

The Role of Development Aid Policies in Land Management in Africa.

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Abstract

In Africa, land is vital for food security and poverty reduction. This is evident in the straddling of the rural-urban divide where most urban dwellers own land in their rural areas of origin. This is a natural evolution which is not equitable to the drastic market changes that Europe underwent with the onset of industrialization which propelled it to heights that will never be equated to that in Sub-Saharan Africa, at least not in this century. In order to formulate policies that directly or indirectly affect land, one must understand the intricate interconnections between access to land, the tenure systems, the agrarian structures and the links between land and food security. This has not in the past been linked to individualization of rights and undue influence by the state or any other external influences could prove detrimental. The customary tenure systems are more often than not, flexible to changing population densities and secure for investments when tackled appropriately. Different systems of tenure management are evident; individual, communal, state and customary. These can be traced to the influence of the colonial structures that first propagated titling and individualization of tenure. The problem area is often the peri-urban area that exhibits qualities of the interface between three or four different systems.

The free market policies are the undoing of the fragile systems that were in place. Commodification of land and commercialization of agriculture was one of the target areas in economic adjustment programmes proposed and fostered on African governments by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). This led to land alienation and to the exclusion of a big section of the society with the exception of large land owners. The introduction of the willing buyer-willing seller strategy usually at less than market value ended up with sales by small-scale holders who were then unable to translate the purchase into meaningful economic endeavours.

There being minimal opportunities for absorption into industry and service sector, they are pushed into the informal economy and the informal housing at peripheral zones, and to a life of abject poverty. The states play a vital role in land alienation as a non-questionable mechanism. There is however a lack of land information systems and a consistent conflict of policies developed over time in relation to tenure and titling. With the push into privatization, there is little hope for the future of customary management which is the backbone of land security for the small scale farmer and with special reference to the women.

This paper tries to analyze the role played by foreign development aid in land management in Africa over time and the effects this had had on the economic development. It focuses on the effects of individualization of tenure, commodification of land, agrarian capitalism on the rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It will finally try to identify sustainable measures that have been undertaken by select countries to solve the problems that have resulted under the dual systems to the whole urban land management process, with emphasis on the poor and disadvantaged section of the societies.

Africa's debt crisis

In order to understand why there exists a leeway for the meddling into the African economic affairs by the Aid agencies, one has to look at the origin of the problem. What are the roots of Africa's debt crisis? Why is it the pawn in shifting aid agencies policies, a playing ground for all manner and form of emerging, non-tested, non-standardized acutely deficient in sustainability policies from aid agencies? It can be assumed to have began with the end of the second world war when there was a need of creating a market for the surplus in overproduction by the United States. The brilliant idea to lend to the developing world to steady markets and ensure purchase of surplus was conceived. This sleight-of-hand lending went to incredible dimensions in the 1970's with the economic boom of the OPEC countries who after channeling their monies to the Northern countries, left them with the problem of liquidating it. Naturally, it went into the developing countries as loans.

In the early 1980's rising interest rates, low rates of return and a looming evidence that these loans may not be eventually serviced hit the crisis point.

WB and IMF stepped in with the Structural Adjustment Lending. The support they got in distilling this most dyspeptic idea was then overwhelming. In a pure act of arm twisting, they offered necessary loans to enable them to service their old loans but with conditions that meant adjusting their economies. These conditions were varied and all the debtor governments were under extreme pressure with unserviceable debts, limited access to world markets and a skewed market system that would not allow penetration with primary goods since they had missed out on the northern world's industrialization phase. They demurred. These policies led to among other things privatization, private monopoly, price control, expenditures, incomes, exports, exchange rates and management of resources. They were and have continued to be an elitist subject, addressing the need not of the majority poor but foregrounded and amplified in the minority rich bracketed in the private sector which is unduly indulged. They have led to budgetary restraints of the public sector and this means budgetary cuts in public sectors like education and health. The previous condescending enthusiasm the rest of the northern world had has began to wane as the contradictions in their nouveau riche strategies of these policies become more evident. The SAP's are (now) seen as reaching to a drowning man with a blade of grass.

The focus of SAP's is maximizing profits and debt reduction. This is a cyclic self-destruction for the countries adopting them, a Catch-22 scenario. In maximizing profit, the attachment given to cash crops to the detriment of food cropping leads to a further decline in food security. There is an overemphasis in large scale agricultural production and this is to a large extent owned by the Northern countries' multinational corporations. The world market is accessible only to the multimillion corporations and private industries who are able to fulfill the requirements orchestrated by aid agencies in their policy documents. It is well known that the ownership of these are foreign.

Aid agencies in Land Management

With the increasing awareness of Africa's problems that are aid related, rural poverty, low economic growth, there were many criticisms towards the traditional land management systems. The solutions that came up amongst the donors was to organize a shift towards a market oriented system. This called for individualization and privatization in order to maximize use of the resource.

This, they hoped, would provide formal land rights, increase agricultural productivity and facilitate access to credit hence eradicate poverty. This, evaluated after a test and trial period, reveal that the results are actually highly skewed with a minority benefiting, and an increase in land and food insecurity hence poverty to the majority. The land access index is in the increase.

British East Africa is a good example. The apportioning of land and demarcation of some as crown land led to many peasants losing their livelihood. Pre-independence British East Africa had a move towards individualization of titles fostered upon them. In 1955 the Royal Commission adopted a move for registration of individual titles. This was also upheld by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the 1961 Munster Commission. In IBRD's 1961 report, it maintained that private land ownership had made the area have its first leap forward into development. There was indeed a move towards commercialization of agriculture where groups of producers began to specialize in production that was market oriented. How does one develop a functioning formal land market overnight in a country that has no functioning cadastral system, effective land registration mechanisms, and where there are as many complex customary management systems as there are tribes?

WB is a big proponent of privatization. The SAP's speak for themselves in this issue. The PROCEDE programme, the privatization of the Ejidos which are communal lands in Mexico on a willing seller willing buyer basis is a good example. This led to many small scale farmers selling their land the proceeds of which cannot be invested into long term sustainable ventures. They then lose their only source of livelihood. This leads to them being left to lead a life of abject poverty and food insecurity which lasts for generations. Ideally food security is equatable to development. Food security is the access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life. The important elements of food security are the availability of food and the ability to acquire it (WB, 1986). Land is often the most important source of food security in Africa.

Many African countries adopted the IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes albeit out of desperation as they were the only aid solutions. Most African countries, Kenya included have kept a rigid legal framework for urban development control that was designed to contain urban settlement and growth instead of offer room for growth has led to informality which then occurs by default.

Kenya's 1973 Metropolitan Growth Strategy and decentralization is a good example. Ideally, land markets in Kenya have existed since independence, with a drive for more during the implementation of the SAP's, the poor have always been excluded. Zambia's 1995 Land Act deals with converting customary to statutory tenure as grants of land to investors. The president has the power to declare customary hold as lease hold without the other party questioning the change, a most vicious attempt in maximizing production. This alienated the peasant population who did not get a compensation and led to food insecurity. Kenya and Ethiopia have histories of post-colonial conflicts over uneven land distribution. Land alienation for estate cultivation for example tea in Kenya and Malawi that was further enhance by the SAP's at the expense of customary land led to many such conflicts.

Solutions?

The solutions that are offered over time to the problems in land management in Africa are often debatable. Aristotelian Physics describes nature as the matter and the form. It further defines the principle of Natural cause or evolution as the means to achieve the end. If the process is interfered with, the consequences may be dire. This is perceived in the changes imposed on African countries wrought by Structural Adjustment Programmes and other aid policies. These programmes had inkling to the concept of Eurocentric chauvinism, indicated not only in the declaration that philosophy originated from there as is well known, but also on other underlying factors that are reflected in the control of aid especially in their neo-protectorate ideals towards countries of historic colonial linkages. One solution would be to let the evolution of the tenure management continue unabated and just guide the process. Inappropriate capitalistic meddling is not the solution. Customary tenure is growing increasingly flexible to changing needs and adjusts to the economic changes wrought by the world market's influences. There exists land markets both formal and informal that are non-alienating. A shift in policy guidance would enable this to progress without an increase in poverty.

There should be instead a focus on food security, especially in the previously well-performing peri-urban agriculture. These areas and the rural areas are the contentious areas that need appropriate agricultural practices, land policy reforms that are coherent in nature and understandable to the whole population. These would ensure smallholders a resource base against poverty and improve on the issue of food security.

However, such policies need serious debate and an understanding of the factor of equity in distribution. Adequate institutions have to be set up for land regulations and administration.

There have been many criticisms to traditional African tenure systems. Their endurance over time weighed against population growth is evidence that these systems are responsive to changing climatic and economic conditions. There are and have been existing land transactions; market and non-market. The non-market transactions are flexible to customary management systems. This has been seen to be increasingly unformalized as a counter reaction to forced formal markets, population increases, and commercialization of agriculture (Place 2002). Customary systems of management means that there are multiple users of land for various uses. There is hence a form of security for all, especially the women. Putting borders and limiting user right to ownership means that there are those whose livelihoods are at risk when they are denied access.

There is a need for tenure security, and especially in customary areas. These can be formalized with a facilitation of the venture both by aid agencies and the involved governments through good governance, empowerment of the locals and appropriate decentralization mechanisms with appropriate institutions and capacity. To begin to address tenure insecurity among women, there is a need to harmonize reform efforts across customary and statutory law, regulations and access to judicial systems.(ECA 2004).

The difficulties of breaking completely free of the stranglehold of the aid agencies' ideologies and policies is evident. Some countries like Botswana have been able to abetted not in the least by their rich mineral resources. They have come up with land policies that recognize customary hold as an economically transactable good and focus their incentives in maximizing production in these.

The capitalist agrarian solutions offered by the SAPs, the WTO and the EU are noted to have yielded both economic development and underdevelopment. This is the contradiction that many beneficiaries are seeking to resolve, to find the resolution point of the fundamentally different products of the same capitalist move.

The point of contention is the resultant underdevelopment and increase in food security and poverty rates. There are several countries in Africa for example Botswana, Zambia and Malawi have managed to implement policies and structures that seek to recognize customary land rights and convert them to formal leaseholds. Botswana's 2002 National Land Policy Review looks at the interests of the poor, the women and their tenure insecurity. The privatization aspect is also discussed with a specific reference to the influence of the cattle industry and the impact that such a move will have on the livelihood of the population.

Conclusions

There is little correlation between consistent economic growth and adoption of SAP's. Gabon, Madagascar, Malawi, Kenya, the worst adopters of the SAP's have performed better than most comparing the GDPs. There are inconsistencies in development and the peaks of growth cannot be directly attributed to the SAP's. A few countries exhibit relative growth of GDP for example Ghana.

Customary systems of management means that there are multiple users of land for various uses. There is hence a form of security for all, especially the women. Putting borders and limiting user right to ownership means that there are those whose livelihoods are at risk when they are denied access. There are documented claims by the WB of economic growth in the same countries which exhibit extreme wealth and access to land inequalities. This does not imply development, even statistically. Their concept of Market assisted land reform, which then changed to negotiated land reform and eventually to community based land reform, only changed names with the underlying policies still very much the same. There is now an introduction of a credit system to the countries that have finally bowed down to WB pressures. There is credit access to those that had once sold the land and the credit is usually at high interest rates. They as well have to put in a percentage of the price of the land in order to be eligible. These same people for whom the credit aspect is organized barely earn a dollar a day. Where are they expected to obtain that? In as much as there is a lot of WB floating currency, it is not accessible to the majority poor, and this is increasingly increasing the profound inequalities evident.

The move to privatization of land and agriculture needs well documented cadastral systems and titles. This is difficult to achieve in areas that lack such data and where land, especially in the peri-urban areas a dual management structure. There is an interface of both communal and leasehold/ freehold tenure. There is a lack of legal recognition of communal tenure, rights overlap and conflict, and there is no documentation of formal rights. The major issue is that such lands are regarded as prime land especially for agribusiness. There is a lot of urban and peri-urban agriculture but mainly for food crops that are then sold in the cities. There is however an intense pressure for these lands to be used for agribusiness for export-worthy products like flowers. This means that with a push for privatization, the small scale crop farmers eventually sell on a willing seller basis, losing his source of income and food security, and unable to convert the proceeds of the transaction in the urban area which is dominated by multimillionaire corporations. He/ she cannot even start to compete. Such a transaction brings about inter alia losing ones home and settling in the next informal settlement, most of which are in this interface. There is however a vibrant informal market that is open but whose proceeds are untaxed since there are no mechanisms that allow for that. The government hence loses a lot in this area.

For the African governments, there has to be well coordinated efforts in addressing the consequences and the spill overs of all policies that relate to land. They have to take the lead on their own development issues, formulate and plan economic policies that relate to their own development strategies should be coherent and the specifics of each be translated to the understanding of the whole society. The focus should be on the disadvantaged sections of the society who should be involved in planning such documents as their experiences are vital to ensure equity in all policies affecting them. To these people, the governments must be accountable.

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