

BOOK REVIEW

Ake, C. (1996) *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Washington D. C.: The Brookings Institution. 173 pp. Price: Not stated

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The book, *Democracy and Development in Africa* is Claude Ake's last scholarly gift to the world. It is indeed classic in its form, content and analysis on the subject of development and democracy in Africa. The book which has five chapters in one hundred and seventy-three (173) pages was published in 1996 - two years after his death - by Brookings Institute, Washington D. C. Ake, broke ground on the problem of development in Africa. After over three decades of preoccupation with development in Africa, the economies of most African nations are still stagnating or regressing he argued. He was optimistic in saying that "for most Africans, incomes are lower than they were three decades ago, health prospects are poorer, malnutrition is widespread, and infrastructures and social institutions are breaking down".

Relying on past literature, the book affirms that many factors have been suggested to explain the apparent failure of development in Africa, including colonial legacy, social pluralism, corruption, poor planning and incompetent management, limited inflow of foreign capital, and low levels of saving and investment. Alone or in combination, the book agreed that these factors are serious impediments to development, but Claude Ake argued that the problem is not that development has failed, but that it (that is, development) was never really been on the agenda. He was optimistic in saying that political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediment to development (pp. 1 and 2).

In this classic book, Ake traces the evolution and failure of development policies, including the IMF stabilization programs that have dominated international efforts. He believes that the authoritarian structure the African states inherited from colonial rule created a political environment that was hostile to development. The political jobbers that inherited political power from the colonial masters discouraged entrepreneurship, economic success is depended on state power or state patronage. For anyone outside the dominant faction of the political elites, it was generally futile to harbour hopes of becoming wealthy by entrepreneurial activity or even to take personal safety for granted. So these people directed their energy to seeking the inside track of power. For those who were part of the ruling faction, entrepreneurial activity became unnecessary, since wealth could be accumulated faster and with less risk by using state power. So entrepreneurship was

blocked at both ends (pp117). These explain why many African politicians are lazy and powers are seeking by all means.

In chapter five (5), under the Residual option, the author argued that development is not a *project* as the Bank and Fund will made Africa to believe but a *Process* this gave rise to his classic definition of development as the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choice and values (pp125). The import of this definition is that development is people oriented and must come within and not outside. Development is something that people must do for themselves, although it can be facilitated by the help of others. Therefore, people should be the end, means and agent of development. Ake came to conclusion that Africa must be seen as they are and not as they ought to be. African development should be realized within Africa by Africans and for Africans. The author further caution against the promotion of liberal democracy in Africa that is alien to the Africa culture and tradition but rather call for participatory democracy that is anchored on more decentralization of power. He sketches the alternatives that are struggling to emerge from calamitous failure - economic development based on traditional agriculture, political development based on decentralization of power, and reliance on indigenous communities that have been providing some measure of refuge from the coercive power of the central state. Ake's argument is indeed a new paradigm for development in Africa that must be followed for Africans by Africans and for the development Africa.

In chapters two and three, Ake shows how, in most of Africa, colonial rule left a legacy of intense commitment to independence but few ideas regarding appropriate economic policies. Immediately after the new nations achieved independence he opined, the political environment began to be hostile to development. The internal struggle for power was the absolute focus of attention. But the new leaders soon realized that they needed some new legitimizing theme to replace liberation ideology, and they settled on economic development as a natural alternative. With limited resources of their own to work with, however, Ake pointed out that the new leaders looked to foreign powers to finance their aspirations and thereby reintroduced in the economic context some of the issues of dependence that they had settled in the political independence.

He further in chapter four gave an overview of the development policies that have ensued and documented the pattern of failures. He examines the alternatives and solutions that can be considered which he hanged on economic development based on traditional agriculture, political development based on decentralization of power, and reliance on indigenous communities to provide some refuge from the centralized state.

In conclusion, the author outlined the kind of democracy Africa needs as follows 1) A democracy in which people have some real decision-making power over and above the consent of electoral choice. This he said will entail, among other things, a powerful legislature, decentralization of power to local democratic formations, and considerable emphasis on the development of institutions for the aggregation and articulation of interests. 2) A social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social and economic rights. It will be a social democracy that invests heavily in the improvement of people's health, education, and capacity so that they can participate effectively. 3) A

democracy that puts as much emphasis on collective rights as it does on individual rights. It will have to recognize nationalities, sub nationalities, ethnic groups, and communities as social formations that express freedom and self-realization and will have to grant them rights to cultural expression and political and economic participation. This could mean, for instance, he argued, a second legislative chamber, a chamber of nationalities with considerable power in which all nationalities irrespective of their numerical strength are equal. It could also mean consociational arrangements, not only at the national level but even at the regional and community levels. It will also entail such arrangements as proportional representation and an electoral spread formula like the one used in Nigeria, by which a party must secure a stipulated minimum percentage of votes over a large part of the country to win. 4) A democracy of incorporation. To be as inclusive as possible, the legislative bodies should in addition to nationality groups have special representation of mass organizations, especially youth, the labour movement and women's groups, which are usually marginalized but without whose active participation there is unlikely to be democracy or development.

This kind of democracy Ake, opined require democratization process that is driven by Africans themselves especially non-elites. Ake, have indeed presented a vivid interface between democracy and development in the book under review. The solutions he presents in the book are the way for Africa development and Africa leaders should look that direction.

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