

PHILOSOPHICAL PREMISES FOR AFRICAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is the cultural assumptions underpinning Africa's strategies of economic development, taking the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as case studies. It considers the issue whether the neglect of Africa's cultural beliefs and values in African plans and policies of economic development may not lead to a development impasse. Accordingly, three major objectives are pursued.

The first objective is to attempt a critical assessment of the two strategies of economic development, LPA and NEPAD, against the background of theories of economic development that informed them respectively and their cultural assumptions. Using both a theoretical reflection and an empirical approach, I argue that LPA and NEPAD relied on theories of economic development whose cultural foundations are not African. Consequently, although they were designed in Africa, their respective philosophical bases are not African.

The second objective is to investigate the relationship between African cultural values and economic development and the extent to which the neglect of the African value system in African policymaking and planning could lead to a development impasse. Based on a theoretical reflection as well as empirical research, I argue that in both LPA and NEPAD, the beliefs and values that structure the African value system have been neglected to the extent of being ignored. The major implication of this neglect is that there is insufficient room for people's participation in the process of their economic development. Participation makes possible the democratisation and the inculturation of economic development, and thus translates the universal conception of economic development to its local, cultural feasibility.

The third objective is to propose certain philosophical premises that could guide development planning in Africa. I revisit the African value system and retrieve the Bantu concept of the human person as *umuntu-w'-ubuntu / umuntu-mu-bantu* in order to ground the future economic development of Africa on the African foundation. Using Sen's capability approach which defines development in terms of the ability of people to lead the life they value and have reason to value, human agency and the expansion of capabilities (or real freedoms people enjoy), I suggest four philosophical premises which link African economic development to what Africans believe and value.

The first premise consists of the shift from extroversion to the freedom of people to lead the lives they value and have reason to value. This premise deals with the spirit of extroversion which prevents Africans from appreciating their beliefs and values in the process of economic development. It emphasises the fact that development is not a project, but rather a process by which people create and recreate themselves and the conditions by which they can flourish fully.

The second premise is the human agency. It deals with the shift from the conception of development as an autonomous process to the conception of development as an agency-based process. It emphasises that the development conceived of as an agency-based process, has as its starting-point and end-point the people.

The third premise deals with the shift from the conception of development as an end product to development as an expansion of capability or the real freedoms people enjoy. This premise emphasises three major things. The first is that the expansion of people's capability is both the end and the means of development. People's capabilities are not only the primary end of development, they are also its principal means. The second is that development conceived of as the expansion of people's capability is the concern of both the people and their structural institutions. The third is that the interaction between people and their structural institutions makes it possible to transcend the various dualities often observed in certain development approaches such as the bottom-up and top-down development.

The fourth and last premise is the principle of baking the cake together. This premise follows from the fact that the capability approach leads to development as a participatory and inclusive process. It expresses the traditional practice of collaboration in the African community. It emphasises that the three major actors in the development process, namely, the state, the people and the market which tend to exclude each other, are all agents and must work together inclusively to achieve a sustainable economic development.

These are the premises suggested to lead future economic development in Africa. Each of these assumptions has implications which are unpacked in the conclusion.

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ACCRONYMS

AAF-SAP:	The African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation;
ACPPD:	The African Charter of Popular Participation for Development;
APPER:	Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery;
AU:	African Union
CA:	Capability Approach
CASS:	Centre for Advanced Social Science
CPP:	Convention People's Party
CSO:	Civil Society Organisations
ECLA:	Economic Commission of Latin America
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GNP:	Gross National Income
IFI:	International Financial Institutions
IDG:	International Development Goals
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
ISI:	Import Substitution Industrialisation
LDC:	Less Developed Countries
LPA:	Lagos Plan of Action
MAP:	Millennium African Programme
MDC:	More Development Countries
NEDLAC:	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEPAD:	New Partnership for Africa's Development
OAU:	Organisation for African Unity
OP:	Omega Programme
UN-ECA:	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UN-NADAF:	The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa
UN-PAAERD:	United Nations Programme of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development;