

Editorial

It is commonplace in certain scholarly circles to paint a picture of the African continent in terms of pervasive and even permanent disarray. In this line of thinking, attention has been focused especially on the so-called 'curse of resources', the several situations of armed conflict taking place and the collapse of central governmental authority have even been very hastily characterised as 'state failure'. Out of this particular reasoning of Africa has emerged a plethora of problematic perceptions of a continent where resources are on the decline, armed conflicts and wars on the rise, central governments in collapse, and social structures weakening.

The past 25 years have witnessed a proliferation of problematic political and policy initiatives for overcoming the challenges confronting African growth and development. Prominent among these initiatives are: the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility; the Highly-Indebted Poor Country Initiative; the Naples Terms of the Group of 8 on African Debt Relief; the United Nations Global Compact; the various summits organized by the UN on social issues, the environment, and racism and discrimination; the G8 Plan of Action for Africa; the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers; the Comprehensive Development Framework; the Millennium Development Goals; the Global Fund; the Millennium Challenge Account; and the Commission for Africa, a personal initiative of British Prime Minister Tony Blair introduced as a logical culmination of his engagement with the central international development questions of the post-Cold War world. But those initiatives mostly emanating out of faulty analytic premises that were simply sidetracking the structural roots of Africa's development challenges, have invariably failed to deliver on their own promises and to redress the enduring problems of Africa in other cases for a more equitable globalisation. It is important to see these initiatives in the light of the struggles by social movements within Africa and across Europe and North America against the globalisation of poverty to which Africa and the global South are particularly vulnerable. It is even more important to measure the extent to which such initiatives have actually delivered on their own promises.

Most are seldom sensitive enough to allow for African voices (both popular and scholarly) and African perspectives on African predicaments. They are often conceived and articulated in a the-world-out-there-knows-best spirit of both the causes and solutions to what afflicts Africa. It is arrogance and ignorance narrowly informed either by neo-liberal ambitions of dominance or by the champions of analogy that people African studies in scholarly and policy making circles.

This issue of the *CODESRIA Bulletin* offers contributions stressing the need to rethink certain problematic assumptions about Africa that have negatively coloured and continue to colour scholarship, policies, perceptions and behaviour even among the most committed of non-Africans. The contributions range from critical reflections on various initiatives aimed at addressing poverty, governance, and democracy in Africa, to the questionable prescriptive Euro-centric scholarship churned out by Africanist political science, through scholarship, politics and representations informed by hierarchies of power that play out

in terms of race, place, gender and citizenship, amongst others. The contributions in this issue do more than dwell on factors internal to Africa in understanding the multiple crisis confronting the continent. They equally and especially stress that the nature of the public policies designed by the world's major economic and political players is crucial since such policies can either facilitate social integration and freedom or intensify processes of exclusion, especially on a continent such as Africa that has experienced the hijacking of its policy structures and processes by financial institutions at the service of neo-liberalism.

This balanced and nuanced perspective is at best inadequately stressed even by the most well-meaning of exogenous initiatives such as the Commission for Africa. More popularly known also as the Blair Commission, this initiative was set up in 2004 to reflect on and craft a strategy that would enable Africa to overcome major obstacles to its development and resolutely follow the path of social and economic progress. In its own words, the 17-member Commission had the task of defining 'the challenges facing Africa, and to provide clear recommendations on how to support the changes needed to reduce poverty'. The Commission was thus imbued with the mission of 'assuaging' the 'scar on the conscience of the world', or at least mitigating the dangers of turning the continent into a festering sore with little chance of healing. After widespread consultations, the Commission published a voluminous report of over 400 pages in March 2005, ahead of the G8 and World Trade Organisation meetings in Gleneagles (July) and Hong Kong (December) respectively, both of which some prominent African leaders were invited to attend.

The report identifies inadequate capacity and poor accountability among the leading weaknesses that have 'blighted' Africa over the last fifty years. Problematic governance, the report argues and seeks to demonstrate, has yielded war, endangered peace and security, accentuated inequalities, denied millions basic education and healthcare, and rendered the continent extra vulnerable to catastrophes such as HIV/AIDS. The report labels African poverty and stagnation 'the greatest tragedy of our times', challenges Africans to 'create the right conditions for development', and calls upon the rich and powerful nations of the world and the international community as a whole to support Africans in their struggles against this tragedy. It recommends, inter alia: the right system of governance and capacity building in Africa; peace and security; inclusive development that champions investing in people; going for growth and poverty reduction; more trade and fairer trade; and an additional US\$25 billion per year in aid for Africa. It concludes with a call for 'a new kind of partnership' imbued with 'mutual respect and solidarity' and informed by 'a sound analysis of what actually works'.

However, as evidenced in the contribution by Adebayo Olukoshi, the conclusions in the report by the Commission for Africa on the problems of capacity and accountability that have engineered and/or sustained most of the current development challenges on the continent, underplay external factors and overplay the internal causes of Africa's predicaments, as though there is no interface between the two or in this case the external may not have been an important determinant. Such approaches

simply do not do justice to the history of unequal encounters that have shaped and reshaped Africa, and structured and confined the agency of Africans. It is important to provide for the fact that development for Africa is fraught with a multiplicity of exogenously generated ideas, models and paradigms, all with the purported goal of alleviating poverty. This discourse and its perpetrators often limit the question of development to the problematic of achieving growth or poverty reduction within the context of neo-liberal economic principles. Notwithstanding the rise of alternative development thinking and practice, the problem is rarely studied in a holistic manner. This is especially true of Africa, where expectations of a particular type of modernity have engendered technicised, disembedded, depoliticised, sanitised and prescriptive approaches to development as a unilinear process of routinised, standardised, calculable and predictable practices. There is more emphasis on teleology and analogy than on the systematic study of ongoing processes of creative negotiation by Africans of the challenges of multiple encounters, influences and perspectives evident throughout their continent.

Such prescriptivity or insensitivity to African perspectives and voices is more fascinated with dichotomies than with the active processes underway by Africans to modernise their traditions and traditionalise their modernities. In this regard, there is cause to empathise with arguments to the effect that Africa has failed to develop largely because it has relied on notions of development and on development agendas that are foreign to the bulk of its peoples, both in origin and objectives, and that have not always addressed the right issues or done so in the right manner. The exogenously induced development agendas have often established an inappropriate sense of problems, with development being presented as a means of being able to break through blockages (backward attitudes and practices, customs, traditions, and philosophies) with knowledge. The question as to *whose* knowledge for *what* purpose has seldom been asked. The assumption has been that there can never be any such thing as the transmission of wrong (inappropriate, unwanted or unsolicited) knowledge by agents of modernisation. Few ever query whether the knowledge is correct; as governments, development agencies and development experts have the same idea that they know best the people's problems and what to prescribe as solutions. Little or no attention is paid either to background or indigenous knowledge or to the need for active local participation in the conception, design and execution of development projects.

Judging from the origin of the various initiatives targeting growth and development crises in Africa, it is remarkable that even today when some may claim the situation is better, the attitude (in policy and scholarly circles alike) remains that of coming from the outside and knowing what is best in matters of local development. Nothing seems to start from the base, or from grassroots research, even when those targeted by behaviour and attitude change experts are at the grassroots. There is much talking at, talking on, talking past and talking to, but little talking with the African masses targeted by the development and research evangelists. Additionally, as Abdul Raufu Mustapha argues in this issue, there is little serious investment in meaningful interaction and interchange between Africanists and African scholars in general, and especially those investi-

gating Africa in ways critical of the conventional wisdom and basic assumptions prevalent in Africanist circles.

Thus it is hardly surprising that many development initiatives even when inspired by development related scholarship have been an utter and unmitigated disaster over the past five decades of independence, and that today Africans are in some ways much worse off than they were in the 1950s. The pursuit of various ill-informed initiatives and strategies for development has proved inappropriate; indeed, as Issa Shivji argues, using the example of lawyers under neo-liberalism, this pursuit has served to excuse the penetration and exploitation of Africa by those who place profit over people. Supported and financed by the World Bank and the IMF, it is hardly surprising that orthodox attempts to minimise the impact of external forces and unequal power relations amongst states guarantee that globalisation, its rhetoric of flows and flexible mobility notwithstanding, shall ensure that devalued African labour does not graduate from its geographies of poverty that flexible accumulation makes possible for multinationals to exploit with impunity.

Theories of development by analogy or mimicry have thus mastered the art of recycling, camouflaging or disguising themselves under various labels, as their disciples refuse or are simply incapable of changing their spots. Any alternative to such theories today when globalisation has become their latest camouflage, should seek to build upon past critiques of the models of development they inspire. Instead of restructuring, modifying, enriching and remodelling their concepts and theories in order to accommodate the broader experiences and contextual variations of the contemporary world, researchers and scholars under this tradition have stubbornly insisted on intellectual hegemonies or the comforts of studying down.

Prescriptiveness and insensitivity vis-à-vis African realities and perspectives are exacerbated by the arrogance and ignorance that come with ambitions of dominance. Equally unhelpful to Africa's cause is the fact that most of the scholarship that informs development initiatives is uncritical of the European origins and assumptions of the social sciences. This is very much in evidence in the current proliferation of 'scholarly' prescriptions on the so-called 'failed states of Africa' (See for example Stephen Ellis, 'How to Rebuild Africa', *Foreign Affairs* 84(5): 1-14, 2005), as blame is systematically taken away from the problematic assumption that 'nation-states' are possible and that they could be anything but dysfunctional in the current neo-liberal configuration of global power relations, and that Africans are at fault for not attaining functional nation-states. And so, everything must be done to bring about 'functional states' in Africa, even if this entails placing 'failed' or 'dysfunctional' states under some kind of 'international trusteeship'. There is a growing body of literature by African scholars highly critical of such problematic assumptions that Africanists can ill-afford to continue to ignore (See Abdul Raufu Mustapha, this *Bulletin*). The contributions in this *Bulletin* thus critically situate themselves in relation to the problematic nature of scholarship by analogy, and in particular, to the mediocrity and insensitivities that such scholarship inspires. Such mediocrity and insensitivities are hardly in the interest of Africa and African Studies.