Reversing Africa's Decline: What Must Be Done?

*A. J. Liviga**

Abstract

This article examines the African crisis from a multidimensional point of view. It starts by looking at the various definitions and presentation of the problem by economists, sociologists, political scientists as well as the IMF and World Bank. It argues that the African crisis has to be seen in terms of loss of control by the leading political actors (states) over the socio-economic, political as well as cultural forces that impact upon the process of development. It posits also that there is no automatic link between Africa's economic decline with natural causes, the connection is mediated by the political and economic arrangements obtaining in Africa. In that regard Africa suffers from a plethora of crises notably the food crisis, the energy crisis, the balance of trade crisis, the debt crisis, and the crisis of economic management. There are also ecological as well as political crises. The paper suggests therefore that it is impossible to prescribe a single solution to alleviate Africa's decline. What Africa need is a comprehensive, multifaceted and frontal strategy to attack the ills that afflict its people.

Introduction

Africa's economic crisis is well-known. Many countries in the continent are unable to feed their people. Domestic food production is now woefully inadequate. The gap between production and national needs throughout Africa has greatly increased, necessitating massive grain imports. In countries such as Ethiopia, Chad, Sudan, Mozambique and Angola hundreds of thousands of people have died from starvation, and millions more are threatened by chronic

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* Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
University of Dar es Salaam

famine. In industry, the picture is equally bad as many industries run below capacity. Others have closed down, many of which may not reopen due to scarcity of foreign exchange needed to purchase spare parts and raw materials from overseas. An equally critical problem exists in the political arena. Political instability that manifests itself in periodic coups and counter-coups, civil strife, corruption and in some cases war, is order of the day. All across Africa there are actual and potential war scenes, the most serious raging in Western Sahara, Chad, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and until recently Angola and Namibia.

The purpose of this paper is two fold: first, to try and summarise major reviews of literature on the African crisis with a view to identifying the main forms of the crisis. Secondly, to synthesise the contending explanations and come up with concrete suggestions that can help policy makers take the necessary action to alleviate the crisis. In the course of the discussion of the issues involved in this crisis, focus will be on policy alternatives. The approach employed is one that sees the crisis as an extreme situation that is implicit in the everyday condition of the people. Emphasis is put on the people and not only on climate, other natural conditions or technology.

An analysis of the magnitude of the disaster afflicting Africa has to be put in the relevant physical, socio-political and economic conditions of the society in which it occurs. The review that follows is made with the understanding that there is no automatic link between Africa's economic decline with natural causes, the connection between the two is mediated by the political and economic arrangements of the society. That is to say, the crisis cannot be separated from the socio-economic system, and organisation of production and distribution. It has to be discussed in the context of the wider processes of underdevelopment, dependency relationships, ownership, and transformation of productive resources. This in turn calls for Africa to make hard choices now if the crisis is to be averted, and reconstruct the economies for development.

The Crisis: Its Nature, Form and Explanation

Defining The Problem

Most analyses of Africa's decline have focused on drought, the disarray of national economies, and the continent's tumultuous politics. It has been noted that the continent is experiencing a systematic breakdown in the relationship between people and their natural support systems. Famine, and the threat of famine, are among the manifestations of this breakdown. Recent assessment of the performance and prospects of African economies portray a deepening economic crisis centred on the problem of food supplies. Basically, the crisis is seen as a crisis of production, and leading authorities and international agencies provide evidence to that effect (World Bank report, 1981; Food and Agriculture Organisation, 1978; the US Department of Agriculture, 1981; the International Food Policy Research Institute, 1977). Individual scholars and researchers have also identified the problem to be production-oriented (Hollist and Tullis, 1987; Lofchie 1987; Chris Allen, 1989; Watts and Bassett, 1985).

The above presentation of the crisis is the most popular, and its evidence the most visible. The thesis that the crisis is a crisis of production is supported by two observations. First, aggregate production indices compiled by African governments and/or international agencies show that in most of the African countries agricultural output has stagnated or declined in recent years. Second, studies of development policy in Latin America and Asia (Little *et. al.*, 1970) showed that strategies of import-substituting industrialisation (widely practised in the 1950s and 1960s) tend to discriminate against agriculture. After independence, African governments frequently adopted similar policies with— it is argued—similar or worse results. In Africa's largely agrarian economies, the resulting decline in agricultural output not only led to food shortages and mounting balance of payment deficits, but also the entire process of economic underdevelopment.

A slightly different view is presented by a few other observers of the African dilemma. Sara Berry (1984) and Zaki Ergas (1982) contend that the food crisis should not be seen as an isolated crisis: it is part of a larger crisis of economic management. This crisis, they argue, is reflected in chronic balance of payment deficits, inflation, low productivity, corruption, waste, and deteriorating standards of living for all but a privileged few. Keith Griffin (1987) posits that the African problem should be seen primarily as hunger caused by poverty. He advances two theses: first, hunger is not primarily caused by inadequate production, and cannot be eliminated merely by increasing production. Rather the fundamental cause of hunger is poverty, and the way to eliminate hunger is to combat poverty. Secondly, poverty is created not so much by the absence of growth as by the characteristics and the styles of growth itself.

A similar departure from defining the African crisis as a crisis of underproduction is evident in the works of Brown and Wolf (1985), Riddell and Campbell (1986), Galli (1987) and Apeldoorn (1981). These authors see the problem as one of ecological deterioration which is complicated by a fast expanding population. To them poor or fragile and declining soil fertility, deforestation, drought, and patterns of subsistence agriculture are responsible for the decline in agricultural output. With Africa's growing population (the fastest in the world), there is less and less food to feed more and more mouths every year.

Finally, there are those who argue that economic decline evidenced in the agrarian and industrial underproduction, drought, famine, and the tumultuous politics in Africa, are not manifestations of a crisis of economic management, ecological deterioration, external pressures, and war. Hyden (1983), Rothchild and Chazan (1988), Turok (1987), Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987), Sandbrook (1982) and Allen (1989) among others contend that the African crisis is a crisis of the state. This argument has several versions (some of them will be discussed later), but the general position is that the African state is overblown, overcentralised, patrimonial, elitist, personalist and authoritarian, and weak and exploitative. As a result of this, it cannot control and direct society, since it is preoccupied with political survival and material interests of those who control it.

For the purpose of this paper, the African crisis will be taken to denote loss of control by the leading political actors (states) over the socio-political and economic, as well as cultural forces that impact upon the process of development. Cultural forces would also include man's pressure on the environment and vice versa. The totality of these pressures on society and its inability to respond adequately, and in the right manner and time, results in the problems (i., e., manifestations of the crisis) enumerated earlier. As stated earlier, emphasising on symptoms or forms of the crisis will not rid Africa of the dangers of its people perishing from starvation, or put a stop to the decline it faces at the present.

Explaining the Problem

Implicit in the definitions of the African crisis are several explanations as to why Africa finds itself in the current situation. This section will be devoted to a critical review of the explanations suggested by the various schools of thought mentioned above. A detailed analysis and presentation will be attempted so as to see as many possible policy alternatives as possible. A detailed analysis is in order because sound and workable solutions to the crisis will, to a great extent, depend on a clear understanding and correct diagnosis of the problem.

The evidence on the African crisis shows that its explanation can be grouped into two broad categories. First, is a group of factors that can be said to be exogenous. The factors in this group include both those that can be characterised as man-made—such as adverse terms of trade and costs of war— and 'natural' factors such as drought and/or floods. We have quotation marks on the word *natural* because drought, for example, may not be natural as such. There is increasing evidence that man does influence the ecosystem in such ways that rainfall pattern is affected. The other category is comprised of factors that are commonly referred to as endogenous, and they include economic policies and administrative practices.

The Policy School

The said causes are given varying emphases by different authorities involved in the African development process. The vast majority of Africa's donors—USA, World Bank, IMF, the EEC and OECD—have become convinced that the continent's agricultural woes for example, are the result of inappropriate government policies. They contend that African governments have ubiquitous tendency to suppress producer prices, overvalue exchange rates, tolerate gross levels of mismanagement and corruption in agricultural parastatals, and to encourage forms of industrial development that sap the agricultural sector of vitally needed investment capital and production input.

This argument is also the main thesis of Bates (1981) and Galli (1987). They both acknowledge the role of drought, depressed state of international commodity markets, and externally provoked destabilisation. Yet, they argue that it is government policies that have brought the present African predicament. Specifically, they blame commercial, fiscal and exchange rate policies, and the response of the majority of rural producers. Galli is more emphatic in insisting that the agricultural policies adopted reflect a bias against peasant agriculture, relies upon a model of accumulation which includes the extraction of agricultural production through administered markets, neglects the rural producers, and emphasise on state farms and large scale production that is extremely inefficient.

Another version of the 'policy school' argument asserts that African governments intervene too much in regulating economies of their countries. The intervention does not serve the masses on whose behalf it is claimed to be made. The masses do not benefit because government or state intervention kills the spirit of competition, which is supposedly crucial to productivity. The conclusion drawn by this school of thought is that it is extremely unlikely that African agriculture will begin to recover unless there is a far-reaching reform in all areas mentioned.

The 'policy school' argument is flawed by a number of reasons: To begin with, the argument that the crisis is due to 'bad policies' is a description rather than an explanation of the problem, and one which gives us few clues as to how to begin to unravel its causes. While every commentator has blamed 'bad policies', none has come forward with a single reason as to why African governments pursue those so-called 'bad policies'. None of those who adopt this position ever admit that post-colonial regimes in Africa took office under pressure—from below, above, and within—to take responsibility for developing their economies, which meant they were obliged to adopt an interventionist stance toward economic activities and institutions.

What is more significant is that the critics do not see that this mandate was essentially contradictory. In most African economies, agriculture was, and still is, the principal source of both foreign exchange and domestic market. At the same time agriculture provides, and will continue for the foreseeable future, the principal tax base from which to draw government revenues, as well as the major source of savings for non-agricultural investment. Yet extracting surplus from farmers reduces agricultural output and income, and vice versa.

It is therefore important to note that African governments do not pursue the policies they pursue because of ignorance or desire to exploit their people. It has to be acknowledged that the form and effects of state policies towards agriculture were shaped, and are still being shaped, by the structure of economic, political, and social relationships among farmers, traders and consumers; and between them and state agencies and personnel.

Secondly, the 'policy school' seems to be convinced that a change in policies will revitalise African agriculture. But the problem, of course, lies in the fallacy of opposites. As Lofchie has pointed out, the fact that African agricultural decline has been brought about to a large degree by excessive government intervention does not necessarily sustain the conclusion that the magic of the free market will provide an adequate solution.

It is basically correct, nevertheless, that reform of Africa's agricultural policies is a necessary precondition for agrarian recovery. But that in itself is not sufficient. The countries that have fostered productive and successful agricultural systems feature a substantial degree of government involvement in their agricultural sectors. The governments of North America and the countries of the Western European Economic Community, for example, are deeply involved in the determination of agricultural prices, and in the formulation of economically desirable production targets. In our view the critical question for Africa, then, is not how to remove the state as an actor in the agricultural sector, but how to formulate a policy framework that combines government intervention with the forces of the market.

Thirdly, to argue that African governments should intervene less in their citizens' activities in order to increase their participation in the international economy is also a contradiction in terms. In today's global economy, integration into world markets requires that governments take responsibility for managing foreign transactions. This, in turn, requires effective management of the domestic economy. It is in the pursuit of this principle, for example, that the US government accused Japan, India and Brazil of restricting the import of US-made super-computers, satellites and lumber products. It was also reported that the US will negotiate under 'Super 301', a law that allows for retaliatory tariffs if no progress is made (*New York Times*, May 29, 1989).

Fourthly, it is unfair for Africa that the very forces which exhort African governments to relinquish control over domestic production and foreign transactions, also hold those governments responsible for managing their balance of payments and maintaining their credit-worthiness in international financial circles. Even if African governments had adopted the free market solution, there would still be two basic problems. On the one hand, the approach fails to recognise how Africa's export orientation has contributed to the present crisis, and on the other, it fails to acknowledge the realities of today's international economy. The world market for tropical agricultural goods has a decidedly zero-sum quality. One country's gain can only be purchased by another country's loss.

In pointing out the shortcomings of the basic tenets of the 'policy approach' which is used mainly by economists, our aim is not to defend the African governments' policies. Some of those policies are real disincentives to increased production and/or productivity. Rather, we want to point out that in criticising African governments for reducing incentives to agricultural producers, for example, economists often implicitly compare the existing situation to one in which state intervention is non-existent. Economic theory, as well as the facts of African political economy, suggest that this comparison is unrealistic. No market system functions in a political vacuum, nor would perfect competition survive for long if it ever existed. The present crisis can neither be understood in terms of poor policies pursued by African governments, nor be resolved by adopting the free market solution. Other causes have to be identified and solutions suggested.

The Resource-Base Approach

The second major explanation for the African crisis is one that adopts an ecological outlook. The main thesis here is that the continent is experiencing a systematic breakdown in the relationship between people and their natural support systems. This breakdown is brought about by such factors as soil erosion, deforestation, declining rainfall, overgrazing, and population explosion. Under the stresses imposed by growing populations, environmental and climatic deterioration are reinforcing each other in Africa.

It is an established fact, for example, that rainfall over land comes from two sources: (i) moisture-laden air masses moving inland from the oceans, and (ii) evapotranspiration over the land itself. When forests are cleared, runoff increases and evapotranspiration is reduced. The result of this process is multifaceted. First, rainfall decreases and drought sets in, affecting agricultural production as well as productivity. Second, the earth is laid bare due to decline in vegetation cover, and this increases soil erosion. Soil degradation makes the land unsuitable for farming, and thus crop yield is lower than normal. Overgrazing also causes soil erosion through breaking of the earth's top soil which is rich in crop nutrients. It also decreases vegetation cover with the same disastrous consequences. In the final analysis, it is man who suffers from the general breakdown of the support systems.

The leading protagonists of this argument—which is gaining currency in African policy circles—advocate what they call a 'resource-base' strategy to resolve the African crisis (Brown and Wolf, 1985:65). Their suggestion is simple at first sight but, as we shall see later, it is complicated when one closely examines it with a view to seeing what the policy implications are. Brown and Wolf suggest that slowing population growth, conserving soils, restoring forests and woodlands, and enhancing subsistence agriculture are sure to be the cornerstones of successful efforts to re-establish working economies in Africa.

Riddell and Campbell (1986: 85-106) attribute the African crisis to pressure by population growth over fragile (poor) soils. Quoting Faruquee and Gulhati (1983:25), they point out that Africa is suffering from a significant acceleration of population growth of between 2% and 3% or more per annum, while the corresponding increase in food production is running between 1% and 2% or less. Riddell and Campbell's solution is not to conserve the fragile soils or brake population growth, but to pursue two strategies. One is mechanisation, and the other learning from the people. However, they point out that the first option should be followed cautiously as studies by the IFPRI (1975) and FAO (1978) show that it is costly. The second option to them seems more appropriate, and their conclusion is based on a study they did in Cameroon. Their study addressed questions such as the nature of resource management developed to cope with high population density in a marginal environment.

This proposition will have to be applicable not only to the Cameroons but to all or most parts of Africa. At any rate, their suggestion is not devoid of problems (as we will discuss later), but one important point they raise is the need to evolve local knowledge and expertise in solving the African dilemma. They are raising the issue of participation and mobilisation that may have not been given serious thought in tackling the crisis. As we shall point out in the next few pages, the issue of participation and mobilisation has to be extended beyond national borders to international organisations and agencies.

Apeldoorn (1981) carries the discussion of ecology or resource-base approach further, and examines the extent to which a society controls its environment. He starts from a general proposition that to understand disasters, we have to examine the process of development and underdevelopment. The general argument runs somewhat like this: "True development is an ecological process in which a 'society' increases its capacity for dealing with the environment, including extreme environmental conditions that produce disaster." (Apeldoorn 1981: 7). According to this analysis, the capacity for dealing with the environment depends on three things. First, the extent to which society understands the laws of nature, i.e., science. Secondly, the extent to which society puts that understanding into practice, i.e., technology. Thirdly, the manner in which society is organised.

The implication of Apeldoorn's thesis is that the African crisis is a result of Africa's failure to control environment. In other words, Africa is suffering because it has no independent scientific and technological base. It is dependent on external sources, and the dependency means that it does not have control of its own resources. Apeldoorn states clearly that the blame should be directed to the people, and more specifically to those who are in positions to use or make decisions to use society's resources. The significance of this proposition is that it directs our attention to the question of relationships between environmental and climatic factors and social organisation, science and technology.

The resource-base/ecological approach seems to balance the causes for the African crisis, and not to stress too much on the management side. This being the case, we ought to examine the individual proposition and see whether or not they can be effected and the problem alleviated. To begin with, one has to understand that the crisis confronting Africa needs to be tackled at two levels. First, short term plans to stop the immediate disaster of people starving to death. Secondly, long term plans to arrest the falling industrial and agricultural productivity, in general, and food production in particular.

It is important to note at the outset that all those quoted above seem to concentrate on long term perspectives, suggesting measures that will create a balance between human needs and resources. The long term solutions proposed have to be implemented now, and since some of them have immediate repercussions on the policy process, we would want to take a closer look so as to see how best they can be effected without causing further crises.

Starting with Apeldoorn, one can note that he stands for Africa pursuing a development policy that will allow it to pursue an independent course in the field of science and technology. He also seems to be arguing for a policy/strategy of holding people responsible, and not put the blame to such things as 'natural causes' or 'factors beyond man's control'. Apeldoorn's suggestion—creating an independent scientific and technological base—is theoretically correct, but very difficult to implement. In the first place, he does not say how that independent base may be created. Secondly, he assumes that the rest of the world, especially the dominant producers of science and technology, will allow Africa to be self-reliant in the two areas. Thirdly, Apeldoorn does not appear to appreciate the historical fact that Africa's technological backwardness is a result of deliberate action that began in the colonial days, and was maintained thereafter.

The strategy advanced by Apeldoorn can only work if there was cooperation, and not competition, among the dominant centres of science and technology. Secondly, it could thrive if Africa could isolate itself and had enough resources to cater for its basic social needs. Given the interdependent nature of the world economy and socio-political fabric, there is no way African governments singly or collectively can opt for an isolationist strategy. The very fact that most of them barely survive due to massive aid and loans which, incidentally, dr them deeper into the debt crises, rules out the possibility of breaking from th ties with the sources of that assistance. This fact notwithstanding, the systems of Western Europe, North America, as well Japan are based on competition, and they complain against each other bitterly. It is inconceivable that they would allow another source of competition (united and strong Africa) to emerge and tip the already fragile balance against them. Nonetheless, Apeldoorn's argument is important to the extent that it alerts African states to the need to develop scientific and technological support systems that depend less and less on borrowed technical know-how.

The difficulty that African states may encounter in the process of developing an independent scientific and technological base also militates against Riddel and Campbell's mechanisation solution. Mechanising agriculture, for example, would entail importing technology which has to be paid for either in cash or by credit. Since Africa is already in debt, the cost of borrowing more for mechanising purposes would be unbearable. It will deliver the death blow to the declining capacity to meet present obligations. Though the option is for all purposes theoretically sound, it is not operationally feasible, given the current obtaining conditions.

Riddel and Campbell's second option, 'learning from the people' raises a number of important points. First, it draws our attention to local efforts to combat the crisis. Secondly, it tries to argue that solutions should not only be passed down from the top: the grassroots can also be a source of ideas and practical strategies to solve the problem. Thirdly, it appears to say that the crisis can be resolved by total mobilisation of all social forces and resources, with cooperation as the key concept. This proposition has several policy assumptions and/or implications. In the first place, it rightly assumes that policy decisions are made at the top and handed down for implementation. The question that arises is: are African heads of state/governments prepared and willing to share decision-making powers with the grassroots? This is a difficult question to answer, but for all practical purposes, a survey of literature on participation, delegation and decentralisation in Africa does not indicate that the policy-makers are willing and ready to share their monopoly of power (Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema, 1983).

The second policy issue that has to be considered in relation to this proposition is that Africa's resources have not been used to develop Africa. Part of it has been taken out by local and powerful interests. Studies on corruption in the third world by Gould (1980), and the effects of personal rule in Africa by Jackson and Roseberg (1982) lend incontrovertible evidence to that effect. Therefore, Africa's meagre resources have to be complemented by external sources. Two questions have to be resolved first if the option is to work at all. One, how to stamp out corruption in African administrative systems, and second, is the rest of the world prepared to bail out Africa?

Assuming that there is a political will to stamp out administrative corruption and that the international community agrees to help Africa, there still remain other policy matters that will have to be resolved for the strategy to be effective. Foremost is the question of leadership and coordination. Leadership will be needed to coordinate the international effort. Brown and Wolf (1985: 67) inform us that in earlier times, the United States provided such leadership. It led the reconstruction of Europe and Japan after World War II. In 1966 and 1967 it shipped a fifth of its wheat crop to India in a highly successful effort to stave off famine after two monsoon failures in that country. We are further informed that the United States does not now appear to have the leadership, even if it had the will. This gloomy picture is complicated by the fact that within Africa itself there are no strong enough institutions to provide that leadership.

At the international level, only the World Bank appears to be institutionally strong enough to lead such an effort. But it is not ideally suited for this role. The Bank's experience lies primarily in carrying out large-scale development projects, not in local mobilisation of the kind needed in Africa. This fact notwithstanding, the Bank's image—especially it's insistence, together with the IMF—for fiscal and monetary policy changes imposed on African states would not instil the needed confidence for those countries. As stated earlier, the policies pursued by these two financial giants have not alleviated any of the problems afflicting Africa.

Another serious policy decision has to be made on ways and means of braking population growth in Africa. The controversy surrounding the issue of population explosion appears to dwarf all other efforts to mobilise people to plant trees, build soil conservation, and enhance subsistence agriculture. The population issue is particularly critical not only because it grows every year and puts more strain on an already weak and declining resource base, but also because of the fact that it touches religious sentiments about the role of the family. Since population growth, more than any other factor, puts the biggest pressure on resources, African countries both singly and collectively need to have a clear and unequivocal commitment to family planning. A recent study (Jacobson 1987: 37) shows, however, that a commitment to population policy and family planning is no longer a problem in African countries. For example, thirteen of the forty two Sub-Saharan countries have issued explicit population policies. Eleven of these countries, including Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia, have incorporated policies specifically aimed at population problems into their development plans. The problem remains to be the disparity between the strength of a policy statement and the real yardstick of priorities, and government expenditure.

The prescriptions of the 'resource-base approach' appear to be feasible, given the right attitude and commitment to match resources with policy pronouncements. The 'resource-base approach' however, does not tell us how the African countries are going to solve the problem of weak institutions. It does not even acknowledge the existence of the problem, let alone say how it arose and how it could be dealt with.

The third major set of explanatory propositions to the African crisis tries to provide answers to these questions. But like any other theory or approach, it has got its own shortcomings which have to be overcome for its suggestions to hold water.

The Institutional Approach

The institutional approach begins by acknowledging that Africa is facing an unprecedented crisis, exemplified by the economic and environmental decline. The school points out that this view is correct but not sufficient to explain the crisis. The advocates of this view argue that the crisis should primarily be seen as a political crisis characterised by Africa's failure to control and direct (social development) society. Individual positions among those who take this argument differ as we shall show later, but generally they argue that the loss of control stems from the weakness of the state in Africa.

As to why the state is weak in Africa, there are two broad explanations. One is external circumstances and pressure, which is historical more than anything else. The blame here is put on the colonial administration and what it stood for. The colonial legacy left Africa with fragile institutions which could not transform themselves into strong institutions because of a weak economic base bequeathed by the ex-colonial powers and the international economic order that favours them. The other explanation is internal circumstances: that the weaknesses of the African state is a function of 'pathological patronialism' that diverts the resources, energy, capacity and political will of African states from the tasks of development and democratisation, into the enrichment of a rapacious horde of venal officials.

The view that the African state is weak and therefore cannot discharge its functions properly is held by many observers of the African development process. Rothchild and Chazan (1988) and Kwame Ninsin (1988), for example, assert that the crisis of the state in post-colonial Africa is a function of its nature as an authoritarian control structure, preoccupied with the political survival and material interests of those who control it. Others argue that despite its historic weakness, the state has expanded—in terms of the resources it controls—in the post-colonial period, and has come to constitute both an avenue for personal accumulation and rent-seeking (Krueger 1979), and a systematic barrier to disciplined growth (Ergas 1982).

Hyden (1983) and Sandbrook (1982) provide detailed accounts of how the issue raised by Ergas and Krueger respectively can be seen in present-day Africa. With particular reference to Tanzania, Hyden explains the economic problems not by external dependency, but by the state's alleged inability to 'capture' the peasantry. The nature of the peasant mode of production, he argues, leaves the state with no structural roots in society, but 'suspended in mid-air' above society. The Tanzanian 'soft state' is therefore incapable of achieving successful development because it is at the mercy of the peasants' 'economy of affection'.

Sandbrook, on the other hand, tries to explain the African economic plight by looking at networks of patron-client relations. He argues that such networks exist everywhere in Africa and they extract economic resources from the state in the context of intense factionalism. Factions are based on personal networks in which material rewards and loyalty are exchanged. So rather than using the resources to solve social problems, the politicians involved use it to maintain themselves in power. In that way the behaviour of those involved in the network transactions constitute a strong barrier to development.

The institutional approach has several suggestions by way of solution to the problem it diagnoses as a weak state. The suggested solutions range from one extreme ideological position to another. Nzongola-Ntalaga (1987), adopting what we would call an extreme Marxist posture, calls for the smashing of the inherited state; replacing it with a 'people's state'. The problem with this strategy is that it is not clear who will smash the post-colonial state. It is also not said what the 'people's state' will look like, and how different it will be from the present state in African countries.

Another problem with this view of the crisis is that it does not consider the immediate problems that affect the people. In other words, while the 'bourgeois' state is being smashed and a 'people's state' installed, who will take care of law and order? We are also not informed as to how those who are on the brink of death because of starvation will be taken care of during the 'transition' from the 'bourgeois' to the 'people's state'. It is easy to checklist the defeat of popular struggles, tell us about the defect of contemporary African states, and the springs of mass discontent. But the extreme view taken by people like Ntalaja does not help us understand what form of state will solve the problems.

Hyden and Sandbrook are more explicit in their recommendations, and it is possible to see what the impact of those recommendations may be. Hyden sees the solution in the form of policies that will encourage the flourishing of a market economy. He argues that only the market economy and a degree of capitalism can break the economy of affection and provide the state with sufficient control. But what Hyden does not tell us is why the capitalist oriented states in Africa suffer the same problems as those of Tanzania, 'a socialist' country he based his study upon. He talks of creating a new class of entrepreneurs who will spearhead the destruction of the economy of affection. In this regard we do not get much from Hyden, in so far as his thesis fails to provide a theory of the genesis of a bourgeois class, and a coherent explanation of why this class has been retarded in Africa.

Sandbrook, on the other hand, suggests that institutionalisation is the answer to the ills of personal rule and patron-client network politics. Organised political opposition would check the networks based on personal loyalty. The problem in this strategy is that by the time African policy makers have attained that level of institutionalisation, the current crisis would have reached a dangerous level. The strategy does not help us to solve the immediate problems, it concentrates only on the long term perspective. That perspective is not worthless; but what we are looking forward to is a strategy that will alleviate the present crisis, at the same time laying the foundation to prevent it in the future.

What is to Be Done?

The foregoing discussion indicates that Africa faces a plethora of crises: the food crisis, the energy crisis, the balance of trade crisis, the debt crisis, and the crisis of economic management. Added to these are the climatic and ecological crises as reflected in the increasing desertification of the continent, persistent droughts, crop failures, hunger and famine. There is also the political crisis which is reflected in the absence of national unity, civil strife and wars. It is therefore not possible to prescribe a single (policy) solution to alleviate Africa's decline. What Africa needs is a comprehensive, multifaceted, and frontal strategy to attack the ills that afflict its people. Such a strategy inevitably requires that both local and international forces—resources and institutions/agencies—to join hands to fight the decline.

As a starting point Africa needs peace. A political solution to the war in Angola (where a truce was recently negotiated), Mozambique, Chad, Uganda, Ethiopia, Western Sahara, Sudan, and Namibia should be sought immediately. It may appear unreasonable to reach an amicable political settlement to the parties involved in the conflict, but history has taught us that the kind of war going on in those countries cannot be won by either side. Continued escalation of the war will aggravate matters, whereas a negotiated political solution will be advantageous for several reasons.

First, the current defence expenditure in the respective countries would be reduced probably to pre-war levels. Military expenditure in those countries is very high, and since the war cannot be won it is a complete waste. The money to be freed from military spending can be put to other uses. The available figures are alarming. According to a UNICEF (1987), the share of the national budget that goes to recurrent defence costs in Mozambique is 42 percent, one of the highest in the world. Angola's defence budget is much larger than Mozambique's in absolute terms, and may absorb a comparable percentage of total spending. Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe also have large armed forces, and Zimbabwe is spending in the order of US $3 million a week to defend its own and the region's trade routes through Mozambique. The effects of such spending on the availability of funds for health, education, water and food security in such poor countries is self-evident.

Secondly, wars affect not only the countries that are engulfed in the actual fighting, but also their neighbours. A negotiated settlement would relieve the whole neighbourhood of massive economic costs in several areas, including destruction of assets, enforced military spending, higher transport costs, lost output, or the need for relief and survival support to large numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Again the UNICEF report is very instructive on this. It reports:

> An estimate of physical damage and its consequences, prepared by the Angolan government in conjunction with the United Nations, totals US $17 billion for that country alone over 1975-1985. Mozambique has estimated its losses over 1980-1985 at US $5.5 billion. To understand the broader implication, these figures must be considered in relation to others. For example, US $5.5 billion represents about three times the total production of the war-ravaged Mozambican economy in 1985 (UNICEF 1985: 18).

Thirdly, loss of life and property would be averted. In the case of Mozambique, there are at least three categories of deaths caused by military and economic destabilisation. The first concerns deaths caused directly by military action. Secondly, there are deaths where, because of the combination of drought and the security situation, food is not available. The third category is that of rising infant and child mortality as a result of the interlinking effects of malnutrition, disease and a breakdown in the network of rural health services. Mozambique has recently estimated its military and civilian deaths at 100,000 in the years 1975-1985 "...from action by Rhodesian, South African and armed bandits" (UNICEF 1987: 19). When peace is restored in the war-ravaged countries, national plans for family planning (population control), soil conservation, tree planting and improved agricultural production can take place. Neighbouring countries will also be relieved of the burden of caring for refugees, for example. A war free Africa will be able to pull resources together to combat backwardness and improve economic performance. It will also make it easier for countries that distrust each other to cooperate in the struggle to rebuild their shattered economies.

The second step for Africa has to be a collective action to ease its debt burden. Africa should negotiate with its major creditors and leading financial institutions to assume and share risks. Creditors, for example, should be persuaded to write-off debts on projects that fail to work. In the same vein, financial institutions such as the IMF should be persuaded and made to stop controlling the least developed countries' economies. Fiscal and monetary measures such as the IMF's structural adjustment programs have had no positive impact on the African economies. It is important for these institutions and agents of development to review their policies toward Africa and the rest of the third world.

These measures at the international level should also be supplemented by concrete action at the local/national level in each African state. First, African states can form regional economic groupings like the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Such groups would be economically viable and more stronger than individual countries to pursue policies which facilitate influx of foreign capital on better terms. If such economic groupings are supplemented with preferential trade agreements (PTAs), then Africa can collectively seek and implement policies that would tie industry to agriculture. Collective regional self-reliance would be possible through cooperation rather than competition. On a regional basis, Africa can also boost industrial and agricultural production by offering higher producer prices, and fairly cheap consumer items.

With peace restored in most war-torn countries, unity achieved within and among countries, improved productivity, and consumer items made available to the people at reasonable prices, the current levels of corruption would be checked, if not eliminated altogether. A relatively corruption-free bureaucracy would be more reliable to implement government policies in those priority sectors such as agriculture. A satisfied agricultural extension officer is more likely to discharge his duties and help peasant farmers than one who is dissatisfied. It is also reasonable to expect a well-paid bureaucracy to handle relief aid diligently, and ensure that the target population is served.

The steps and measures listed above raise a number of questions that need to be considered in the wake of the urgent need to halt Africa's decline. First, are the political leaders of Africa prepared to make tough decisions needed to reverse the decline? Second, is the international community prepared to mobilise to help Africa save itself? Third, can African governments and the international development community adopt a development strategy based on comprehensive and environmental—rather than narrow and economic goals—that restores and preserves natural support systems rather than meeting a specified rate of return on investment in a particular project?

Answers to these questions may not be easy to give, but there are indicators that can help us guess the real feelings of those concerned. Browne and Cummings (1984) shed light on the first question. They tell us that African politicians are more than willing to end the tragedy, but resources let them down. In April 1980, African heads of state met in Lagos, Nigeria, to endorse the Lagos Plan of Action, a blueprint for the continent's long-term development aimed at economic integration, and calling for a strategy of collective self-reliance. But deepening economic crisis has prevented African leaders from making much progress towards these goals.

International support is therefore needed to bolster the will of the African leaders. The needed international support is not always forthcoming, and when it is, it is not geared to help Africa but to beef up its own interests. The World Bank and the IMF, for example, are criticised for prescribing solutions that do not solve the economic crisis. In a recent book, Lawrence (1986: 5) summarises the indictment of many contributors when he writes: "there would appear to be agreement here that the IMF and the World Bank are policing the international system largely in the interests of maintaining and expanding this system. Within that function, the power of the USA in terms of voting rights and rights to appoint key functionaries is a means of maintaining US hegemony within the system."

In the light of this it is difficult to answer the third question in the affirmative. However, the crisis that Africa is experiencing has to be seen not only as an African crisis because its repercussions spreads beyond the continent's borders. If Africa fails to meet its debt obligations, for example, international financial institutions will suffer. If Africa fails to produce more agricultural products and sell abroad, the industrial world economy is interlocked in a dependency arrangements such that one part's problems becomes the problems of the whole system.

The international community, therefore, has a role to play in helping Africa to halt the decline. They have to formulate contingent plans to resolve the immediate problems, especially those of plants operating at below capacity, shortages of necessary inputs, low productivity in agriculture, and of declining terms of trade for primary products. A 'Marshal Plan' kind of strategy may not be a bad idea if the international community decides to act decisively to help Africa save itself.

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