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The African Development Strategy

Oghenefejiro Mejire

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Abstract

Economic and social development in African countries has not been progressing at the same rate as observed in countries in other world regions. This is despite the fact that African countries have implemented the trade liberalization policies and reduced state intervention models that have helped other countries, particularly in Europe, develop. This paper suggests parties interested in contributing to the development of African countries should focus less on offering economic policy solutions and more on strategies which enable African countries to gain both the agency and autonomy they need to build strong institutions (educational and infrastructural amongst others). This is essential because current African development strategies treat Africa as a monolith. African development affects different African countries with different local contexts. In recognition of this, African development policies should focus on building local agency, autonomy, and institutions. African countries need to develop strong institutions grounded in local contexts to successfully implement development policies to help their countries grow fiscally and societally.

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The African Development Strategy: How Does it Need to Evolve?

Oghenefejiro Mejire
School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa
Email: omeji096@uottawa.ca
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Résumé
Le développement économique et social des pays africains n'a pas progressé au même rythme que dans d'autres régions du monde. Cela malgré le fait que les pays africains ont mis en œuvre des politiques de libéralisation du commerce et des modèles de réduction de l'intervention de l'État qui ont favorisé le développement d'autres pays, notamment en Europe. Ce travail suggère que les acteurs souhaitant contribuer au développement des pays africains devraient accorder moins d'importance aux solutions de politique économique et se concentrer davantage sur des stratégies permettant aux pays africains d'acquérir à la fois l'autonomie et la capacité d'action nécessaires pour construire des institutions solides (éducatives, infrastructurelles, entre autres). Cela est essentiel, car les stratégies actuelles de développement en Afrique traitent le continent comme un ensemble homogène. Le développement africain touche pourtant différents pays avec des contextes locaux variés. En reconnaissance de cette réalité, les politiques de développement devraient mettre l'accent sur le renforcement de l'autonomie, de la capacité d'action locale et des institutions. Les pays africains doivent développer des institutions solides ancrées dans leurs contextes locaux afin de mettre en œuvre avec succès des politiques de développement qui favoriseront leur croissance économique et sociale.

Mots-clés: Développement international, développement africain, autonomie, capacité d'action locale.

Abstract
Economic and social development in African countries has not been progressing at the same rate as observed in countries in other world regions. This is despite the fact that African countries have implemented the trade liberalization policies and reduced state intervention models that have helped other countries, particularly in Europe, develop. This paper suggests parties interested in contributing to the development of African countries should focus less on offering economic policy solutions and more on strategies which enable African countries to gain both the agency and autonomy they need to build strong institutions (educational and infrastructural amongst others). This is essential because current African development strategies treat Africa as a monolith. African development affects different African countries with different local contexts. In recognition of this, African development policies should focus on building local agency, autonomy, and institutions. African countries need to develop strong institutions grounded in local contexts to successfully implement development policies to help their countries grow fiscally and societally.

Keywords: International development, African development, autonomy, local agency

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Introduction

Despite African countries implementing various international development programs and policies suggested by allies and international organizations, they have not experienced the same socio-economic growth observed by countries in other world regions (Comelli et al., 2023). This paper proposes that the failure of development strategies in Africa is a result of the repercussions of the historical and modern harms that African countries have faced. These harms have weakened the agency of African countries, resulting in their inability to build strong public institutions. These harms have also resulted in the African continent being seen as a monolith in development, with one uniform development policy being applied to African countries that have different local contexts. Since understanding local context is necessary to creating development policies for African countries, African countries (who understand their local context best) should be at the head of their development policy creation. Thus, I argue that the stakeholders in the socio-economic development of African countries should focus on partnering with African countries to create policies that build their autonomy and agency. This will in turn help them create the strong public institutions (educational and infrastructural amongst others) required to implement successful development policy. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the public institutions built and the development policies implemented, both the public institutions and the development policies would need to be adapted to the local context of the countries they will be based in.

The African Development Context

To understand the flaws of the current global approach to international development policies for Africa, it is essential to understand the context of African development. There are various stakeholders involved in the development of African countries, including the International Development Association (IDA) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The IDA is made up of 175 contributing and borrowing countries, and DAC member countries are mostly from the Global West (with some observer organizations). There are also non-African countries who contribute independently to African development like the United States, Japan and China (Usman & Washington, 2024). This means that a majority of the stakeholders to African development are outside Africa. These stakeholders provide funds for African development as well as ideas from the experiences of their local contexts on how to achieve socio-economic development in Africa. However, they are not the only parties involved in African development. Some initiatives to develop Africa infrastructurally, maintain political stability, and increase economic capacity are led by African countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya (Dizolele & Elebe, 2025; Leistner, 1990; Oshewolo et al., 2024). Moreover, the most prominent organization in African development is the African Development Bank Group (AfDB); a key

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organization responsible for ensuring social and economic growth across the continent. The AfDB consists of 54 regional member countries (African countries) and 27 non-regional member countries (non-African countries which include the two largest non-regional shareholders, the United States and Japan). Its resources and funding come from subscriptions from all member states, donations to the African Development Fund (ADF), and the Nigerian Trust Fund (NTF) (AfDB, 2024). International organizations and non-regional member countries are heavily involved in African development as mentioned in the previous section. As such, these groups have varying degrees of political influence over the region's policy implementation because they are significant shareholders and contributors to African development or the AfDB (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024). Financial institutions influenced by the Global West like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have influence over the policy prescriptions of the AfDB (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024). Similarly, the United States, while remaining a supporter to African development at the AfDB, tends to use bilateral agreements and its power in the IMF and World Bank to influence African countries into changing their national policies in order to achieve United States' foreign policy goals (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024).

These influences are harmful to African countries' development, especially when they use mechanisms like conditional aid, unsustainable lending, and sanctions. Firstly, these methods weaken the agency of African countries and slow down their long-term growth in order to achieve the goals of Western countries or Western influenced organizations (AfDB, 2019; Hofmeier 1991;Mahoney, 2023). Secondly, these influences enable non-African stakeholders dictate the direction African development policy should take. This results in a uniform African development policy that does not take the local context of each country into consideration during either its creation or implementation. Unfortunately, these harms cannot be avoided as they are able to occur as a result of African countries' need for financing. Countries like the United States are major contributors of aid to African countries as well as a member of most organizations that support African development (with the United States being a member of the IDA, DAC and the AfDB) so their influence on African development policies cannot be avoided. The influences of countries like the United States in African development policy creation and implementation often seeks to further their interests even if it is to the detriment of African countries. As African countries hold key natural resources and an abundance of votes at the United Nations General Assembly (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024; Bassou, 2017), Western aid contributors utilize development aid as a tool to achieve political and economic goal like obtaining voting support, trade agreements or material resources - thereby contributing to the erosion of the freedom African countries have in creating and implementing their development agendas.

The context of the current African development is a reflection of the inequalities that African countries have

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traditionally faced on the international stage platform. Post-independence, many African countries faced diverse setbacks because of the ways that colonial powers damaged their economic, social, and political systems with colonialism and neo-colonialism (Rodney, 2018). These setbacks have placed them in a position where they are viewed as lagging behind their non-African stakeholders amongst the international community. Over time, this issue has grown to be more complex due to international interest in the development of African countries and has led to development policies and assistance that are often fitted with conditions that address the goals of Western foreign policy but do not take the local context of individual countries into consideration. This ultimately slows down the development of African countries (Fentahun, 2023). This is seen with donors' use of mechanisms like conditional aid and unsustainable lending (AfDB, 2019; Hofmeier, 1991) to achieve goals like obtaining voting support, trade agreements, or material resources. Overall, these conditions have led to economic dependency and weakened the agency of African countries (Anyiam-Osigwe & Vreeland, 2024; Broome, 2020). Thus, development policies for African countries are influenced by external pressure exertions from non-African stakeholders to African development. These pressures are not easily avoided as a result of African countries' need for financial support as well as the fact their position in the international community is perceived as lower than Western countries due to historical harms.

Importance of Building the Autonomy and Agency for African Countries

This paper proposes that African development policies should focus on building autonomy and agency in African countries to enable them create strong public institutions that will promote rapid socio-economic development. To understand this, it is vital to break the idea into two parts: the importance of local agency in development and the importance of public institutions grounded in local contexts.

Local autonomy and agency in development contexts is vital to adapting development policy to local context. The idea that establishing local freedom enables countries to rapidly adapt development policy to local context is corroborated through several theories. Firstly, development policies are known to be most effective when they are adapted to the context of the country they are in (Barder, 2012). This idea is supported by capability theorists Amartya Sen and Martha Naussbaum. Amartya Sen promotes the idea of capabilities and freedoms being deeply rooted in local contexts and Martha Naussbaum delves into the importance of agency in achieving capabilities and freedoms (Gasper, 1997). Through these theorists, it is understood that adapting development policy to local contexts improves said policy's efficacy. This observation is seen in many countries across the world.

An example is the development policy utilized by the Chinese government. The policy utilized state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in its development (Cheng-Han,

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2017) which aligned with China's cultural and political leanings. Similarly, Japan's protectionist policies aligned with its desire to protect its local culture and avoid colonialism, a mentality deeply influenced by the sakoku period in the country over 150 years ago (Garside, 2024).

Adapting development policy to local context is also seen when examining the Marshall Plan. The plan was a financial aid program fundamental in helping Europe recover from the effects of the Second World War. Through it, Europe experienced sustained economic growth, revitalized industries and increased investments (Gossé et al., 2021). This scale of success was possible in part because it gave its participant countries flexibility in the ways they could implement the conditionalities within their borders. As a result, the conditionalities proposed by the plan were adapted to the contexts of the recipient countries (Gossé et al., 2021).

The Importance of Strong Public Institutions Grounded in Local Context

In order for development policy to be adapted to the local context, strong public institutions rooted in the local context of the country are necessary (Ostrom, 1990; Rodrick 2004). This is important since the existence of these institutions are necessary in bridging the gap between the local and global levels (Colombo & Cuda, 2023). Moreover, these local institutions are responsible for transforming global goals into actionable local plans and ensuring the cooperation of locals in the plans. The role of public institutions as the bridge between the local and the global means that they must be rooted in the local context in order to be sustainable and long-lasting. When strong public institutions are grounded in local context, it fosters a sense of ownership within the community and ensures the longevity of the institution. Moreover, it ensures the institutions remain relevant in catering to the needs of the country or community it serves.

Rooting both public institutions and development policy in the local context African countries restores their autonomy and agency to them because they are in control of the running of institutions and implementation of development policy through their local contexts. They are equipped to implement and make changes to national development policies as they see fit. In using strong institutions grounded in local context to adapt global policy to local context, African countries will be able to better utilize existing development policy strategies suggested by their allies in order to develop more rapidly.

The Potential Outcome of the New African Development Strategy

In order to successfully develop their economies, African countries need not attempt to create new development policy, but instead must focus on creating the conditions that can make current development policy implementation successful. Since African countries are aware of their need to develop (Senghor, 1962), this new approach to development policy could revitalize the drive to develop from within Africa. Similarly, the international community (international organizations, states and other relevant parties) needs to

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focus on jointly implementing development policies such that African countries establish the freedom they need to create strong institutions rooted in their local contexts. This will enable them to adapt international development policies and lessons to their local contexts - ensuring both these institutions and development policy implementations can last in the long-term. As such, African countries will finally be able to move past the historical and modern inequalities they have faced to develop more rapidly.

Examining South Africa and its development in recent years shows that this shift in approach is both feasible and efficient as well. South Africa established stable and functional public institutions (political and educational amongst others) rooted in their local context and that has given the country the stability it needs to begin adapting development policies to its local context for its social and economic growth (Stewart et al, 2019). These changes in their development strategy have enabled them rise to become an economic leader on the African continent, both in annual GDP and industrial capacity (International Monetary Fund, 2024). Similarly, Ethiopia, by prioritizing the development of strong public institutions rooted in its local context, has been able to adapt development lessons to its local context and grow exponentially in the past few years (Planning and Development Commission, Ethiopia, n.d.; World Bank, 2024). In contrast, countries unable to develop strong public institutions rooted in their local contexts have not been able to develop because they do not have the capacity to adapt international policies to their local contexts (Jundi, 2023). This is corroborated when examining the attempt of the Ugandan government to revitalize their domestically-oriented industrial policies. The Ugandan government replicated industrial policies like government intervention that were vital to the successful development of countries in East Asia (Cheng-Han, 2017) .However, these policies were not adapted to their local contexts and eventually failed to achieve the anticipated level of success (Behuria, 2021). This shows that regardless of how good a policy is, if it is not adapted to suit the country it is implemented in, it cannot attain high levels of success.

Conclusion

The current African development context involves several different parties with various agendas – some which may ultimately conflict with the development of African countries. Historical and modern harms done to African countries create a situation where current African development strategies address African development as a monolith without taking individual local contexts into consideration. This system continues because African countries are unable to go against non-African stakeholders to African development because of their perceived international status and need for financial support. To improve on future development policies for Africa, the stakeholders in the socio-economic development of African countries should focus on jointly creating policies with African countries that build their autonomy and agency. This will in turn help them create the strong public institutions

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(educational and infrastructural amongst others) required to implement successful development policy. However, creating those development strategies does not mean *ignoring* the past lessons from the development of other regions. It means adapting development policies suggested by allies and implemented in other world regions to fit local contexts. This is done using strong public institutions grounded in local context to adapt existing development strategies to local contexts. In doing this, African countries can move past the harms they have faced to experience incremental socio- economic growth.

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