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Book Review

Africa's Development Thinking Since Independence: A Reader, Second Edition, Ed. Eddy Maloka, Published by the African Institute of South Africa, 2004 (ISBN : 07983 0160 0) PP.530

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This is the year of the Organisation of African Unity and the African Union's jubilee which has been declared as the year of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. We selected this book to review for this special issue on the Ethiopian economy as it is a book that has fully put together all the treaties, charters, protocols and declarations by African Heads of States over the last 30 years by focusing mainly on how to promote African structural economic development and transformation. Is there really an African development thinking that is distinguished by intellectual clarity founded on the knowledge power that can define, articulate and explore the complexities of the African development trajectory?

African heads of states first put out the Monrovia declaration in 1979 that laid the basis of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) that put forward the long-term structural transformation of the African economic structure starting from 1980 to 2000, the year of the millennium. This long term transformation was going to be based on the principle that "the same determination that has virtually rid our continent of political domination is required for our economic liberation." The Lagos Plan of Action was founded on two key principles: collective self-reliance and self-sustaining development and economic growth. The Lagos Plan of Action amplified the following: "Africa must cultivate the virtue of self-reliance. This is not to say the continent should totally cut itself off from outside contributions. However, these outside contributions should only supplement our own effort; they should not be the mainstay of our development." Both a self-reliant and an integrated African development agenda were to be evolving in Africa. Subsequent declarations like the Abuja Treaty of 1991 on the African Economic Community continued to echo similar developmental aspirations. This was signed by all the African Heads of states including Ethiopia.

As Africans through their own meetings continue to declare, the World Bank launched at the same time in the 1980s the Berg Report ostensibly to promote African accelerated development through what came to be known as the structural adjustment programmes. Some 35 African states appeared to choose structural adjustment after signing to the Lagos Plan of Action's self-reliance and integration principles to transform structurally the African economy. However, they went one by one and signed to structural adjustment austerity and conservative measures and policies by cutting expenditures on social services such as health, education and trying to attract foreign direct investment by removing state control over the economy.

The UN also found a middle ground between the Lagos Plan of Action and the World Bank and IMF's Structural Adjustment. The UN produced the "United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD). The UN appeared to seek some kind of compact between African heads of states and others in the rest of the world. As the African states were under the structural adjustment, it was clear no matter how noble the UN and the Lagos Plan of Action declarations have been, what took priority was the implementation and the impact of structural adjustment on African economies. UNCTAD acknowledged that global compact with a positive impact on African economies is nowhere to be witnessed. The structural adjustment programmes were hardly in sync with the UN or the Lagos Plan of Action. In addition it was recognised that the external economic environment from 1980s to 1990s was not favourable to Africa. Progress was not predictable and in fact it was largely negative. Undeterred, the UN developed another programme in 1991 to mirror the Abuja Treaty made in the same year by African heads of states, by declaring another protocol named: the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s(UN-NADAF).

The African Heads of States also moved along and established more declarations in the OAU such as 'the African Common Position on Africa's External Debt Crisis' and the 'African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation.' These are declarations and as they often are not backed as the World Bank and IMF's structural adjustment with cash, they get forgotten as soon as those who declared and signed leave from their Summits.

When the OAU became AU similar efforts were made to continue holding a possible African agenda with the UN declaring on the left side and World Bank and IMF on the right side and the AU passively caught in the middle declaring self-reliance and integration to define African overall development, but largely unable to launch or realise it. Today under the AU there is the Constitutive Act and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). To give NEPAD credit, it brought to economic development the critical relevance of accountable and transparent governance, peace and security, peer review and democracy. NEPAD has

embedded in its agenda of economic transformation democracy, transparency, peer review, governance and it has made, therefore an important addition to what was missing in the OAU declarations of self-reliance and integration by challenging all the Governments that all economies must also be accountable, transparent, democratic by being also upholders of human rights, justice and sustainable governance to improve the quality of life of the people together with the promotion of economic growth.

What clearly emerges from this important book is that African development thinking or re-thinking is neither independent nor self-reliant up to now. African leaders appear to sign in the UN, OAU-AU, World Bank and IMF and they appear very unclear about the value and importance of developing a clear economic development trajectory employing integrated and self-reliant principles by incorporating accountable and transparent governance with a strong passion to see Africa fully free, with dignity and independence. A liberation imagination must guide African economic development not dependency of any sort at all.

The seven papers in this special issue on the economy on Ethiopia corroborate what this book in development thinking has put together. It appears what Ethiopia faces is largely a reality that nearly all African countries are lumbered with. The value of this book is that it puts together all the charters, protocols and documents related to African economic development in one volume. It provides an excellent reference and it is critically important that research should dissect all these documents and ideas for developing the relevant paths of African economic transformation that are capable of mobilising all stakeholders to enshrine African integration with and for self-reliance without necessarily delinking but with the capacity to navigate independently the contours of globalisation by avoiding possible negative impact to Africa in the process of its economic development.

From 2000 to now there is recognition some economies in Africa are rising. High growth rates with persistent poverty, inequalities and unemployment can often present a real intellectual challenge on how to design and frame a self-reliant and integrated African economic system. There is a real risk that the Africa rising talk can distract objective and analytical scrutiny from seeing critically and reflectively who is benefitting and who is losing by this growth; as indeed all the rising economies with high recorded growth rates still wallow in poverty, inequality, education, health and unemployment. Research is much needed to examine if with the admission that Africa is rising, there is also the quality of life of the African people is also simultaneously rising. Above all is there a way to draw concrete lessons to apply for Africa's overall economic growth? This remains a real dilemma to all real African thinkers and scholars that they cannot simply ignore for any reason.

Having pointed the relevant questions, I strongly recommend this book to be used in teaching on African economic development and conclude the review by adding a few references that

may encourage the reader to highlight a new developmental direction that can help anchor potentially well-being to all Africans in the process of economic structural transformation and development.

References

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