

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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A recurring argument in all thirteen chapters of this book is that public policies, if properly framed and implemented, are strategically placed to serve as the hub of national development. The book notes that concerns of this nature have motivated human existence since time immemorial, with ancient Greek city states among the prime movers. At the core of the Public Policy Question is a concern for responsible policy decisions and actions that are formulated and implemented in a sustainable, accountable and transparent manner.

The book also notes that the Public Policy Question invariably entails a study of the state and politics. This, as argued in Chapter 1, arises from the fact that where there is public policy there is a state and politics. The state and public policies are formal institutions of politics. Where there is the state there is politics and where there is politics there is power, unequally distributed. Policy processes, be they national, local or sectoral, are arenas where those with interests in a policy engage in negotiations over the goals of the policy and conflict over the allocation of resources. Both decision makers and policy implementers have to take into account the reaction of the diverse stakeholders. As politicians, decision makers have to evaluate political resources (likely costs and benefits) while public managers attend to bureaucratic resources needed to sustain such initiatives.

POLICY MAKING AND THE POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

When African countries became independent, since the late 1950s, their economies were structured in such a way that they were merely producers of raw commodities that were supplied to Western capitals for processing and value addition. Colonial education systems were not designed to equip Africans with technical skills to enable conversion of raw materials produced locally into finished products. This set up created economic dependence on the industrialised economies of the West. From this background, post-independence governments in Africa became concerned with reversing the exploitative economic relations with the industrialised countries, and this influenced the formulation of a cocktail of economic policies to give effect to the new agenda of promoting local industries and nationalising some in the process. The desire to promote

the rise of local industries led to the adoption of protectionist policies to shield infant industries from international competition. The other common strategy was to create state-owned enterprises to spearhead economic development across sectors of the economy. Governments also created local development banks to finance local economic development. In all these efforts, the state played a central role, and national development was driven through centralised planning of the economy. An evaluation of all these initiatives and economic policies, however, shows that they did not produce the expected transformation of the African economies, as some continued exporting raw to semi-processed products to the industrialised capitals of the Western countries such as the UK, France, Germany, Portugal and the USA. With time, a combination of poor governance, plummeting international prices of products such as oil, and many other factors led to economic underperformance, and many African countries found themselves in serious need of economic strategies to save their economies from a deepening crisis and potential collapse. This is the time many of them looked to the Bretton Woods institutions for financial assistance, and the package they received was the structural adjustment programmes that have received extensive coverage in scholarly works and international economic reports.

Concerning African development, commentators have cited its connection to the two aspects of governance and policy making. An inextricable connection exists between the nature of governance, the quality of public policies and the pace of national development. This theme has been widely dealt with globally, and currently there is significant academic output that unanimously projects 'good governance' as the strongest variable behind accelerated development across countries. Indeed, many have linked 'bad governance' to retardation and stagnancy in the national development front. Following this line of argument, international commentators, especially the World Bank and IMF economists, are convinced that the African development crisis is partly a 'crisis of governance' and a 'tragedy of policy making'. This understanding has partly explained the continued involvement of international financial institutions (IFIs), bilateral, multilateral, and other international actors and consultants in the African policy making spaces. The same actors have championed the creation and propagation of universal policy recipes that have been exported to many developing countries as dosages prescribed to cure their stagnating economies, challenges of growth, and persisting conditions of poverty, inequality, food insecurity, and various other development problems. The same Western understanding of Africa's 'handicaps' of governance and policy making has further shaped the conceptualisation, design and packaging of the prescriptions that many countries of the developing world have received and continue to receive today.

The most unfortunate part is that World Bank and IMF policy recipes came to Africa mostly in the form of coercive policy transfers that reflected the external imposition of policies on governments. This trend complicated the African development challenges