DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper adopts a balanced perspective, steering clear of the outright pessimism of democracy's critics as well as the unqualified optimism of its proponents. Due to constraints of time and resources, it does not engage with the extensive body of normative analyses and cross-country regression studies often cited by both camps. Instead, it argues, first, that democracy is inherently desirable not only as a political system but also as a value that empowers citizens and promotes accountability. Second, it identifies key challenges confronting African democracies, including weak institutions, elite capture, electoral manipulation, and underdeveloped civic cultures. Lastly, the paper contends that meaningful and sustained economic development in Africa requires a shift toward a "democratic developmental state" rooted in the principles of the "human development paradigm"one that prioritizes inclusive growth, education, healthcare, and social equity. In light of these arguments, the paper recommends strengthening democratic institutions through constitutional reforms, enhancing civic education to deepen democratic culture, investing in human capital as a driver of development, and fostering leadership committed to both democratic governance and strategic economic planning.

Introduction

Is democracy inherently desirable? And do democratic institutions facilitate or hinder economic development or in other words, does political freedom means economic prosperity? While it may appear reasonably simple to answer the first question affirmatively that democracy is inherently good because it facilitates free human choice and enhances political participation; the answer to the second question is an empirical one, and is characterised by a serious debate within the field of development thinking about the effects of electoral democracy on the development process. Whereas the pessimists argue, for example, that the experiences of Libya in Africa and Korea, Taiwan, or Indonesia in Asia show that an authoritarian state is better able to engineer a successful process of economic development than an electoral democracy such as Nigeria; the optimists concluded that there is a direct, positive linear relationship between democracy and economic development represented by the

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Botswanan and to some extent, the South African cases. At the middle of the spectrum are the skeptics (to which this paper belongs), questioning the validity of both conclusions. The fact that both development and underdevelopment have historically occurred in both democratic and non-democratic states especially in Africa, raises some fundamental questions about the true nature of the relationship between democracy and development.

The relationship between electoral democracy and economic development has been a center of debate for several years now. A number of cross-country researches have shown that the theoretical divide on the impact of democratic versus authoritarian regimes on growth is matched by ambiguous and mixed empirical results, resulting in a lack of consensus on the subject. While the supporters of the "democracy promotes growth" hypotheses (the optimists) argue that the motivations of citizens to work and invest, the effective allocation of resources in the marketplace, and profit-maximizing private activity are best maintained in a climate of liberty, free-flowing information, and secured control of property (North 1990; Campos, 1994, etc.). Democracies for them can limit state intervention in the economy; are responsive to the public's demands on areas such as education, justice, and health; and encourage stable and long-run growth (Baum and Lake 2003; Lake and Baum 2001; Rodrik 1998; Sirowy & Inkeles, 1991).

The opponents of this hypothesis, (the pessimists) on the other hand, are of the opinion that democracies often yields to popular demands for immediate consumption at the expense of profitable investments; that it cannot be insulated from the interests of rent seekers, and consequently cannot mobilize resources swiftly. Democracies are also said to be prone to conflicts due to social, ethnic, and class struggles. While some authors favor authoritarian regimes to suppress conflicts, resist sectional interests, and implement coercive measures necessary for rapid growth, others within the same group remain overall skeptical on whether regimes, rather than markets and institutions, matter for growth (Bhagwati 1995).

The Research Problem

From the foregoing, the research problem is depicted by the fact that despite the lengthy and rich dialogue on the subject, many of the central questions pertaining to the developmental consequences of political democracy remain, by and large, unresolved. Instead, the relevant quantitative, cross-national research continues to be plagued by conflicting findings, a state of affairs made only more complex by conceptual, measurement, modeling and research design differences. Since economic development have occurred as well as remain elusive in both democratic and non-democratic states alike, the research question can therefore be stated as thus: what then is the factor responsible for the achievement of economic growth in some states and lack of it in others?

Method

In terms of the method of enquiry, this study believe that even though it appeared more convenient, the usual regression analysis and literature may be less persuasive in the context of African experience. This is because it mostly relied on some statistical data such as the World Bank's "development indicators". Such abstracted criteria of per-capital income, GDP, etc, are outcomes rather than causes of either economic development or lack of it. Because capitalism does not operate in a vacuum but rather within the context of the state, this paper is however convinced that the state is very essential in determining the direction of development.

Consequently, the paper adopts both the human development and the institutional approach in discussing the relevance of the developmental state in overcoming the development elution in Africa. The study employed the secondary method of data collection where data in documents such as journal articles, government publications, reports of various international non-governmental organisations as well as intergovernmental agencies where accessed and studied.

Conceptual Clarification

The Concept of Democracy

This paper conceived democracy as both intrinsically and instrumentally essential. Intrinsically, it is a necessary and component of the ability of individuals to live freely and autonomously. Instrumentally, under normal circumstances, it guarantees that the policies and laws created by a government will have a reasonable correlation with the fundamental interests of the people. Thus democracy is a central determinant of the quality of life, and a central element in the ability of men and women to live freely and autonomously as human beings. Such a democracy ought to have the following tenets:

i. All adult members of the collectivity ought to have the status of citizens (that is, there ought to be no restriction in political rights for different groups of people within the polity; universal citizenship principle).
ii. All citizens ought to have the broadest set of political rights, and liberties possible as well as full equality; equality principle).

iii. Legislation ought to reflect the principle of the sovereignty of the people. When and where legislation is required, it ought to result from a process which involves the meaningful expression of interest and preference by all citizens (popular sovereignty principle).

iv. Finally, a democratic society is one that is fully subject to the rule of law: legislation rather than personal authority produces limitations on individual liberty, and legislation is neutral across persons (legality principle).

Economic Development

Historically, there has never been a consensus or general agreement on how to define economic development or growth; nor on how best to measure growth in developing societies. However, a wide approval has been gained today for a notion which defines economic development as *a* process whereby the real per capita income of a country increases over a long period of time while simultaneously poverty is reduced and the inequality in society is generally reduced or at least not increased.

Conceptions of this kind have also been adopted in World Bank analyses and have informed the Bank's strategies since the early 1970s though with some considerable fluctuations over time. For instance, up till around 1980, the World Bank was mainly interested in combining growth in per capita income with special assistance to the poor (described as redistribution with growth or the basic needs strategy). In the 1980s, the focus shifted towards aggregate growth in conjunction with restoration of macro-economic balances, structural adjustment, and increased foreign-exchange earnings. Since 1990, the Bank has again re-emphasized growth for the poor and resource-weak groups, along with aggregate growth in its overall conception of development (World Bank, 1980; 1990).

The above conception of economic development embodies a wish to improve the living conditions, the welfare, for in principle all citizens of a society. However, the indicators for this remained in most of the literature and the international debate limited to income measurements and consequently asserting growth in real incomes as the main target thereby negating the need for enhancing human capacities and the socio-cultural aspects of development. This was disputed by prominent economists such as Amartya Sen, Paul Streeten, Mahbub ul Haq, and others who believed that increased incomes should be regarded as a ***means*** to improve human welfare, not as an end in itself (Sen, 1988; Streeten, 1994,).

With the first *Human Development Report* from 1990, prepared under the leadership of Mahbub ul Haq, the UNDP adopted this basic criticism of income measurements and presented a more comprehensive concept of human development (UNDP, 1990). The report defined human development as *a* process of enlarging people's choices. In addition, the point of departure between the economic growth perspective of development and the human development school is that the first focuses exclusively on the expansion of only one choice - income - while the second embraces the enlargement of all human choices - whether economic, social, cultural, or political (Haq, 1995).

Consequently, this paper is also of the view that a link between income growth and human welfare has to be created consciously through public policies which aim at providing services and opportunities as equitably as possible to all citizens. This cannot be left to the market mechanisms, because these are essentially pertaining to the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable. As a result therefore, the paper conceived economic development from the human development paradigm. The idea of human development embraces every development issue, including economic growth, social investment, people's empowerment, provision of basic needs and social welfare schemes, political, cultural and religious freedom, gender equality, environmental protection and all other aspects of people's lives. While no aspect of the development model falls outside its scope, "the vantage point is widening of people's choices and the enhancement of their lives.

Theoretical Framework

The paper studies the relationship between democracy and development from the combination of human development perspective and the institutional paradigm. The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives, have greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political, economic, religious and other cultural freedoms and sense of participation in community activities. Without these, many choices are simply not available, and many opportunities in life remain inaccessible including the opportunity to save, invest and consequently earn income. Fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities (the range of things that people can do or be in life)

The concept of human development was originally introduced as an alternative to conceptions of development that focused on economic growth measured in terms of level of income. Human Development is a development paradigm that is concerned with more than the rise or fall of national incomes. It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and live productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. People are the real wealth of nations. Development is thus about expanding the choices people have which are much more than economic growth.

Properties of the human development paradigm

As applied in this paper, the human development paradigm has the following properties: that development must put people at the center of its concerns; the purpose of development is to enlarge all human choices, not just income; the human development paradigm is concerned both with building up human capabilities (through investment in people) and with using those human capabilities fully (through an enabling framework for growth and empowerment); human development has four essential pillars: equity, sustainability, production and empowerment; and that, the paradigm defines the ends of development and analyses sensible options for achieving them. The paradigm consistently takes the view that though economic growth is essential for human development, but to fully exploit the opportunities for improved well-being that growth offers, it needs to be properly managed. According to the paradigm, there are four ways to create the desirable links between economic growth and human development.

i. Emphasis on investment in the education, health and skills of the people.
ii. More equitable distribution of income and assets via rational tax systems
iii. Improvement in human development through well-structured social expenditures by the government.
iv. Empowerment of people, particularly women.

In addition to the human development perspective, this also used the institutional viewpoint to highlight the role of the developmental state in championing the course of development. Institutionalism is an approach in the social sciences that is focused on the role of institutions in society. the origin of institutional thinking in political science can be traced to when early political philosophers attempted to provide a normative analysis of the nature and purpose of governing institutions (Aristotle, 1996). In addition to Aristotle, Althusius discussed the features and role of governing institutions in society; Thomas Hobbes equally argued for the necessity of strong institutions to protect man from the consequences of his natural instincts while John Locke as well argued for the relevance of public institutions in his social contract (Hooker, 1965). Both (Fontana, 1994) and (Rohr, 1995) corroborated that the contemporary democratic principle of separation powers is based on Montesquieu’s ideas about the need for a balance in political structures of states.

Some of the major assumptions of the institutional perspective of politics include the believe that rules and basic structures constitutes the major significant difference between political systems (i.e the presidential and the parliamentary systems). The theory also believes that law is an essential element in governance. Therefore, the concern for political institutions is same as the concern for law. In addition, the institutional paradigm equally believes that structure determines behaviour – the behaviour of individual political actors is constrained by formal and informal institutional structures.

Discussion of Findings

Factors Militating Against Economic Development in African Democracies

According to the data consulted, African states have come under intense pressure from the international community to democratize with a promise of almost automatic economic development. The defenders of liberal democracy controlling most of the intergovernmental and development agencies have succeeded in making it almost a condition that for states or members to secure any development assistance, it must first of all democratize. This coincided with internal pressure for political freedom and space and consequently, a number of African states adopted liberal democracy as its system of state organization. However, after years and years of practice, economic development remains an illusion in most Africa democracies. Based on available data, this paper therefore observed that the weak nature of the liberal state is the major factor responsible for such a predicament (Akinloye, 2018; Fortin-Rittberger, 2014; Leftwich, 2010; Oluwafemi, 2017; Ugoani, 2016).

The nature of the liberal democratic state

The Africa states of the 1950s and 1960s which was given a central role in earlier views of the process of development in Africa, is no longer in existence. The situation changed dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The African state is today the most demonized social institution in Africa, vilified or lowered for its weaknesses, its over-extension, its interference with the smooth functioning of the markets, its repressive character, its dependence on foreign powers, its ubiquity, etc. The state once the cornerstone of development is now the millstone around otherwise efficient markets. This is evident in the number of literature that emerged to describe it as the "rentier state" (Hendrix, 2010), the "overextended state", the "parasitical state", the "predatory state", the "lame leviathan", "the patrimonial state" the "prebendal state", the "crony state", the "kleptocratic state", the "inverted state", etc.

With a dozen of neo-liberal policies and agendas in full implementation, the contemporary liberal democratic state has been rolled back to a mere night watch. The question therefore is that can a lame leviathan or a weak state take decisive majors where necessary even against the most effective social groups? Saying no is stating the obvious. It is logical that whereas electoral democracies are reasonably effective in mobilizing groups in defense of their economic interests, it is difficult to implement policies within an electoral democracy that impose economic hardship on politically effective groups. But development (and economic reform more generally) unavoidably involves hardship for various social groups.

For regime sustenance and electoral purposes democracies may be particularly susceptible to populist pressures for immediate consumption, unproductive subsidies, autarchic trade policies, and other particularistic demands that may hamper long-run investment and growth. The East Asian success story in development over has convinced many that some degree of insulation of the bureaucracy, in charge of formulating long-run development policies and guiding their implementation, from the ravages of short-run politics is important; the role played by powerful semi-autonomous technocratic organizations like the Economic Planning Bureau in South Korea and the Industrial Development Bureau in Taiwan clearly points in this direction (Kutlay & Karaoğuz, 2018; OECD, 2018).

Other problems with African democracies pertain to law enactment and enforcement**.** The process of enactment of laws is subject to an enormous amount of influence peddling for contributions to campaign finance and other factors for legislators (Candela, 2020). Over time this problem has got worse in most democracies, as elections have become frightfully expensive. When policies to be legislated are up for sale to the highest contributor to the campaign fund, development projects may not win out (the policy decision in the budget may go in favor of buying one more military aircraft rather than 100 rural health clinics). There is also the systematic erosion of the institutional independence of the police and the criminal justice system. Political corruption defined as the abuse of public office for private gain is among the challenge faced by African democracies. The gain may accrue to an individual or a group, or to those closely associated with such an individual or group. Corrupt activity includes bribery, nepotism, theft, and other misappropriation of public resources.

In addition to the above, there are also issues of poverty; poor governance which often results in poor infrastructure; some undemocratic tendencies such as the lack of internal democracy among political parties and even the legislature thereby converting elections to selections as well as the nature of the economies of most African democracies which are either dependent, rentier or monocultural. There is also the abuse of social movements which in some cases are propelled by ulterior political motives such as the quest for power rather than political reform. Whereas cultural pluralism or diversity is a good source of ideas such that can generate development if properly harnessed, in some African cases, it is used as mechanism for domination and instrument of inter-elite competition.

With these complexities, this paper believes that for Africa to experience the economic revolution of some of the East Asian states there is the need for a stronger state. The current neo-liberal state which has been deliberately subjected to the market lacks the capacity to induce development via the necessary public policy.

The Need for the Developmental State

Experience has shown that ensuring commitment and discipline for development is far from whether a state is democratic or authoritarian. In other words it demonstrates that the linkage between democracy and economic development is not ***intrinsic*** but rather a function of a third factor. The third factor by our comprehension is the "developmental state". The developmental state, or hard state, is a term used by international political economy scholars to refer to the phenomenon of state-led macroeconomic planning in East Asia in the late twentieth century. In this model of capitalism (sometimes referred to as state development capitalism), the state has more independent, or autonomous, political power, as well as more control over the economy. A developmental state is characterized by having strong state intervention, as well as extensive regulation and planning. The term has subsequently been used to describe countries outside East Asia which satisfy the criteria of a developmental state. Botswana, for example, has warranted the label since the early 1970s.

Sinha (2003) also posited that it encompasses the view that state intervention is necessary not merely to correct market failures arising out of scarce capital, externalities, and technological improvement but also to achieve long-term capital accumulation and society-wide developmental goals. While the history of the concept of the developmental state may lie with the economist Friedrich List, its recent reincarnation was implicit in the writings of the post-World War II development economists. It owes its current usage to ***Chalmers Johnson***, who, in addition to socialist and free market systems, posited a ***third category,*** the capitalist developmental state. In his two works (Japan: Who Governs? The Rise of the Developmental State and MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975) Johnson used this conceptual innovation to offer a revisionist account of Japan's rise to power (Johnson & Koyama, 2017).

The World Bank for the first time in 1993 recognized that the state played a role in sustaining high growth, and subsequently its 1997 world development report was devoted to analyzing the role of "the state in the changing world." The concept implies that in the Asian and Botswanan cases the state itself led the industrialization drive, that is, it took on developmental functions. These led to two differing orientations toward private economic activities, the regulatory orientation and the developmental orientation, and consequently two different kinds of business-government relationships. The United States is a good example of a state in which the regulatory orientation predominates, whereas Japan is a good example of a state in which the developmental orientation predominates.

A regulatory state governs the economy mainly through regulatory agencies that are empowered to enforce a variety of standards of behavior to protect the public against market failures of various sorts, including monopolistic pricing, predation, and other abuses of market power, and by providing collective goods (such as national defense or public education) that otherwise would be undersupplied by the market. In contrast, a developmental state intervenes more directly in the economy through a variety of means to promote the growth of new industries. Some of the characteristics of the developmental state could be summarized as thus:

i. Economic nationalism
ii. Protection of fledging domestic industries.
iii. Focus on foreign technology transfer.
iv. Large government bureaucracy.
v. Alliance between the state, labour and corporations.
vi. Skepticism of neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus.
vii. Prioritization of economic growth over political reform.
viii. Legitimacy and Performance.
ix. Emphasis on technical education

Another reason for opting for the developmental state as an alternative is the issue of market failure represented by such phenomena as the recent global financial crisis. This position was also echoed earlier by Nthandika Mkandawire when he argued that

> *…the general conclusion of the literature on market failure so prominent in development economics is still a problem that warrants government intervention and that since such "failures" differ in intensity, scope and location, a selective set of interventions is required. The most significant lesson has been the central role played by a "developmental state" in the process of development. This "dirigisme" Asian experience and theoretical*

> *developments in economics have revived interest in some of the issues that were central to development studies... These issues include problems of human capital; possibilities of the state "crowding in" private investment; market imperfections and failures, industrial policy, etc. In the African case, the failure of structural adjustment programmes has compelled even the most dogmatic institutions to recognize the positive role the state can play in the process of development, beyond acting as a "night watchman"(1998).*

The need for a developmental state can also be surprisingly found in some World Bank publications. For instance, in *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, the World Bank (1989) acknowledged the importance of the state in managing development and social change, and brought back on the agenda the pro-active role of the state in development. However, the return of the state was now premised upon a whole series of proposals about "good governance". In *Adjustment in Africa* (World Bank, 1994) and *Bureaucrats in Business* (World Bank, 1995), the World Bank was possibly compelled by facts to retreat from its more familiar ideological terrain in which ordinarily, a developmental state wouldn't have been mentioned.

CONCLUTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The history of the post-independent African state is that of monumental democratic and developmental failures. The few exceptions to this have been Botswana and Mauritius, and to a degree, democratic South Africa. After almost four and a half decades of independence as well as some years of democratic experiment, most countries on the continent are characterised by underdevelopment. Consequently, at the beginning of the 21st century, Africa is unable to compete in the global economy. Majority of African countries lack basic social and physical infrastructure. As a result, most people on the continent have no access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, good sanitation, roads and healthcare. All of this is coupled with a high illiteracy rate, especially among women. The lack of access to basic medical care occurs against a backdrop of ravaging diseases; a situation which has become exacerbated with the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The state of underdevelopment has been reinforced by authoritarianism, political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts and civil wars. Since attaining their independence, most African countries have been plagued by some form of political conflict. This has included the civil wars in Nigeria in the 1960s, Liberia in the 1990s, the Ivory Coast in the 2000s, Angola for most of its post-independence period, the crisis in the horn of Africa as well as the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi.

In spite of these failures, the question of the democratic developmental state is not sufficiently on the agenda in Africa. It has also received little attention in academic discourse. Against this background, this paper is calling for its consideration as an alternative to the current liberal democratic state. While other skeptics such as Przewoski and Limongi, (1993) appeared to be inconclusive, this contribution is of the view that democracy as a system of state organization and economic development are two human phenomena that are neither completely exclusive nor intrinsically linked. The former only directly affects the later when influenced by a third party or factor.

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