



Preamble

It is undisputed that Africa faces a developmental challenge. The challenge is political, economic, social and cultural. "Development" is a protean concept, making it difficult to define. Economists currently distinguish between "growth" and "development", aware that growth can occur in terms of economic indices without ensuing development. Development embraces the nurturing of human potential and issues of social equity. Frederick Cooper has recently provided a working definition for development as understood by African citizens, and against which governments are measured.

Its simplest meaning conveys a down-to-earth aspiration: to have clean water, decent schools, and health facilities; to produce larger harvests and more manufactured goods; to have access to consumer goods which people elsewhere consider a normal part of life.¹

This quest has proved elusive. Sub-Saharan Africa has entered the 21st century with an average per capita income lower than at the end of the 1960s, and the region accounts for a growing proportion of the world's absolute poor. About \$2.3 trillion in aid has been directed towards Africa in the last five decades without much significant socio-economic change. Scholars such as Amartya Sen remind us that economic development is fundamentally about human development, and that human development is about how people perceive themselves, how others perceive them, and their opportunities to improve their overall quality of life. International organizations and African governments have attempted to respond to these new insights.²

Governance, culture and development are today the most crucial inter-facing issues of concern about Africa. These have been more than underscored by the provisions of recently adopted regional and sub-regional instruments, notably: the Consultative Act of the African Union (A.U.) and the new Partnership for African's Development (NEPAD) as well as the Revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993. The World Bank after over two decades of failed development in the face of structural adjustment programs has conceded reluctantly that Africa's salvation may not lie in the unmitigated operation of market forces. African governments have been allowed the front seat in terms of driving developmental agendas, and the World Bank through initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals is rethinking how it can support African efforts at development. For these laudable policy concerns to be realized there is an obvious need for more creative research and training support by the African academic community than is currently in evidence. Academic research acknowledges that there is an institutional crisis in Africa. This institutional crisis is evident in the spheres of health, economics and politics. A recent publication by WHO underscored how health systems in Africa are insecure, and gross inequalities persist in healthcare funding, training, research and delivery.³

While the main causes of death in Africa are communicable (45%) and non-communicable (35%) diseases, an estimated 80% of regional health budgets - about 10% of national health budgets -- still have been allocated to communicable diseases for the past decade. The result is a neglected epidemic of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. For example, 84% of African countries spend less than 1% of their total health budget on mental health.

Many economists believe that the root of Africa's economic problems lies in the way their economies are organized - in their institutions. Since African economies are primarily based on rural agriculture, it is critical to understand the way rural institutions function. Chris Udry at Yale has demonstrated in his work on West Africa how rural Africans suffer from a wide range of risks inherent in their reliance on weather and climate to produce harvests. The consequent aversion to additional risk discourages the adoption of new technologies, hence the need to formulate institutions that would mitigate risk. It is not surprising that African technologies lag behind best practices. African economic behavior has always been rational and sophisticated. Illiterate farmers propelled Ghana into the position of the world's leading producer of cocoa in 1911 when the economic opportunities were attractive and without colonial government support. It is important to understand the economic, cultural and institutional environment within which African families, farmers and entrepreneurs work. This larger context incorporates the structure of families, the division of labor, land tenure and gendered access to land, secure rights to property, access to loans and new technologies, etc.⁴ Such knowledge facilitates a holistic approach to development, and appropriate solutions to Africa's problems. Michael Kremer and Ted Miguel recently demonstrated in rural Kenya that a project as simple as providing school-based mass treatment with deworming drugs can significantly improve school attendance among the youngest children.⁵

The past decade or two has spawned a vast social science literature on the "collapsed", "weak" or "predatory" African state. The relationship between state and civil society has also received much scholarly attention. The crisis of institutions is well summed up in Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (1992). Mahmood Mamdani recently reminded us that the institutions in crisis in Africa are the European-bequeathed institutions, and not necessarily the traditional African ones.⁶ The brief decolonization experiment and the establishment of western-style political institutions after decades of oppressive colonial rule gave these institutions little resonance for Africans. The quick reversion to dictatorial rule in the face of political dissent in independent Africa was in the true spirit of colonial rule. The need to understand the nature of power and its historical and cultural manifestations in Africa is urgent. The need for a Foucauldian excavation of the archaeology of knowledge in Africa, and an interrogation of the structure and nature of institutions that regulate governance, economics and everyday life is long overdue.

¹ Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 91.

² Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford, 1992); idem, *The Quality of Life* (Oxford, 1993); and idem, *Development as Freedom* (New York, 1999).

³ WHO, *World Report on Better Health: Strengthening Health Systems* (Geneva, 2004).

⁴ See, for examples, C. Udry, "Gender, Agricultural Productivity and the Theory of the Household," *Journal of Political Economy*, 104 (1996), 1010-1046; Markus Goldstein and Christopher Udry, "Addressing Unequal Economic Opportunities: A Case Study of Land Tenure in Ghana," *Development Outreach* (September 2006); and Timothy G. Conley and Christopher R. Udry, "Social Learning through Networks: The Adoption of New Agricultural Technologies in Ghana." Available at <http://www.econ.yale.edu/cru/pdf/learnnet.pdf>.

⁵ Michael Kremer and Ted Miguel, "Worms: Identifying Impacts on Education and Health in the Presence of Treatment Externalities," *Econometrica*, 72:1 (January 2004), 159-217.

⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism" (Cambridge, Paper Presented at Harvard University, 2004).