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Title: The Resolution of Food Crises in Africa Requires Building an Integrated African National Economy

Inspiring Quote!

“The elevation of an agricultural people to the condition of countries at once agricultural, manufacturing and commercial, can only be accompanied under the law of free trade, when the various nations engaged at the time of manufacturing industry shall be in the same degree of progress and civilization; when they shall place no obstacle in the way of the economical development of each other, and not impede their respective progress by war or adverse commercial legislation.”

(Friedrich List, **the National System of Political Economy**, Trans. By G. A. Matile (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott (Translation of: F. List: **Das nationale System der Politischen Oekonomie**, 1841): pp.72-73)

1. Introduction

People often say when Africans argue for an integrated national African economy, they are self-indulgent entertaining nothing but a futile illusion. They claim that to argue that Africa must unite economically, ‘knowledge-ically’, politically, and ‘society-ically’ is to day-dream and to give in to fantasy. They assert that Africa does not exist in anything, form or shape other than as a geographical accident. Of course, they would hardly say this of the USA, for example, where ‘the tribes of the whole world exist in it’, and people have united under one constitution and

national flag, and right now seemingly poised to electing an African –American with a father from Kenya! To claim more than a geographical reality to Africa is often condemned and reproached. The pursuit of African integration is said to be a too pie in the sky dream, fantasy, utopian, unrealistic, which distracts from taking realistic incremental actions and thus by foreclosing such options by going for unity on a big scale is pronounced to be dangerous!

2. Africa is so rich but also so poor!

A brief overview of the African economic picture reveals a paradox where the continent that has rich mineral resources, nearly a billion people and a land mass which includes the sizes of China, USA, India, Western Europe, Argentina (see map below) together and still is larger than the sum of these regions is in the an unacceptable state of being an object of aid, debt and loans despite the vast resources both known and yet to be explored in it for the whole post- colonial period.



Africa should have been a production and innovation centre not a charity and aid centre of the world where currently 'donorship' has sadly replaced African national ownership' of not just Africa's resources, but even worse Africa's own agency, autonomy and independence to shape and determine policy and direction to undertake national development. The main thrust of the African quest to unite such key ideas, projects, programmes and infrastructures connecting its politics, knowledge and the economy flows from a recognition that Africa must organise a production, economic and innovation system by integrating consumers with suppliers, producers with users, users with other users in Africa and for Africa. This is both desirable and possible and knowledge of how to do it- know-how- can be cultivated so that the continent emerges fully as a region free from the 'donorship' gaze it suffers from so cruelly at the moment under the enormous burden of a crippling fragmentation and dependency myopia.

This is no exaggeration to state that African political and economic arrangements today are characterized by internal pervasive and schizophrenic disconnections, mismatches, fragmentations and external dependence. Nearly 70 % of Africa's overall population exist in subsistence and primary resource and agrarian condition. Where a region has the overwhelming portion of its production as agricultural, that region invariably remains vulnerable even to feeding itself, conversely where a few percentage of a nation's population is working on the land and is engaged in knowledge, manufacture and services for the most part, that nation is more likely to feed itself whether it rains or not.

The main pattern of Africa's economic relations with the world economy is through what makes Africa permanently to remain vulnerable unless it changes its conditions through continued unequal primary agriculture and mineral exports for the products with knowledge, technology and innovation value added manufactured elsewhere. African countries produce similar primary products for the same market and compete against each other thus accentuating and deepening their fragmentation. A key example is the horticulture produced by many East African countries today!

Africa faces a true dilemma: if it is able to insulate itself from the world economy, it can incur possible welfare, income and knowledge losses. If it continues to integrate as it does now based on current dominant patterns of relating on the basis of primary commodity transactions with the world economy, it faces continued economic dependence and fragmentation and lack of structural transformation of its fundamental economic, social and knowledge infrastructure.

Africa's current pattern of insertion in the world economy comes at the cost of fragmenting the African economic, knowledge and political space. It appears the continued cost of fragmentation is supposed to be offset by Africa being in the international aid system. Whether African fragmentation can be offset by dependence on aid or national development should be a genuine issue for deep reflection and foresight for the AU and others with broad commitment to African freedom and unity.

3. Where is the African Strategy?

An African national project is necessary for launching the infrastructure for a comprehensive structural transformation of African economy, state, society, communities and people. What seems lacking is exactly what is most needed: an African national project and national spirit first and foremost to anchor the evolution and dynamics of an African strategy!

Africans continue to experience fragmentation that reproduced dependence on outside powers. But they have not tried a unified African national project yet that inspires their self-composition, self-organisation and self-definition and self-recognition as Africans in order to undertake challenges together, deal with those that they have to deal with and respond to opportunities together. Their 'advisors' provide hundreds of reasons why Africans are different from each other. Why they cannot come together. The fact that under conditions of fragmentation and dependency, the existing fractured states have not succeeded to transform structurally and undertake a credible national development strategy is very often conveniently ignored. Strategies that accentuate fragmentation continue to be devised.

No one says or counsels that going on a path of fragmentation that leads to nowhere is even more unrealistic and utopian than a united strategy that can work which has not been tried yet in spite of the compelling recognition over half a century now that either Africa unites or perishes!(Dr. Kwame Nkrumah).. Instead the search for a united African national alternative gets castigated for being futile and utopian. But when too many fragmented states scramble for resources carefully doled out to them from an international aid regime to pursue goals they can hardly meet, no one dares to say this path is even more utopian than the alternative African national project that has never been tried. Where there is no African national project in place, means a big void and vacuum at the heart of Africa's confident march to the future where there will be no clear African national strategy to guide policy and practice!

Africans are now treated to admonishments from the likes of Bono and Wolfensohn, who are now calling openly for African unity. At the **Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Lecture in Accra, Ghana under the title “Africa in the Global Century: Partnerships for Success”**, the former World Bank President, **James Wolfensohn**, argued for Africa to unite:

“Africa can make the best of the opportunities and wealth available to it to grow its people and economy if it unites.” (Wolfensohn quoted in Dogbevi, 2008)

The World Bank has also begun to echo the ‘integration line’ by recognising that **the flow of goods, capital and people are so limited that inter-African collaboration and integration remains largely untenable** also. It has produced: **New Development Strategy Focuses on Regional Integration in Sub-Saharan Africa**: see <http://go.worldbank.org/VJ7PSXVTP0>

In addition a number of countries far and near to Africa appear to develop their own Africa strategy based on their understanding or mis-understanding of what they think Africa is and may or may not be or become. The list continues. The EU has an Africa strategy since 2005. The Chinese have theirs. The Indians had a Summit in March 2008. The Japanese held a summit on May 28, 2008. Even a small country- Denmark, has set up an Africa Commission like the Blair commission before to organise its own mode of intervention into Africa. It looks more countries will develop strategies on, for and to Africa and probably not with Africa despite the abundant talk of partnership, national ownership the Paris terms and such like rhetoric and discourse.

What seems to be lacking in all these is the African strategy for Africa and the combined African strategy on those who make strategies for Africa and others that are involved and continue to do their business to, for and on Africa.

The time is long overdue to make each of the nearly billion Africans in the continent to develop an African national spirit and unite on the shared experience, challenges and a grand national project to transform Africa from an agrarian economy to a knowledge-service and knowledge- industrial economy to achieve food security and improve the health, education and well being of all the people, and not just a few elites. Only then can Africa achieve the freedom, security and stability to emerge with its own voice and act with policy and practice to secure its independence without fear or favour in a complex world.

4. National spirit necessary to offset pervasive fragmentation and donor dependency

The problem is that after nearly 50 years of post- colonial independence African economies continue to be fragmented in spite of the AU/NEPAD salutary processes. The more the fragmentation amongst African economies deepens the harder for each of the fragments not to be supplicants to the aid system. Africa thus also faces another critical dilemma of being an unequal ‘partner’ with the burgeoning aid industry that has created a business of what is known as ‘technical assistance,’ where those who provide the aid consume a sizeable portion of the resources allocated, and the recipient Africans continue to be in a vulnerable position as long-term the aid receivers are unable to get out of this dependency situation.

In general, it may not be easy to disprove aid is not useful to some within the recipient countries, this does not validate, however, aid or the international aid system per se, since it is not also difficult to show, that the long term impact of aid is negative, if we proceed from the normative preference that the recipient countries options to plan their development free from conditions imposed that often do not take the specific context of the countries can be misdirected by the international aid system. In the long term, it is better to take the suffering to learn how to fish rather than receive fish. Recently Tanzania announced to all the donors that they want time to think and cope with the influx of hundreds of donor inputs. They said they needed time to work out what this all means and made a moratorium on donors’ visits to Tanzania!

It is thus no exaggeration that a country relying on aid is most likely not to develop a national strategy without the interference and the factorings of the interests and policies of the aid system. Being a recipient in an international aid system for many African countries has not brought development but corruption and poverty. It undermines a given state in Africa from making mistakes and learning from the routines and practices of creating an integrated African national economy. Africa cannot afford to continue to suffer the opportunity cost from continuing to receive aid only to defer building the much needed ability to create the capacity, capability, competence, learning and innovation to transform the largely agrarian and subsistence economic system.

5. Concluding Remarks:

Over half century has passed; Africa suffers from myopia of a particularly pernicious 'fragmentation-dependence' situation. The root problem for its unchanging African predicament lies

in the state of fragmentation that invites dependency and conversely dependency that continues to prevent the evolution of an African national spirit, purpose, project and strategy.

There is a need for a fresh approach, a new departure to embark on a roadmap to convert the 'fragmentation-dependence' dilemma into an enabling 'integration-self-sustaining, learning, innovation, capabilities building' national system, national project , national spirit and national strategy to re- launch African development on a secure pedigree with confidence and inspiration.

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