The debt crisis, the global economy and the challenges of development: sub Saharan Africa at the crossroads

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ABSTRACT

Current initiatives by the G7 and other Western creditors to write off the debts of the world's heavily indebted countries, the majority of which are in sub Saharan Africa, has interested both African states themselves and among non-governmental organizations working towards poverty alleviation. If this is implemented, governments will no longer have to divert large proportions of national revenue away from development to debt-servicing obligations. This article argues, however, that sub Saharan Africa debt is attributable to both internal and external factors, aggravated by the hostile global economy and by the lending conditionalities of international financial institutions. The paper is optimistic that unconditional debt cancellation will allow sub Saharan Africa to emerge from decay and stagnation. However, it warns that, while it is a necessary condition for improvement, debt cancellation alone is not sufficient to reverse the despondency into which sub Saharan Africa has fallen. Debt cancellation must be augmented by interrelated domestic policies such as deepening democratization, striving towards gender parity, stemming conditions that precipitate incessant conflicts, reversing the region's crumbling environmental conditions, and fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

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Introduction

In 1996 the industrialized countries instituted a scheme aimed at writing off the debt of heavily indebted Third World countries. Aptly called the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) initiative, the scheme has excited exhilaration not only among African states who are increasingly unable to repay their debts, but also among non-governmental organizations working towards poverty alleviation in the Third World. The exhilaration has been heightened by the known linkage between debt and the development crisis of sub Saharan Africa. It is generally believed that sub Saharan Africa's debt has been partly responsible for the stalling of development and the deterioration in the quality of life in the region.

This thinking is reinforced by the frequent diversion of large proportions of national revenues away from development into debt servicing and other debt repayment obligations. Consequently, as some states in the developing world, especially those in Asia, develop resilience and find niches in the increasingly competitive global market, the capacity in sub Saharan Africa to meet the exigencies of development is truncated. The debt in our region is the result of the interplay of internal and external factors, although the dominant international financial institutions mostly emphasize the former.

This article analyses the causes of sub Saharan Africa's debt and related hurdles to development. It argues that there is a correlation between debt and the development crisis in sub Saharan Africa. Contrary to neoclassical assumptions, the origins of sub Saharan Africa's debt are both internal and external, aggravated not only by the international economy on whose margins Africa is located, but also by the inauspicious lending conditionalities of the international financial institutions. The initiative towards debt cancellation is necessary not sufficient to reverse the developmental malaise of the region.

The paper suggests that the unconditional cancellation of debt augmented by such domestic policies as deepening democratization, striving towards gender parity, stemming conditions that precipitate and facilitate incessant conflicts, reversing the crumbling environmental situation in the region and fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic, will hasten sub Saharan Africa's emergence from decay.

The first part of the article seeks conceptual clarity on the notion of development. The second examines the causes of sub Saharan Africa's debt, the third makes a case for debt cancellation and exposes the contradictions in the HIPC initiative, while the fourth, whichexamines the way forward, is followed by a short conclusion.

Conceptual framework

HISTORICALLY, DIFFERENT, often contradictory, conceptual frameworks have informed the concept and meaning of "development". The limitation imposed by space in this paper does not permit a comprehensive review of these frameworks. Nevertheless, I make some cursory observations on three—Marxism/structuralism, modernization and basic needs—in an attempt to place the concept of development in perspective for the current discussion. These conceptual frameworks are briefly reviewed in turn.

Marxism is one of the earliest conceptual approaches to the analysis and definitions of development. Marxism perceives development in terms of the reordering of socioeconomic relations in society. Marx viewed a developed society as one that has successfully purged itself of exploitations and abolished class distinctions in favour of an egalitarian social system. Marx's ideas were developed by radical development economists who blamed the underdevelopment in their societies on the exploitative role of foreign capital. The policy prescription emerging from this perspective is state intervention and the establishment of social democracy to mitigate exploitation.

The problem with Marx and the general structuralist perspective is their reductionism. Both Marx and his later disciples believed that once the means of production were socialized the fruits of development would inevitably be reaped. The experiences of contemporary communist China and the now defunct Soviet Union, which were good laboratories for testing Marxist assumptions, have scarcely vindicated these radical assertions.

Similarly, with the coming into vogue of the modernization theory in the 1960s, development was defined in terms of a society's movement away from traditional practices towards western modes of life.

Specifically, development was measured in terms of the degree to which a society extricated itself from the shackles of primitive practices in favour of "modern" values. Economistic in outlook, the modernization process was perceived as a linear process ending at a specific point. Rostow's (1960) stage theory, which depicted societies as passing through various stages to full scale development, is one classic exposition of the modernization theory. Rostow believed that the institution of liberal market principles hastened a society's transition from one stage to the next. Thus the key policy thrust of modernization is the establishment of a capitalist economic system that runs on the principles of the free market. Modernization theory implicitly equated development to a western-styled democratic and a capital-oriented society with scientific methods of production.

Although popular, the modernization framework has come under telling criticism for its implicit attempt to standardize western values for all societies, thereby disregarding the wide cultural differences that exist among States. To assume, for example, that a society is not developed until democratic institutions modelled after the West are established is to depict democracy—erroneously—as the end of history. Some have warned that democracy neither offers an automatic panacea to underdevelopment, nor guarantees improvements in the quality of life (Schmitter and Karl 1991; Shepherd 1998:2). Even more difficult, modernization theory did not foresee the future centrality of the conservation of the environment in sustainable development; defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (World Commission on the Environment and Development 1990:43). Accordingly, modernization can hardly provide a holistic paradigm of development.

Another framework which influences the development discourse in Africa, and upon which this paper is based, is the basic needs approach. Various authors have expatiated upon it. The social psychologist, Abraham Maslow perceived development in terms of the satisfaction of certain basic human needs, including food, shelter, sleep and sex. To him, the route to high-stage human development is initiated from low-stage economic development and proceeds through intermediate social development. Social development in turn entails social security, stability, order, social integration and group belongingness. A human being thus proceeds to higher social development when those basic needs are fulfilled (Maslow 1954). Maslow's thoughts have been criticized for focusing on the development of the individual rather than on the collectivity of the nation. This criticism, however, fails to recognize that a nation is composed of individuals; that national development is meaningless if it does not translate into improving upon the conditions of the individual. Indeed, as Vehnamaki (1999) has noted, Maslow's ideas emphasize links between economic development and socio-human development, in particular the fact that economic development constitutes the foundation for human development.

In contrast to the methodology of Maslow, yet consistent with the basic needs approach, Seers (1972:124), conceives of development mainly in economic terms and within the broader needs of society. Although his conceptualization is by no means flawless, it nonetheless captures some of the key indices of what is generally accepted in Africa as encompassing development. He notes:

> The questions to ask about a country's development are...:what has been happening to poverty?...to unemployment? [and] to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result "development", even if per capita income doubled.

Like Maslow, Seers projects a concept of development that is people-centred. Its basic tenet, in contrast to the ideas of modernization, is the establishment of a welfare system that protects vulnerable sections of society from the dangers of the market, to ensure a balanced and sustainable human development. Although Seers' conceptualization is economistic and thus excludes political and environmental issues, it is nevertheless appropriate for the present discussion. This is because poverty, unemployment and deepening inequalities, along with their attendant ancillaries such as crime, violence and AIDS, are among the most visible features of the political economy of sub Saharan Africa.

In this paper, therefore, we conceive of development within the basic needs framework. Development here means holistic and progressive improvements in the economic, social, political and environmental conditions of a nation (WCED 1987:43), which translate into improvements in the quality of life through meeting basic human needs. We surmise that sub Saharan Africa's inability to improve upon the quality of life of its population has been partly due to the pressures exerted by its external debt.

Sub Saharan Africa's debt—causes and escalation

THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE precipitating the adoption of structural adjustment programmes in Africa was the continent's socioeconomic crises, which was growing out of control by the 1970s. Central to this crisis was the region's debt, which has been growing astronomically since the last two decades. In 1974, for example, sub Saharan Africa's total debt stood at $14.8 billion. By 1984 it had risen to $91 billion and rose further to $217 billion by 1993, representing 12 per cent of the total debt of $1,812 billion owed by developing countries. South Asia's share was then 8 per cent while the corresponding percentage for East Asia and the Pacific was 20. The debt is currently at a staggering $233 billion, although some sources put it even higher (Parfitt and Riley 1989:88; *The Nation* 14 May 1998).

The rapid escalation of sub Saharan Africa's debt is now well known. However, the causes of the debt have generated a debate, which has featured two main perspectives—the neoconservative view represented by Africa's creditors and the radical view espoused by African leaders. The neoconservative view traces the origins of Africa's debt to the pursuit of discredited and self-destructive internal policies. Reflecting old beliefs in modernization and neoclassicalism, it identifies state intervention and the consequent stalling of market forces as core causes. These ideas were set out in a World Bank Report (1981), which identified, *inter alia,* import substitution industrialization, overvaluation of local currencies, state expansion and the inefficiency of the State. Other economic factors identified in this perspective were corruption and the reckless use of loans, which were wasted on prestigious and unprofitable projects (Lever and Huhne 1985). Additionally, the neoconservative perspective locates Africa's debt in such ruinous political factors as personal rule and clientelism, which, along with their intrinsic predatory and rent-seeking tendencies, have undermined effective governance and facilitated economic decline (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Sandbrook 1985).

In contrast to the conservative view, the radical perspective sees Africa's debt as externally generated. It explains Africa's debt and its general economic crisis within a broader historical context rooted in dependency theory. At the core of this explanation is the incorporation of Africa into the global economy which, while playing an essentially peripheral role, also became overly dependent on the capitalist economy. Africa, the argument goes, was made to develop monocrop agriculture and primary economies driven primarily by agriculture, which remained vulnerable to the vagaries of the world market. This in turn created unfavourable terms of trade, generated chronic balance of payment problems, and consequently spawned new pressures towards borrowing from external sources (Korner *et al.,* 1986).

But if balance of payments led to sub Saharan Africa's initial indebtedness, the debt itself became a self-generating phenomenon that created an even heavier debt burden on the borrowers. Rescheduling (the arranged postponement of debt repayment) became a conventional method of debt management by sub Saharan Africa countries. Of the 42 countries rescheduling their debts between 1975 and 1985, 19 were from sub Saharan Africa and of the 144 debt rescheduled worldwide during the same period, 67 were for sub Saharan Africa (Callaghy 1987:154).

Yet rescheduling has compounded the debt as debtors have had to pay more in interest than they had originally borrowed. In the four-year period 1986–1990, for example, the IMF extracted through debt rescheduling over $3 billion more than it gave to low-income countries in sub Saharan Africa (*New African*:32). As a result of rescheduling, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo—DRC), paid $191 million more to its creditors than it received in 1984 alone. On aggregate, as a result of rescheduling, sub Saharan Africa's interest payments rose from $221 million in 1980 to $7.2 billion in 1989 (Kraus 1994:251; *New African*, 32). Thus, although foreign loans were supposed to alleviate the recipient's budgetary crisis, the result in practice is that debtors are constantly digging a new pit to fill the old one. A bigger and deeper pit always remains to be filled.

Compounding the debt of sub Saharan Africa was the process of debt-servicing. As sub Saharan Africa governments strengthened their determination to demonstrate a capacity to repay debt in order to establish credit-worthiness, a greater percentage of new loans and export earnings were committed to servicing existing debt. Cameroon, for example, spent 36 per cent of its national budget on debt service during the 1996/97 fiscal year compared to only 4 per cent on basic social services. Similarly, Tanzania's debt payments were four times what it spent on primary education and nine times what it spent on basic health during the 1996/97 year. Although some countries such as Swaziland and Lesotho committed only 5 per cent of their export earnings to debt servicing, others like Somalia committed as high as 112 per cent (*West Africa* 1993:16–22). Such high debt service ratios led inevitably to further externa' borrowing as virtually nothing was left for development.

Further causes of sub Saharan Africa's debt were the two oil shocks of 1973–1974 and 1979–1980. To be sure, the responsibility of the oil crises in escalating sub Saharan Africa's debt has remained debatable since, in the face of increased oil revenues, the debt of some major oil-exporting countries like Nigeria and Mexico increased. Generally, however, consequent on these oil shocks, the combined deficit of oil-importing developing countries rose from $11.3 billion in 1973 to $37 billion in 1974 and expanded further from $42 billion in 1978 to $88 billion in 1980 (Hallberg 1986). Even in normal times oil-importing countries in sub Saharan Africa committed nearly half of their total export earnings to meeting energy requirements. During the oil crises, therefore, much of sub Saharan Africa's revenue went into the payment of oil bills, creating the need for more external loans. In addition, the oil crises created global recessions, which drove down the prices of primary commodities upon which the economic fortunes of most sub Saharan

Africa countries depended (Nyerere 1986). The two oil crises were thus responsible at the least for the escalation of sub Saharan Africa's debt.

The abatement of the Cold War placed Africa in an ambivalent position on the world stage; a position that diminished its prospects for attracting foreign capital. On the one hand, it has become heavily dependent on the international financial institutions and the global economy through aid and structural adjustment programmes. On the other hand, and more poignantly, Africa is being marginalized in the global economy. This is reflected in two interrelated developments—its receipt of shrinking development aid, which dropped from more than $8 billion to $1 billion between 1983 and 1990; and declining direct foreign investment. Since the late 1980s foreign capital has been gravitating away from the continent. For example, British companies (numbering some 139) investing in Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe declined to 96 during the 1980–1990 period (*Africa Recovery* 4 1 1990:18–19).

In addition to the trend of disinvestment, which possibly were the consequences of conflicts and insecurity and the discovery of new investment opportunities in Eastern Europe, Africa also witnessed a rapid dwindling of net nonconcessional aid, a trend that has since been persisting (Callaghy 1991:14). In 1994 aid to Africa totalled $23.4 billion. This declined to $17 billion in 1998, while that for sub Saharan Africa fell from $18 billion to $13.5 billion within the same period (*Africa Recovery* 2000 14 1:7). Similarly, although new loan commitments by international banks to developing countries increased from $20.6 billion in 1990 to $28 billion in 1991, the proportion destined for Africa declined from $0.6 billion to $0.4 billion over the same period (IMF, 1992:77). Official funding has also been drying up. Between 1991 and 1997, grants and net lending from official funding declined in real terms by more than one-third from $66 billion to $44 billion, which experts say is barely sufficient to cover interest payments (UNDP 1997).

Africa's marginalization is further complicated by globalization, which conventional wisdom claims will hasten the eradication of poverty. So far, as economies across the world become globalized and unified, many developing countries continue to face difficulties in integrating into the fast-expanding global economy. This problem has been particularly acute for sub Saharan Africa where the convergence of debt, inflation and a narrow export base concentrated in primary commodities, has attenuated the competitiveness of the region's economies, and reducing its ability to be a conspicuous member of the "global village" (Akokpari 2001). The establishment of the World Trade Organization, and the Uruguay Round Agreements to supervise trade among states, along with the conclusion of the Multilateral Agreement on Investments have complemented the conditionalities of the IMF—the unloved policeman of capitalism—in facilitating the exploitation and appropriation of the resources of developing countries by big multinational corporations (Tandon 1998).

In this process the industrialized economies are the ultimate beneficiaries. As Giddens (1999) observed in his Reith Lectures on globalization, the share of the poorest fifth of the world's population in global income dropped from 2.3 per cent to 1.4 per cent over the past 10 years, while the proportion taken by the richest fifth has risen from 70 per cent to 85 per cent. He noted further that 20 sub Saharan Africa countries now have lower incomes per head than they did two decades ago. For sub Saharan Africa, the asymmetry in the distribution of resources under the current orthodoxy and in particular the tendency for MNCs to control its resources, depicts globalization as promoting "global pillage" rather than establishing what is commonly assumed to be a "global village".

In short, the debt crisis is the result of forces that are both internal and external to Africa. But the critical point is that the debt burden has become unbearable for the fragile and stagnating, if not declining, economies of sub Saharan Africa. Commenting on the size of Africa's debt Ake (1996:106) laments that "the debt burden of Africa is so great and the capacity to repay so limited that it is increasingly necessary to think not in terms of servicing but in terms of debt stock reduction and write-offs." It is in this context that the relevance of the HIPC scheme can be readily appreciated. Yet, as will be shown subsequently, the HIPC initiative falls far short of popular expectation.

Debt cancellation and the contradiction in the HIPC scheme

As sub Saharan Africa's debt mounted, the international financial institutions instituted structural adjustment programmes both as a method of managing it and as an alternative path to recovery. Emphasizing policy measures as decontrolling, desubsidization, downsizing, devaluation and privatization among others, structural adjustment programmes were to check state intervention and patronage, considered to be the central causes of the region's economic downturn. However, after over a decade of strict implementation, the results of structural adjustment programmes have been mixed at best. Indeed, as inflation, unemployment and balance of payment persisted, the Economic Commission for Africa (1989) described the 1980s as "a decade of lost hope". Five years later the World Bank (1994a:2) was candid in conceding that "adjustment alone will not put countries on a sustained, poverty-reducing growth path. That is the challenge of long term development". This admission rocked the foundations of the initial euphoria that greeted the introduction of structural adjustment programmes.

But even more disappointing the neoclassical paradigm sank adjusting countries deeper into debt. In an effort to establish structural adjustment as a credible alternative developmental paradigm, the international financial institutions granted huge amounts of loans to countries considered "strong adjusters" (Herbst 1993). For example, Ghana, considered "a star in the adjustment business", received a total of $9.3 billion from the IMF and the World Bank between 1983 and 1993 as nonconcessional aid (World Bank 1994b). During that same period, however, Ghana paid back to, or repurchased from, the IMF more than that amount, resulting not only in negative transfers, but also in the aggravation of its debt (Ofori-Atta 1993:1813). The introduction of the HIPC initiative was a tacit admission by creditors that structural adjustment programmes, in which much confidence was reposed, lack the capacity to arrest the spiral rise of developing countries' debt.

As a scheme of debt management, the HIPC initiative identified 41 poor countries for debt forgiveness. Among these, 20 were eligible for special assistance. Of the 41 countries marked as HIPCs, 33 were in Africa. In reality, however, the HIPC initiative fails to meet the expectations of poor and indebted countries. The strict eligibility criteria set by the architects of the scheme has excluded many poor countries. First, the initiative excluded countries with low debt-to-income ratio. Creditors deemed debt to be sustainable at 200–250 per cent of exports and 280 per cent of revenues. Second, prospective beneficiaries of the HIPC plan need to meet a six-year track record of successful structural adjustment, a condition that applied especially to countries which begun the implementation of structural adjustment programmes in 1996. More generally, this condition is particularly stringent not only because of the pauperizing effects of these programmes, but also because of the long period of time required to determine the fate of a country. Even this, notwithstanding the six-year record of structural adjustment implementation, the confirmation of a country as a successful structural adjuster is still at the discretion of creditors.

In the light of such distressing, indeed seemingly unattainable conditionalities, many non-governmental organizations, including Oxfam, Jubilee 2000 and Christian Aid have been critical of the HIPC project and sceptical about its capacity to relieve the debt of poor countries. They maintain that the debt-export ratio is far too high for most indebted countries, who, to benefit from the scheme, must borrow more and contract bigger debts. The concerns of the non-governmental organizations were well-founded, for by April 1998 only Uganda, among the many heavily indebted sub Saharan Africa countries, had benefited from the scheme. Even so, this benefit was partial: only 20 per cent of its debt was cancelled. It was not until June 1999 that Mozambique, classified as one of the poorest countries in Africa, qualified. Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire qualified in 2000, while Mali and Tanzania are due to follow suit in 2001 (UNDP 1997). The other non-African countries qualifying by July 1999 were Bolivia and Guyana. To increase the chances of many more countries of being eligible, the non-governmental organizations asked for a reduction in the debt-to-revenue target to 150–170 per cent. In addition, they argued for the reduction of the six year waiting period and the linkage of debt cancellation with genuine needs for poverty alleviation (Katsouris 1999).

The agitation of the non-governmental organizations has not been in vain. In a meeting in Cologne, Germany, in June 1999, the G7 relaxed the eligibility criteria into what is called HIPC-2. The debt-to-export and debt-to-revenue ratios have been reduced to 150 per cent and 250 per cent respectively, while the six years' waiting period has been slashed to three years for those countries beginning adjustment before 1996. In practice, however, the efficacy of HIPC-2 has remained an issue of contention between proponents of the scheme and critics. While creditors claim HIPC-2 would bring debt relief to between six and ten more countries, non-governmental organizations argue that most countries included in HIPC-2 are unlikely to meet the three-year adjustment record qualification, since they were or are presently at war. These countries include Liberia, the DRC, Angola and Sierra Leone. Moreover, contrary to the G7 claim that HIPC-2 brings \$100 billion additional debt relief, non-governmental organizations say only an additional \$16 billion of relief comes with it. Thus much controversy still surrounds the debt relief initiative. The continuous campaign by non-governmental organizations for the unconditional cancellation of the debt of poor countries (*Africa Recovery* September 1999) indicates that, despite its apparent generosity, HIPC-2, is still far from totally addressing the debt problems of the developing countries.

Yet, an even greater challenge confronting the HIPC initiative, which reveals its perfidy is the funding of the debt relief project. The IMF estimates that the total cost to creditors of the HIPC scheme, even with just a handful of qualifiers so far, is around \$27.5 billion, excluding bilateral cancellation of development aid debt. The strategy of the IMF in financing the cancellation is through gold sales. The UK, one of the major international creditors, has recently sold some 803,768 ounces to help finance the HIPC scheme. Concern is, however, emerging from gold-producing African countries which have no illusions about the deleterious consequences of gold sales. In practice, gold sales mean infusing more gold into the global market. This has the effect of driving down gold prices and, as a natural response, forcing the industry to lay off workers. Already, Ghana and South Africa, the leading gold producers in Africa, have been forced by recessionary pressures in the gold market to retrench over 2,000 mine workers (*Africa Recovery* 1999 **13**:2–3). In reality, therefore, the HIPC initiative relieves less than it promises. Apart from its failure to satisfy the initial expectation it excited, it also addresses one set of problems and creates another in the process. But in general, requirements for sub Saharan Africa's development go beyond debt cancellation. The President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, has noted that debt relief is just "one very important component in a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction [and development]" (*Africa Recovery* **13**:10). Additional interrelated policy issues need to be addressed to ensure sustainable development in sub Saharan Africa. This is an issue to which we now turn.

Towards sustainable development in the twenty-first century

IF THE CRITERIA FOR eligibility to HIPC are revised and debt cancellation becomes a reality for many more countries, sub Saharan Africa will still have to address other set of challenges, including the crisis of democratic governance; gender inequality; stemming conditions that promote conflicts; environmental degradation and launching an aggressive campaign against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These are briefly elucidated in turn.

Strengthening democratic governance

WHILE THE INSTITUTION of democratic rule does not automatically guarantee development, it nevertheless provides channels for checking anti-developmental practices such as corruption and inefficiency. There is no gainsaying the fact that part of the causes of sub Saharan Africa's socioeconomic woes were the direct consequence of undemocratic governance. As Barber Conable, the former president of the World Bank, noted,

> The development of many sub Saharan Africa countries has been quite unnecessarily constrained by their political systems....People need freedom to realise individual and collective potential... Open political participation has been restricted....Many African leaders have been more concerned about retaining power than about the long-term development interest of their people...(Callaghy 1991:59).

The power of members of civil society to stage protests unfettered is enough to dissuade the political élite from pursuing unpopular policies. Moreover, with democratic rule, elected representatives find themselves constantly accountable to the electorate and the risk of loosing the next election becomes a motivating factor to prioritize the interest of the governed over everything else. The institution of democratization and good governance by the international donor community as a condition for aid and investment in Africa is partly informed by the thinking that a positive correlation exists between democracy and development. In these respects, the deepening of a democratic culture and the strengthening of civil society provide a countercheck to state authoritarianism, which had been the foundation of such anti-developmental practices as corruption and inefficient governance.

Recognizing the contribution of women

ANOTHER CENTRAL PROBLEM which sub Saharan Africa governments must surmount in the march towards sustainable development is recognizing of the contribution of women. The World Bank (1989:7) notes that,

> In Africa women are generally lead managers in the household; they are responsible for feeding the family; for providing water, education and health; and for family planning. They are also active in the production of food crops and in trade. Their role should be more explicitly recognized in the design and implementation of human resource development programmes.

Yet women have suffered discrimination and marginalization both in politics and in the economy. In recent years, however, women in sub Saharan Africa have been taking advantage of political openings in national political systems to assert their leadership roles and press for increased access to social, economic and political opportunities. But this gone no further. The recognition has not translated into increased access to sociopolitical resources. Statistics across Africa show that despite women's numerical, sometimes academic superiority, very few of them occupy high political offices. This has been due to the reluctance and refusal of some African leaders to appreciate and recognize the capabilities of women.

Aided by tradition, leaders confine women to subordinate positions. For example, in response to demands by Kenyan women for equitable gender representation in the national parliament, President Daniel Arap Moi, in a typical male-chauvinistic old-generation leadership style, reiterated: "God made man to be the head of the family [and] challenging that was tantamount to criticising God." (Gordon and Gordon 1995:261). Such conceptions of leadership, if not changed, are certain to keep women perpetually in the lower echelons of the political hierarchy. The situation is similar in the economic sphere where women are frequently confined to domestic jobs and the informal economy. Development requires the changing of these trends and thinking in order to harness the potentials of all sections of the society in the national effort.

Stemming conditions that facilitate conflicts

THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT that part of the reason for Africa's inability to surmount its developmental problems are the incessant conflicts which are now dominating the attention of its leaders (Akokpari 1999). In Angola, the Central African Republic, the DRC, Sierra Leone and Sudan to mention but a few, wars have not only devastated national economies, but have also unleashed untold hardships on the population. Moreover, the effects of conflicts have been felt by neighbouring and regional States, which assume the onerous task of stretching their meagre resources to accommodate the massive influx of refugees. Often, as a result of the wider implications, regional States are forced to intervene diplomatically, sometimes militarily, to either contain or terminate the conflicts. Africa's conflicts are over the control of resources and the intensification of these conflicts is linked to the partisan posture of the African State (Doornbos 1990).

The postcolonial African State has failed to accord its competing constituencies equal access to meagre political and economic resources. At the same time, it also failed to promote conditions that facilitate fair competition for these resources (Akokpari 1998). The State has become in most cases an instrument for furthering the sectional interest of particular constituencies.

Lacking alternative channels to access resources, marginalized constituencies have had to resort to war to dislodge their governments.

The interests that have thus been overthrown must in turn regroup and dislodge the incumbent government, creating an endless cycle of conflicts and wars. At a deeper level this cycle of conflicts is linked to poverty and scarcity, which intensify competition for access to the State. The State under these conditions is seen as a channel for accumulating wealth and the competition for access to it becomes a matter of life and death. To promote development, the African State will have to assume a more neutral posture and address rapidly spreading poverty.

Reversing environmental decay

THE CAUSES OF SUB SAHARAN Africa's crises are also partly located in the region's crumbling ecological system. As noted already, environmental conservation has become a key component of development. Yet environmental degradation has escalated in sub Saharan Africa in recent decades. The poorest region of the world, sub Saharan Africa is threatened by such related phenomena as deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, pollution, drought and famine. While these are vehicles for catastrophe, the region is also facing a population crisis, currently growing at a rate of 3.1 per cent, the highest in the world. Sub Saharan Africa's environmental decay is most readily visible in deforestation. Although the destruction of vegetation is a global phenomenon, it is acute in many parts of sub Saharan Africa where over 70 per cent of the population depend on the forest for survival and other economic activities.

As a result of population pressure the rate of deforestation in Madagascar, for example, has destroyed more than 80 per cent of its rainforest. In other countries like Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, deforestation has been accelerated by increased timber exports. In Côte d'Ivoire, closed forest has declined by nearly 67 percent in 20 years, (Timberlake 1991:90–91) while in Ghana tropical forest shrank to a quarter of its original size between 1983 and 1993 (Nyang'oro 1995:90). Generally, as a result of deforestation and inappropriate land use, Africa loses 36,000 square kilometres on the average to the desert annually (Nnoli 1990).

Other features of Africa's environmental malaise include soil erosion and pollution. Erosion is a particularly serious problem for hilly countries like Ethiopia and Lesotho. Everywhere, unmitigated erosion triggers a chain of related ecological disasters. For example, it robs the soil of its ability to support vegetation. This in turn has implications for humans. In years of inadequate rains the prospects for crop failure and famine are high. Similarly, nomadic communities are unable to pasture their herds. In the final analysis development suffers, as governments commit large amounts of scarce hard currency, which could have gone into poverty alleviation programmes, into the importation of food. The challenge, for sustainable development, therefore, is for sub Saharan Africa governments to institute appropriate policies to reverse ecological decline, for as Rahab Mwatha, of the Greenbelt Movement, suggests,

> The African crisis is essentially an environmental problem that has precipitated such adverse symptoms as drought, famine, desertification, overpopulation, environmental refugees, political instability, widespread poverty, etc.....Africa is dying because her environment has been overexploited and neglected.... (WCED 1990:154).

Fighting HIV/AIDS

IT IS NOW WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED that HIV/AIDS are among sub Saharan Africa's greatest developmental challenges. The extent of the infection and the rapidity of the spread of HIV/AIDS are such that not only will it reverse gains in development, but it will also lead sub Saharan Africa into a future without a people. The recent issue of the World Bank publication, *Africa Recovery* (1999, **13**:2–3), reveals frightening figures about the effects of HIV and AIDS on development, some of which are worth restating.

The World Bank estimates that countries with high incidents of AIDS will loose 1 per cent of per capita GNP growth each year. Over the next decade, for example, Kenya could lose 15 per cent of per capita GNP while human welfare indicators are expected to worsen dramatically in southern Africa, where infection rate has assumed epidemic proportions. These predictions are not sanguine; they tell the grim reality about a region set to be devastated by a disease to which an effective antidote still remains elusive. Already, over 9 million Africans have died of AIDS.

In 1998 alone, 1.5 million adults died of AIDS along with 500,000 children. At the same time, the rate of infection is on the increase. In 1998, for example, 3.5 million adults—equal to the population of Eritrea—contracted the virus and HIV-positive mothers infected another 500,000 children at birth. In South Africa, conservative estimates indicate that about 1,500 people contract AIDS daily and in Côte d'Ivoire it is reported that a teacher dies of AIDS every day.

These statistics have serious implications for development. It is estimated that the death from AIDS of one family member causes the family income to fall by half and agricultural output has already fallen by half in one-third of rural households affected by HIV. A study shows that in Zimbabwe maize output fell by 61 per cent, vegetables by 49 per cent and cotton by 41 per cent as a result of HIV/AIDS. Industry has not been spared either. It has been estimated that company profits have fallen by between 7 and 20 per cent in some sub Saharan Africa countries as a result of HIV/AIDS.

Similarly, AIDS has significantly reduced life expectancy in Africa. The World Bank has estimated that life expectancy has dropped from 50 to 40 years in Zambia as a result of HIV/AIDS and, in Botswana, where it was projected to exceed 69 years by 2000–2005 has now been predicted to decline to 41 years. It is a sad paradox that in the midst of the alarming devastation caused by HIV/AIDS, African governments seem to be doing little to contain its spread. A study, for example, found that in 1997 African countries spent just $150 million on AIDS prevention, out of which only 10 per cent came from governments. However, the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that at least $1 billion is needed to contain the epidemic. As governments show a slow commitment to the fight against AIDS, the virus is certain to pose a major hurdle to Africa's developmental efforts.

Thus in order to promote meaningful and sustainable development, sub Saharan Africa governments need to double their efforts to combat the spread of AIDS. In furtherance of this, budgetary allocation to health sectors will need to be increased dramatically and governments will have to assume tougher stances on crimes such as rape and other abuses that can potentially lead to AIDS infection. Above all, an aggressive government and non-governmental organization-driven campaign of education needs to be pursued among sub Saharan Africa's population about the dangers associated with AIDS. Only a programme backed by political will can stem the current devastation caused by AIDS and only then can sub Saharan Africa tread on the path to sustainable development.

Conclusion

THE SUB SAHARAN AFRICA debt burden which has been mounting since the 1970s is the product of internal and external factors. As the paper has attempted to show, the debt itself and the process of repayment have contributed in no small measure to debt escalation, a trend that could not be stemmed even by structural adjustment programmes. In fact, rather than ameliorating the situation, these programmes compounded the debt of sub Saharan Africa countries. As noted, the lending conditionalities of creditors and the logic of globalization have all combined to attenuate sub Saharan Africa's capacity to develop.

The HIPC initiative instituted by the IMF/World Bank and supported by the bilateral creditors to ease the debt pressure on poor countries has so far not fulfilled popular expectations. The criteria for eligibility set by creditors appear virtually unattainable for a vast number of sub Saharan Africa countries. These conditions are so strict that they place a question mark over the sincerity of creditors and the overall objectives of the HIPC scheme. It is recommended that, against a backdrop of the weakness in sub Saharan Africa's economies and the development crisis facing the region, debt cancellation be done unconditionally and, as recommended by non-governmental organizations, be tied to a genuine desire to arrest poverty.

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