Governance in Africa

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EDITORIAL

An Introduction to Governance in Africa

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The objective of the journal *Governance in Africa* (GiA) is to engage with the contemporary and evolutionary debates on transformative governance for sustainable and equitable development, and stability, in Africa. In recent years, there have been signs of a move away from conventional approaches to governance reform — constructed through the analytical lens of western powers — toward a new convention that uses African localities and everyday norms as the starting point for transformation. This is an approach that is also informed by orthodox analytical approaches. The objective of this journal is therefore to provide an exploratory space for creative thinking and to encourage a wider, deeper and more nuanced debate from a broader knowledge base. It aims for a different assessment of what transformative governance might mean in Africa, and adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the issues. It seeks to provide a unique platform for the presentation of new evidence or new theory from a variety of well-informed voices, and to cross-pollinate ideas. It is the goal of GiA to align innovative thinking, research and policy making in this complex and dynamic field.

This introduction explains why it is an appropriate moment in Africa's recent history to launch a publication of this kind. It gives some background to the international and local governance agendas, and an overview of some of the debates that are currently shaping new policy.

GiA – a note on the new publishing model.[1]

Why GiA now?

The launch of GiA is relevant and timely given the new impetus and approach to reform being generated by external policy makers, and also given Africa's new international relations that look more toward the east and south, than the west. Having focussed for decades on market-based approaches that failed, international actors are now pre-occupied with a more developmentalist approach to governance that promotes a bigger role for African states. The idea is to move away from policy that restricts and restrains state activity, to that which strengthens and enables capacity for growth and development (Noman et al, 2012: 7). Whilst outsiders busy themselves thinking of new and not so new ways of influencing governance in Africa, the reality is dawning among development partners that nobody can envision a transformative model of governance that is significantly different from the past (Booth and Cammack, 2013). This reality suggests a unique opportunity to investigate alternative approaches, including African ideas and locally sourced solutions, to the seemingly intractable puzzle of what good governance means in Africa.

Why does it matter?

Observers may notice that, in recent years, not all news from Africa has been gloomy. Many advances have been made, especially among the group of 'emerging' countries that are benefiting from advances such as the technological revolution, stronger economic management and the end of the debt crisis (Radelet, 2010). More generally, improved efficiencies in economic management have encouraged foreign investment and impressed the international financial institutions — a crucial advance for the creditability and credibility of African governments on the international stage. There has been a significant reduction in the under-five mortality rate, major advances in the control of HIV/AIDS, and a reduction in the number of deaths from malaria. There are pockets of accelerated development in mega-cities such as Lagos and Luanda that have increased the middle classes and extended consumer markets. Private sector exports are making bigger contributions to national economies, and the continent's prospects for economic growth are the most encouraging globally (UNECA, 2013). With these positive developments in mind, does Africa need new models of governance?

These advances are to be celebrated, yet pale when compared to the enormous challenges still facing the continent's governments and populations in the quest for both sustainable and equitable development, and peaceful and stable societies. Population growth, state fragility, poverty, climate change, conflict, poor leadership, underemployment, low capacity and low productivity, all contrive to hold most of the continent back. The rise of extreme fundamentalism in ungovernable and governed spaces (north east Nigeria and east Africa) is of great concern for the future stability and security of these regions; and, as Central African Republic descends into chaos in the absence of a functioning state, and the youngest country, South Sudan, fractures and disintegrates so soon after its bespoke construction, what lessons must be learned from the way the continent is governed?

If we are to be guided by indicators of good governance devised by the World Bank, the region of sub-Saharan

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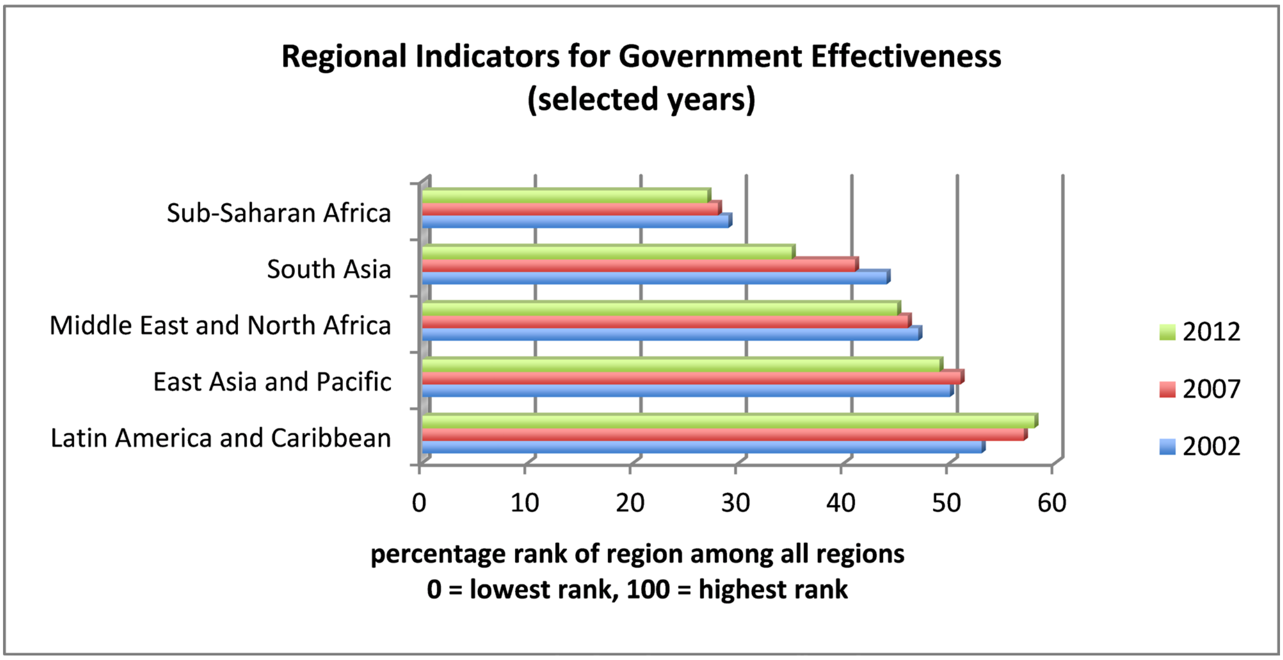

Fig. 1: Regional Indicators for Government Effectiveness. *Source:* World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators, available online http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#doc [accessed 30/01/14].

Africa (SSA) has the lowest score on the measure of *Government Effectiveness*.[2] Compared to other developing regions, it has remained the lowest performer on this indicator for the past decade, and over time things have deteriorated (**Fig. 1**).

No African state is doing well on the Resource Governance Index. This is relevant because the export of fuels, ores and metals is equivalent to more than half of continental export earnings, and revenues from natural resources dwarf those from international aid. In the case of Nigeria, for example, oil revenues in 2011 were 60 per cent higher than the total amount of international aid to all of SSA (Revenue Watch Institute, 2013). Governance of natural resources is significant because mismanagement and corruption have many manifestations, not least the build up of tension and frustration among citizens. When income is high but effectiveness is low, people draw their own conclusions as to where the money has gone.

The population of SSA is growing faster than any other region, doubling over the past 27 years to over one billion, and is expected to double again in the next 40 years. Population pressure impacts on the environment and conflicts over land and water are common, exacerbated by climate change, as desertification takes hold across the Sahel – even as far south as the dry lands of Tanzania. More than 40 per cent of people are under 15; this means there will be increasing growth in the numbers of working age people in the next decade – around 11 million youth each year according to World Bank calculations (World Bank, 2014). With few exceptions, converting economic growth into meaningful paid work has been an unmitigated failure. Vulnerable employment in SSA – defined as unpaid family workers and own-account workers as a percentage of total employment – remains the highest in the world at 77.4 per cent in 2013 (ILO, 2014). In North Africa the youth-to-adult unemployment ratio has reached historic levels rising to 29 per cent in 2013, more than twice the global average (ibid: 64).

Compared to other developing regions that have already met or are expected to meet at least some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SSA will not meet any.[3] In terms of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, SSA is nowhere near meeting the target of halving the number of people living on less than $1.25 per day, which remains at almost half the population. SSA is the only region in the world that saw numbers living in extreme poverty steadily rise from 290 million in 1990 to 414 million in 2010 (UN, 2013a). Although these figures represent a percentage reduction – 56 to 48 per cent – this advantage is outweighed by the rate of population growth.[4] The rest of the developing world has met this target, on average a drop of 47 to 22 per cent (UN, 2013b). This disappointing outcome is in direct contrast to the high levels of economic growth being experienced across SSA. In North Africa there has been a decrease in economic growth due to the turbulent political situation, but SSA has defied the global trend and is forecast to see an increase in overall growth from 4 per cent in 2013 to 5 per cent in 2014 (UN, 2014). To achieve the MDGs, however, growth must be sustained above 7 per cent (UNECA, 2008). Kjær therefore explains the necessity to explore alternative routes to 'growth-enhancing' governance that are not dependent on predefined good governance institutions that fail, but more dependent on good research into the right political incentives for change (Kjær, 2014).

With few exceptions, there have been setbacks for the consolidation of democracy; *coups d'état* in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, the constriction of press and political freedoms in Burundi, the thwarting of elections in Guinea,

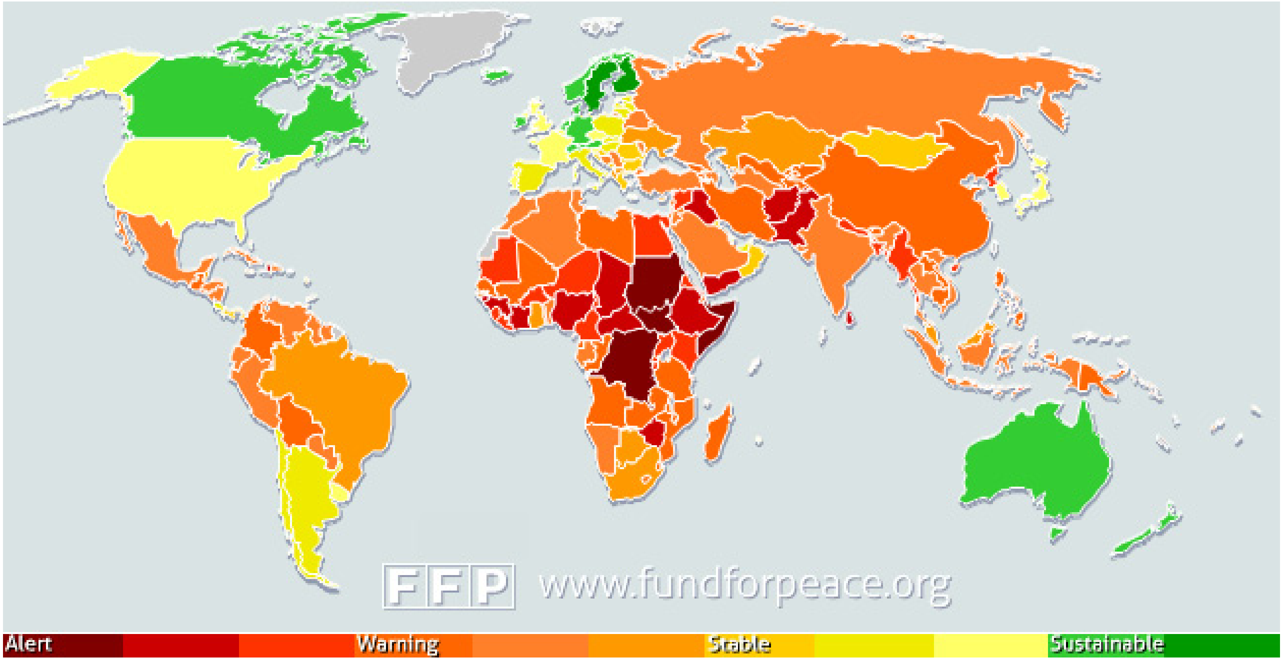

Fig. 2: The Failed States Index 2013 (Fund for Peace, 2013).

Mauritania and Togo, and recent oppressive anti-human rights legislation in Nigeria, Uganda and The Gambia, are examples of democratisation stalling and retreating. *Political hardening* – an indicator used to measure government violence, arrests, bans, curfews and states of emergency – indicates a general deterioration of political freedoms since 2000, rising sharply from 2010 to reach an all time high in 2013 (African Economic Outlook, 2014). Data from Freedom House indicates that SSA as a region declined in all seven categories of political rights and civil liberties over the past five years. Despite the promotion of democracy as a condition of bilateral aid, only 20 per cent of states are politically 'free'. Over half of all African countries experience persistent electoral violence, where electorates are subjected to physical violence and/or coercive intimidation (Bekoe, 2012). Despite this, and the fact that competitive elections are yet to be proven as a mechanism for guaranteeing the political accountability of leaders, African populations continue to believe they are the best method for choosing leaders (Bratton and Logan, 2014).

The Failed States Index shows that Africa is the most vulnerable region to state failure and has the largest cluster of fragile states. Fragility means governments cannot perform the necessary functions to meet citizens' demands, and failure to deliver the social contract – the provision of security, rule of law, or services – challenges state legitimacy and instability follows (Stewart and Brown, 2010, OECD, 2007). States emerging from war are examples of fragile states; at the beginning of 2014 the UN had 13 global active political/peacebuilding missions, and eight were in Africa. The global graphic (**Fig. 2**) illustrates how state fragility and susceptibility to failure are concentrated in the Africa region where the four most extreme cases reside (Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and DRC). In the second most vulnerable category over half are in Africa. None of these states has achieved a single MDG and over a quarter of a billion people are affected by the failures.

The fragile states discourse is hugely significant for our study of governance in Africa because it currently dictates development and aid agendas and is generally protected from major normative dissent (Nay, 2014: 228). The 'revised' orthodoxy for fragile states has been constructed by the World Bank and OECD and is unchallenged in policy circles. It advocates for statebuilding, technocratic style solutions to government challenges, and fails to engage with the well-established and creditable argument that development and security is fundamentally a local political matter, and that evidence based thinking and locally based research is essential for appropriate governance reforms (Leftwich, 1994, Booth and Cammack, 2013, Kjær, 2014).

There is a convincing body of evidence, summarised only partially above, to indicate that governance is not working for the majority of African populations who encounter every day the realities and consequences of ineffective government in their states. These include a model of democracy where citizens observe, but do not receive, the benefits of economic growth; the prevalence of violence, or threat of violence, and the paucity of law and order in every corner of the continent; a lack of opportunity, the continuance of deep poverty, and the persistent marginalisation and disempowerment of large sections of the population. Bad or failed governance is understood to be associated with these continent-wide ills and, to cure Africa of its malaise, governance must be improved by some means. The current orthodoxy, which focuses on statebuilding, technocratic style solutions to government challenges, simply will not do. So what do we understand *governance* to mean in the context of such a diverse continent?

'Good governance' for Africa

Governance is understood to mean the exercise of power for the management of a nation's affairs (World Bank, 1989: 60), not to be confused with government, which is the instruments used to do so – the security forces, civil services, justice system and so forth. The methodology of governance in our globalised world involves a multiplicity of actors — local and global, invited and uninvited — who share responsibility to govern. This is especially so in Africa where relatively new and sometimes fragile states are often dependent upon external partners and organisations for technical support, resources and access to markets. This methodology of governance results in local policy outcomes that are often unconnected to the actions of central governments but more connected to conditional partnerships, memberships, networks, or private and informal relations (see Rhodes, 1996: 657, 666). This includes membership of multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, which has remained central to the promotion of good governance in Africa for several decades. Since 1989 the governance narrative has been centred on development and the reform of governance institutions to achieve sustainable growth after the failure of SAPs (World Bank, 1989).

Bad governance was blamed for the failure. Bureaucratic obstruction, weak judiciaries, political and administrative arbitrariness, the absence of the rule of law, corruption and rent seeking among governors, were identified as distinguishing characteristics (Olukoshi, 2003). It was claimed that good governance would emerge through prescriptive and institutionalist programming for accountability and transparency, predictability and rationality, competency and the reduction of red tape in government (World Bank, 1992). Capacity building was a priority in this endeavour, to enable African technocrats to initiate and implement market-based economic reforms as an essential element of good governance (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999: 47, Khan 2007).

Good governance for development was also a neat fit with the parallel venture of liberal statebuilding (Paris, 2002). Over the past quarter century since the fall of communism, the mission in development, peacebuilding and economic circles has been to promote and implement governance reforms in the style of industrialised democracies of the global north (Fukuyama, 2004). Irrespective of the political, social and cultural histories of individual nations involved, it is still believed that democratic institutions and market-based economies can be successfully transferred from north to south, almost overnight, in all circumstances. This highly influential project for Africa has squeezed out space for alternative or evidence-based thinking on structures of governance that might work better in nuanced conditions of the locale.

With this background in mind, the good governance project is based on the premise that government quality is impacted by the nature of political institutions, which must be changed. The argument is based on the 'how' rather than the 'who' or 'why' and sidelines the issue of local politics and the relationships between state, state actors and citizens. The project's technocratic focus means that some equally desirable outcomes — such as human security, equality, justice or jobs — are sidelined or deprioritised in this over-ambitious, complex and capacity draining mission (Cubitt, 2013). Yet the seemingly 'apolitical' technocratic solutions do little to hide the fact that the good governance orthodoxy is very political indeed. Good governance as conceptualised from outside is not necessarily the same as that conceived locally; even though the project is grounded in the promotion of democracy, it does not embrace the larger debate on what good governance means to local populations (Olukoshi, 2003: 266), even in the most sensitive context of war-to-peace transitions (Krause and Jutersonke, 2005, Autesserre, 2010, Cubitt, 2011). Good governance can mean social trust, security, hope and well-being, for example, which are essential for the buy-in of local people to any development project, yet there are currently no alternative normative political theories that connect these concepts, and others, to the search for good governance in Africa (Rothstein, 2011: 5).

A prescriptive and institutional approach has not delivered the desired outcomes and some critics suggest that this is due to constructing the wrong institutions (Chang, 2002). Rather than addressing this policy malaise, however, international partners have proceeded to increase the institutional demands on African governments by introducing additional requirements in the political and social spheres using the same prescriptive modelling, regardless of limited capacity to deliver (Grindle, 2004). These include strengthening civil society and the creation of structures to enable participation in government. Despite its critics and failures, the good governance project remains a fixation among the dominant community of development agencies, and enormous amounts of time, energy and resources are dedicated to the design and implementation of governance reforms by international organisations, governments, multilateral institutions, and international NGOs.

Africa led approaches

As confusion and indecision hinders the design of new policy among international influencers, it has been forgotten that African scholars identified the greatest challenge when consulted by the World Bank in 1989. They emphasised a crisis in state-society relations, which was a local political and not an administrative challenge (Mkandawire, 2007). They made the argument that the aid invasion and international governance of the 1980s, and the concurrent atrophy of local governance, undermined and weakened the social contract in Africa. Challenges for democratic consolidation were, and still are, about changing state-society relations as the *sine qua non* for development (Mkandawire, 2006). It was the view of African scholars that sustainable development and the legitimacy of democracy would never be achieved without paradigms, strategies and agendas that favoured only African peoples (Ake, 1996). The imperative for transformative change was a more active role for the state in market economies, a broader base for policy initiative, and a more nuanced and context-specific approach to the unique and diverse conditions among disparate African environs (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999).

There were Africa led initiatives for change. The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos (1980) set out a local vision centred on the indigenisation of development policy; an attempt by African leaders to harness political control of their own destiny and claw back the right to exercise power. The African Economic Community for Continental Co-operation (Abuja Treaty of 1991) and the Sirte Declaration (1999) included democracy, the rule of law, human rights and so forth, in an effort to embed principles of international law with indigenous plans. Over time, however, African leaders abandoned these strategies and surrendered their political economies. There followed a decade of development disappointment as the orthodoxy of SAPs took hold (Adedeji, 2002).

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was an attempt to build a more constructive relationship with the global north. It launched an instrument for self-appraisal on governance — the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) — to measure performance across political, economic, corporate and socio-economic spheres, and to demonstrate Africa's commitment to addressing its governance issues. At the time of writing, there were 34 member states of the APRM, and 17 peer reviews had been completed. As with previous indigenous initiatives, however, there was popular enthusiasm but lack of political will or capacity for implementation, which has led to mediocre and uninspiring results.

The current debates

It is the case that African politics is bedevilled by a number of characteristics that combine to produce an image of bad governance on the continent today. Corruption, militarism, authoritarianism, clientelism, neo-patrimonialism or tribalism are all evidenced in some form or other from Cape Town to Cairo, and from Dakar to Mogadishu. Indeed, neo-patrimonialism appears the default and natural setting in African politics, described as the 'moral economy of corruption' or the 'economics of affection' (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, Hydén, 1980). But this is a political culture that deadlocks efforts to develop inclusive whole nations (Hydén, 2006: 228), a reality that has generated the view that Africa is inhospitable to good governance institutions (Lonsdale, 1995, Schatzberg, 2001, Chabal and Daloz, 2006, Kelsall, 2008). Others note that bad governance is not culturally specific, but a universal challenge affecting all nations at some point in their development history (Rothstein, 2011: p.111). Different schools of thought offer equally compelling arguments.

For example, that the international methodology of governance plays a dominant and calculating role in the way African states are run. It constrains the choices of political actors and may not be appropriate for local contexts. Interference of this kind raises the issue of how much 'leading' African leaders are free to do and refutes the quality at the very heart of good government, *impartiality* in the exercise of power (Rothstein, 2011). Interventions from afar are never politically neutral; political theory is always for someone or some purpose (Cox, 1981). The current methodology of governance removes accountability from national leaders (usually democratically elected) who are asked to prioritise the agenda of an external constituency. This has dire consequences for local politics (Leftwich, 1994). External funds, including aid, subjugate local priorities and agendas (Bano, 2012). In so doing, they distort the relations between state, state actors and the citizenry. This system can work well for politicians' own interests, allowing corruption to flourish, and the 'institutional inertia' that follows will 'self-correct' any democratic advances (Rothstein, 2011: 106, Harris, 2003). As Claude Ake argued two decades ago, development has not really failed in Africa because it has never been seriously on the political agenda (Ake, 1996).

Khan develops the argument that good governance cannot take root on a continent mostly devoid of the necessary components to make it a success. For example, the rule of law, stable property rights, the control of corruption, capacity to implement reforms and so forth (Khan, 2012a: 52). African states are often devoid of democratic (in the western sense) political cultures, modern socio-economic environments or broad-based economies outside the extractive sector (see Gills and Rocamora, 1992). So, some tentative and alternative governance solutions have been identified that might help transform African economies and complex societies in a way most desirable for the populations involved, as well as their sponsors (Chang, 2007, Rodrik, 2007, Andrews, 2008).

Among them is the *developmental state* and variations on that theme, a model of governing that may help create the structural transformation necessary for increased productivity alongside economic growth to raise living standards (Amoako, 2011, UNECA, 2011, Whitfield, 2011, Lin and Monga, 2011). Some commentators argue that Africa can learn lessons from the development model of the Asian Tigers (Southall, 2006, Turok, 2008), but this is contested by those who argue only democratic regimes can deliver development in Africa (Mkandawire, 2001, Andreasson, 2007, Edigheji, 2010). The developmental model is less stringent on the state government of markets than the development model of south-east Asia, and is a policy change supported by African leaders and scholars (Mkandawire, 2001, Zenawi, 2012). Promoting developmental states in Africa will involve a giant leap of faith for the proponents of good governance, however, because at every stage of the process there will be collisions between 'minimalist' and 'developmental' strategizing (Leftwich, 1994; 381).

One variation is that of *developmental patrimonialism* where politically generated opportunities for profit are institutionalised and centralised, and where economic rents are deployed efficiently with a view to longer-term development (Khan, 2000). An example is contemporary Rwanda (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). Booth describes developmental patrimonialism as 'working with the grain' i.e. embracing local norms and practices rather than fighting against them (Booth, 2011). The rationale for this approach is based on analysis of some immediate post-independence regimes — Cote D'Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi — where rent management was centralised and resources deployed to assist national development (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997). This approach has its critics who highlight the costs to democracy of an authoritarian style model that involves elite bargaining (Straus and Waldorf, 2011, Reyntjens, 2011), and those who note that patrimonialism can also be anti-development, as in the case of Zimbabwe (Dawson and Kelsall, 2012).

Another approach is offered by the *heterodox theorists* who propose the restructuring of African economies towards state industrialisation, economies of scale in manufacturing, import substitution and so forth (see Breisinger and Diao, 2008, Lin and Monga, 2011, Whitfield, 2011, Khan, 2012b). However, this approach requires a transformation in local politics and international relations to shake off dependency on outsiders and outside forces — a reality often overlooked by proponents of this strategy. There have been mixed results from heterodox experiments; success in Mauritius (Subramanian, 2013), but failure in Ghana (Fosu, 2013). Exploiting comparative advantage means state involvement at all levels and different relations between citizens and state — *ergo* a transformation in local politics. The incorporation of heterodox views into the dominant paradigm will involve a major revision of the doctrinal foundations already set out by powerful players in the international system (Nay, 2014: 228).

As the world hegemonies recalibrate, the BRICS – most specifically China and India — have become Africa's most influential economic partners, and as the continent realigns its posture accordingly, and relies less on western development aid, its leaders face possibly their greatest challenge — how to resist and counter the 'new imperialisms' (Cheru and Obi, 2010). Trade openness remains a fundamental requirement in these new relations, and south-south co-operation — with Brazil for example — preserves the huge power differentials that African states formerly experienced with the west (Carmody, 2013).

Post-development theorists have identified the shortcomings of both mainstream liberal and state-led development models, and suggest moving beyond the contemporary paradigm of quasi-liberal, procedural democracy and the economically globalised world order (Rahnema, 1997, Esteva and Prakash, 1998, Matthews, 2004). Certainly there is good evidence to suggest that the free market approach in donor circles is no longer tenable — witness the recent catastrophic failures of the global markets and financial institutions (Bracking and Cliffe, 2009). African nations may fare better if they ignore the machinations of global financial markets and multilateral agencies and steer their own course toward development. This is because they are best placed to reinvent the concept and achieve their own goals and aspirations (Rodrik, 2007, Andreasson, 2010). Living with the realities of failed or ineffective governance, African citizens commonly look to alternative sources of support — religious groups, chiefs or other traditional authorities, family networks and so forth — that can provide health care, education, access to finance for an extensive network of followers. In the Sahel, for example, locally derived and owned solutions such as the 'peace forums' in Niger can be the best route to better governance, security and development (Reitano, 2014). The idea that a people or their social-cultural institutions are an obstacle to their development is a confusion in development thinking and an expensive error of the past (Ake, 1991: 8, cited by Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999: 140).

Everywhere in the literature we see calls to embrace local norms, or craft policies to fit individual contexts (Unsworth, 2009, Poole, 2011, Booth and Cammack, 2013). Context now matters in policy circles and 'bottom up' thinking may influence top-down orthodoxies. Some of these solutions promote a focus on collective action, or the transformative potential of pre-existing and traditional institutions that must not be swept aside in the hurry to 'innovate' (Booth and Cammack, 2013: 99). But ideas for local ownership are not new and have never brought about structural transformations in the past, and there remains resistance to such change in policy circles (Booth and Cammack, 2013). In essence, what is now being discussed, is the old but previously disparaged ideas of African scholars and policy makers who first asked the question: how can the relationship between African states and their societies, between leaders and their citizens, be fundamentally and permanently changed? This is the question at the heart of our new publication: *Governance in Africa.*

Notes

[1] GiA is fully and formally registered as an academic publication in the same way as a conventional print journal. The difference is that GiA does not produce hard copy issues that are structured into several volumes each year. Rather, all content is archived into an annual volume and published electronically on a 'rolling basis' as both web pages and PDF files once the comprehensive review and production process is completed. This has a distinct advantage over print publishing because work is made available almost immediately and to a global audience. This model of publishing is both cost effective and environmentally friendly, but the most important advantage is that, unlike conventional print journals, all content is free to view without a subscription charge. Research sponsors, or institutions where specific funding allocations for publishing are held, meet the article processing charges. Authors who do not have access to funding may have their charges waived. GiA's commitment to removing publishing barriers for locally based research and commentary reflects the view that engaging seriously with the local can only enhance understanding of the challenges involved. Our editors hope that you find the content of GiA to be informative, enlightening and thought provoking whether you are an academic, practitioner, policy maker or interested individual.

[2] An indicator that aims to capture perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formation and implementation, and the credibility of government commitment.

[3] It should be noted that regionally good progress has been made only on the gender parity of primary school enrolment, and the eradication of some diseases. Some individual states have fared better than the region. Millennium Development Goals Progress Chart 2013, available online <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/2013_progress_english.pdf> [accessed 4 April 2014)

[4] It should be noted that there are exceptions to this general trend across SSA – Uganda, for example, has successfully halved the numbers of people living in extreme poverty although that country faces other challenges in terms of inequality

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