

Understanding of power	Implications in practice
Power over	Conflict and direct confrontation between powerful and powerless interest groups:
Power in	Capacity building, supporting individual decision-making, leadership etc.
Power with	Social mobilisation, building alliances and Coalition
Power within	Increasing self esteem, awareness or consciousness rising. Confidence building

Review Mechanism. Unfortunately, these developments policy strategies fail to take into account one important element, the people and their roles in effecting change. Restructuring of the African economy must be born from the perspective and understanding that being poor changes people's incentives and the set of constraints in which the people operate. It is imperative for development policy to pay more attention to other forces that affects people's decision, such as a lack of information, problems processing information, or even inertia and what the people want including their involvement in the realisation of envisaged goals. Here is where 'development from below' comes in and should be exploited in addressing the plight of African countries. The role of the international community is to create the kinds of positive conditions in developed and developing countries that will enable developing countries to achieve the MDGs. Achieving the MDGs goes a long way to improving the quality livelihood of the people the purpose for which it is design.

The first stage in the journey of a thousand miles begins with the process of deepening the democratic process and empowering the people, especially at the grassroots level to be active participants in the development process. Empowerment generally is understood in a variety of ways. The Human Development Report (1995) stresses that empowerment entails participation. Empowerment of the people means development must be by the people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions-making and implementation processes that shape their lives. Investing in people's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development. Empowerment is a bottom-up process and cannot be bestowed from the top-down.

Empowerment is essential a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated from to-down strategy. Understanding empowerment from this perspective implies that development agencies cannot claim to empower people. Citizens must empower themselves. The role of the state or development agencies should be one facilitating the empowerment process whereby citizens can freely analyse, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed from above, by the powers that be. The idea that planners or the state can identify citizen's runs against empowerment objectives which imply that citizens

themselves formulate and decide what these interests are. Planning suggests a top-down approach, and yet citizens may define their interests differently from planners. Citizens must have the power and latitude to make decisions for themselves in mainstream development discourses and execution. This is also consonant with a liberal approach to democracy, emphasising individual rights and participation in decision-making, through the electoral process. Figure1 depicts the definition of power and empowerment in practice and how it should be deployed to achieve vital objectives. The new form of planning must originate from below trickling-upwards for fine tuning. Power should be used in such a way that it brings the biggest dividends to the people. The definition of power and empowerment is illustrated in Table 1.

Deepening the political process entails devolution of power. The over-centralisation of political and economic power is instrumental in dampening the socioeconomic transformation of the continent. Unfortunately, the return to multiparty politics has not brought about genuine representation of the choices of the people because of rigged and flawed electoral practices. There is a gradual return to a monolithic legislative assembly as demonstrated in Cameroon's 22 July and 30 September 2007 parliamentary and municipal elections for example. Decentralisation implies greater involvement of the people in the development process as well as giving poverty eradication priority place in policy formulation. Following the World Bank Report (1996) African governments give low priority to poverty reduction as an objective. Poverty was rarely identified as a policy problem in governments' Letters of Development Policy and only about one-quarter of them had explicitly identified poverty reduction as a policy objective in their programmes with the Bank. In a related statement (Addison, 1993) notes: "many African countries present a difficult political environment for any donor agency that is intent on reducing poverty. Many of the policies that benefit the poor work against the interests of higher-income groups who are politically influential in their demands. They are often the very people who constitute the political power base of the region's governments".

Deepening the political process through the devolution of power and empowering citizens will create a new playing ground for development, as explicit attention would be paid to the plight of the poor under democratic governance system and where the poor have become a

political force in their own right. The lack of accountability in political structures in Africa is part of the explanation of the neglect of the poverty issue and fear for ensuring a democratic governance system prevails as leaders will be held accountable. Of course, the poor have their weakness, for example, a contributing factor to past political neglect is the heterogeneity of the poor, where their interests vary and sometimes conflicting. They rarely exist as an organised political entity. Antipoverty measures thus tend to relate to particular poverty groups, according to the basis of their livelihoods. As such, there is the tendency of a constant danger that the interests of the poorest – the least powerful, least integrated into the modern economy, and least articulate will lack an effective voice and be left aside. The absence of effective political mobilisation is an important feature.

Political parties, interest groups, and other bodies should do more in ensuring that the powers and voices of the poor are mobilised, heard, harnessed to enhance and contribute to the development process. The emergence of a vibrant civil society is of added advantage as input factor in accelerating the transformation from a third to a first world. As earlier indicated, it is imperative for the state to create an enabling environment for the discovery of hidden talents and the exposure of other forces as complementary inputs into the strategies for reconstruction and development. Serious structural reform priority policy agenda are required to tandem with issues such as ensuring quality institutions; the formation of human capital; and the development of infrastructure. But these are not enough or can ignite growth, but are unable by themselves to affect the growth momentum until a combination of strategies aimed at the dynamic transformation of production structures, coupled with broader macro-economic conditions and stability.

The second process is economic restructuring. This calls for total mobilisation of domestic resources, and the linkage of state-civil society-private sector interface into a solid constructive force for the socioeconomic transformation of the continent. It is possible that the process of de-linking may not be possible in this respect. What should be strongly encouraged is taking advantage of the “later-comer strategies” which enables countries that arrive late on the world industrial scene to accelerate their development through targeted catch-up efforts. The latecomer advantage needs to be captured by developing countries through targeted strategies. The situation facing countries that arrive late on the industrial scene is one which combines apparently hopeless drawbacks, difficulties and inadequacies, with advantages that flow precisely from being “late” and not having to go through all the previous steps that incumbents have had to endure. But to benefit from such strategies requires building up the human capacity of the society.

The Asian Tigers (many of these countries had the same or even lower per capita than a number of African countries in the late fifties and early sixties) used the

“latecomer advantage” and other forward looking strategies and propensities to propel themselves into the position they now hold. African countries need some kind of Gerschenkronian (1962) “compensating institution” to bridge the gap between technological resources of the developed world and the aspiration to catch up on the part of the developing world. It should be noted that within a generation or so, countries of the Asian Tiger region transformed themselves from a third to a first world nation to say the least. African can achieve such a transformational process provide the right priority policies, leadership and positive responses of the people are in place.

In line with this is the building up of the necessary human capacity to give added value to existing natural resources and to discover or transform resources into competitive products. The talents of indigenous people should be exploited, developed and harnessed as inputs into the development process. State-civil society-private sector – international community positive responses has to be encouraged so that the private sector becomes more productive, competitive and as channel for poverty reduction. Positive responses from the international community towards the aspiration and envisaged goals of African countries are vital. First the notion and strategy of “aid” or “handouts” must be replaced with the policy strategy of “fair trade” and “constructive engagement” with the people of Africa. Existing global market system fails the poor and African countries confronting them with the monopoly and monoposny forces of the west against which they have no effective defences. Second, the state in many African countries remains the major employer. And yet it is not efficient and effective in service delivery. This gives a wrong notion to aspiring graduates who look only on the state for employment. Third, the educational system has been structured in a many that students are trained to go out and be “job seekers” and not “job creators”. It is not surprising that with the state as the major employer, it also becomes the breeding ground for corruption. Competing for the few employment jobs in the public sector creates room for bribery and corruption, clientelism, tribalism, mediocrity and other vices impeding the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in respect of quality services delivery destroying the social fabric and sustainable transformation of the society. The state-civil society-private sector interface must go hand in gloves with partnership, participation, responsibility and benefit-sharing as the strategic approach to alleviating poverty and making under-development history on the African continent.

Bringing change means investing into the future. The blossom of democracy comes from development from below, inclusion and the appropriate utilisation of human and natural resources for the common good. The sum total of positive individual and collective initiatives is development. Visionary and articulate leadership provides strong incentives for the people to rid themselves

from the ghetto of underdevelopment, corruption and poverty. The era of “top-down government” is over: so also the era of “top-down development” is over. This the era of “Here the Rule People” governance system assisted by “bottom-up” “people-oriented” development approaches. There is no other way Africa can rid itself out of the yoke of underdevelopment and exploitation if a democratic governance system of “peoples’ involvement” is not the cornerstone. Placing people first should be goal around which everything should originate. Promoting empowerment through a democratic process calls for a thorough examination of organisational structures and process as well as identifying where these may conflict with empowerment goals, e.g. in terms of accountability and transparency. The future of Africa is bright provided appropriate measures are taken now in address or righting the wrongs of the past in order to construct a better future.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

The views so far express indicates one thing – the prognosis may appear poor and uncompromising in the sense of lying blames at the door step of western powers, of which they have been part of the contributing forces. The problem to a large extent lies with African governments and the people who make the government. It is clear from the analysis that both the state and market (foreign forces) have a history of having failed the African poor. Redressing the issue of failed states and foreign forces requires drastic but positive actions from all the implicated partners. But they seem little grounds for believing in either the capacity or the commitment of African states and foreign forces in these directions. If they were things would after fifty years of independence been different. We should not be talking of poverty in Africa. As for corruption, it is as old a trade like prostitution; but it should not be allowed within the parlances of African development. Pessimism should not be permitted in the continent’s development process. A progressive forward looking strategy should be the guiding principles if poverty and underdevelopment has to be made history.

No doubt, many positive changes have taken place in Africa since the 1990s. African states should build and improve on these positive changes with a new mindset, attitude and behaviour. A minimum function of the state is the provision of a legal and institutional framework to facilitate the economic and political life of its citizens. Essentially, this is a matter of ensuring that the rule of law prevails to provide peace and security to life and property. Very often these basic responsibilities have not been fulfilled. According to Ayittey (1998), “Government as it is known in the West does not exist in much of Africa....One expects at a minimum a government to be responsive to the basic needs of the people. Or at

least, to perform some services for its people. But even this most basic requirement for government is lacking in Africa”. This explains in nutshell the state of poverty and misery on the continent. Contrast this with the degree of affluence enjoyed by a tiny minority.

Special attention should be directed towards the plight of the most vulnerable groups – women, the girl child, the old and disable among others. The female gender currently suffers serious disempowerment from the male dominated society. This makes it necessary for a policy strategy that (a) integrates gender analysis and gender equality practices into poverty elimination policies and programmes: (b) facilitating and extending policy dialogue on sustainable human development issues to both Governments and civil society so that this dialogue includes all relevant gender dimensions: (c) advocating and promoting the empowerment of women in political and economic decision-making at all levels from household to national government and in local, national and international administrative structures. Both in peace, war, conflicts and post conflict construction phases women bear the burden of development, and are victims of the of violation of human rights in all facets. Traditional cultural beliefs are often used to discriminate against them. In this respect, it is vital that policy actions be put in place that promotes and enhances the empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups through: - (i) promotion of women in policy and decision-making processes and positions: (ii) emphasising women’s income-generating activities: and (iii) providing women with access to empowering facilities (such as education, orientation and training of all kinds).

Importantly, is to stop translating the positive aspects of western development in a negative way in the name of holding on to cultural heritage. For example, the ethics of hard work and respect of time, which constitutes the fundamental principles and backbone of capitalism and western progress, should not be converged into what is known as ‘African time’ and the laxity that reigns in the work place. It is eight hours of work and not eight hours at work. It should be duty consciousness, accountability, effective and efficient work attitude, transparency and quality services delivery not mediocritical activities and taking the little from those who have not. Drastically put a stop to the Matthew Effect Syndrome (MES)

The major areas requiring radical changes is “top-down” approaches to development which should be replaced by development from “below-upwards”, “democratic governance” and of making poverty in the African continent history, a process which can be addressed from at least the following perspectives, namely:

1. Empowerment and democracy;
2. Extending beyond central government (decentralisation or devolution of power, the incorporation of civil society and the private sector in the development

process;

3. Coalition building – adopting an inclusive policy strategy with the forces of partnership, participation, responsibility and benefit-sharing play significant roles:

4. Regional integration – political and economic should be intensified.

5. State and citizen responsibility including the positive responses of the international community towards the aspirations and needs of the African people.

6. Visionary leadership remains a necessity in giving the necessary touch for the realisation of envisaged goals.

7. Poverty should be seen as the greatest crime against human well-being, and must therefore, be eradicated

8. African countries should put in place proactive thinking policy strategies for quality human well-being;

9. Articulate a comprehensive national science technology and innovation policy as no nation can develop bypassing the use of science, technology and innovation.

CONCLUSION

It should be pointed out that the responsibility for acting against the scourge of poverty is far from being a matter for African government alone. But this does not excuse these governments from articulating strategic priority policy measures in seeing to it that the living conditions of their populations are greatly improved. It is easy to apportioned blame son others. The developed world has its share of responsibility as well especially now that we pushed into precepts of a global village with rocky terrains. The international community must from human perspective now begin to address the problem seriously, and there is still far to go in improving their policies, attitude and practices. The idea of servant master relationship must give way to complimentary partnership, participation and responsibility sharing. Power-sharing should be the guide word.

African states must change their approaches, by beginning to embrace the idea of “bottom-up; people-oriented” development approach. Putting people first should be the guiding principles. Vested interests for too long have prevented the poor benefiting from development. The time for change is here and now by adopting “bottom-up”, “people-oriented” and an “inclusive” developmental approach. An inclusive strategic approach will help put an end to conflicts and wars that have turned the continent into the laughing stock of the world. The truism of African poverty reality and development is that structural reforms across the board are required and by taking into account the following issues:

1. There can be no solution to African poverty without sustained accelerated growth;

2. There can be solution to African poverty without attention to equitable income distribution:

3. There can be no poverty reduction and sustained

development without a democratic governance system where the people remain the focal point or take-off stage; and where the devolution of power or decentralisation of the governance system is an inherent part of policy action.

4. Empowerment is demonstrated by the quality of people’s participation in the decisions and process affecting their lives.

Most of the problems arise from the absences of an inclusive governance system; and partly from the institutionalised “top-down” policy strategies that have been implemented for decades on end. There has to be a prioritised conscious and concerted move towards a people’s comprehensive development framework (PCDF) and a genuine poverty reduction strategic process (GPRSP) are certainly steps in the right direction of arresting poverty for ever. The poverty-reduction strategy should be development from “bottom-up” and through a system of consultation and discourses with all the stake holders, and building a political consensus around its main element. The state of underdevelopment and poverty is the result of a “top-down” and exclusive approach embedded with greed and selfish interests, which now reflects in the low turnout at elections or the growing wave of political apathy as exhibited in some countries.

Attempts have been made in the paper to outline the challenges the continent is exposed to and the need for a constructive road-map towards meaningful structural reforms. A critical prerequisite for sustainable development is a combination of many inter-related strategies as discussed throughout the paper. Base on these that the following recommendations are advanced

RECOMMENDATIONS

Putting in Place a Futures Intelligence Capacity (FIC).It is imperative for African countries to put in place Futures Intelligence capacity network that should promote and ensure peace and security, democracy and good governance, improved economic and corporate governance, and the importance of sub-regional and regional integration for sustainable development. It is in this light that the following are recommended:

1. Readdressing the predatory state in Africa requires putting in place a Futures’ Intelligence Capacity to have a long-term (between 25, 50, 75 and 100 years) proactive priority strategic planning approach to the continent’s development;

2. Futures’ studies should be encouraged in the educational curriculum of African institutions of learning as well as be part of in-house training in many government departments;

3. Apparently, the ruling class is not a true economic

bourgeoisie; but one that loots the economy and collapses effective administration. Therefore, it is unable to exercise effective control over production necessary to maintain its dominance and must therefore resort to consolidating its position by coercion and active participating in the lucrative activities of corruption and mismanagement;

4. Civil society must rise to curb this distorting and exploitative attitude of the governing class;

5. Identifying strategic opportunities, recognise and exploit their contributions to development and inspire the next generation to exploit such opportunities full steam;

6. Mobilising domestic financial resources for development related activities by promoting state-civil society-private sector interface and creating the necessary enabling environment for arresting poverty and ensuring sustainable development;

7. Human capacity development is essential in giving added value to existing natural resources potentials,

8. Put a stop to the Matthew Effect Syndrome (MES), cultivate and practice the habit of sharing: (power-sharing; shared-responsibility and benefit-sharing) as inputs to sustainable development;

9. Exploit the virtues of NEPAD and APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism) framework to accelerate the development of continent;

10. Sustainable structural change can only be achieved through continuous policy adaptations and improvements in human resources development to facilitate the process of adjustment to new conditions;

11. African leaders must accept the evolving new challenges of power-sharing, shared-responsibility and benefit-sharing or else all development initiatives like those being put in place by NEPAD and other bodies will only remain a bundle of failed initiatives on the scrapheap of Africa's history. It is time to avoid such failures and constructively move forward.

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