

Abstract Volume 1 (1989): Human Dimensions of Adjustment

The *African Development Perspectives Yearbook* stands out against a wide-spread overall pessimism, which affects the public and scientific opinion on Africa's development chances. According to our opinion, new results or discoveries are less important than introducing a new perspective: Even though the level of poverty and misery continues to grow in Africa, there are many different approaches and successful experiences whose thorough discussion may unleash new economically and socially successful development strategies. Considering the great number of authors, the reader cannot expect a complete conformity in all questions at issue in African development policies. Common statements and positions, however, might be realised. They form a comprehensive view on the essential impediments to and perspectives of African development. The broad range of topics and the wide spectrum of authors also show, in a sense, the current state of the international discussion on Africa's present situation and its future. The main points of the analysis, assessments and programmes published in Volume 1 may be subdivided into three groups:

Africa's present situation

A serious discussion of new development approaches is to be based on thorough analyses of previous experiences. For example, one of the most decisive factors for Africa's present condition are the structural adjustment programmes, mainly propagated in their conventional version by international organisations. Their social and political implications, particularly for the poorer social strata, have widely been neglected. Therefore they are leading topics of the *Yearbook's* first volume.

Social aspects of structural adjustment programmes are illustrated by the experiences of sub-Saharan Africa's economically most important and most populous country, Nigeria. It would be by far too superficial to attribute the dramatic downward trend in the standard of living of a country like Nigeria merely to the collapse of crude oil prices since the mid 1980s, if only because the progressing impoverishment of the people and the shrinking agricultural production originate from earlier times. Rather, political mistakes of preceding decades, which have not yet been corrected by the stern Nigerian adjustment policies, should be duly considered.

Particularly, the neglect of agricultural production and of the rural population, common features in many African countries, should be recognised in this instance. Via forced rural exodus and scarcity of food, this policy indirectly strikes the urban poor as well. The example of Nigeria clearly shows the fact that reforms of markets and prices alone are not able to remedy grievances in the agricultural sector. With respect to Nigeria and other West African countries, the World Bank stated that a considerable number of migrants had returned from cities and towns to rural areas to reassume agricultural activities; this could be regarded as a sign of successful structural adjustment. According to our findings, however, return migration has to be ruled out as a significant phenomenon, at least as far as Nigeria is concerned.

Like the social and human dimensions of Africa's development, the symptoms of ecological crises were neglected for a long time. But growing misery and inequality and a rapidly growing population result in continuously aggravating ecological problems. As a consequence of their poverty, African nations are compelled to ruthlessly exploit the natural foundations of life, a fact, which, in addition to external causes like exportation of timber, monoculture, and toxic waste imports, is the main cause of environmental destruction and degradation in Africa. Unless the international community makes an ample stand against this process, it will inevitably accelerate.

It is well known that the African continent is lagging behind the development of other Third World regions in different aspects. According to the criteria of economic, social, and ecological indicators, deficiencies can be observed even when compared to Africa's own performance in the 1970s. In order to specify this statement, some contributors studied those countries now and then termed "successful models" of African Development: Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Ghana. Although the final decision about their development status has not been taken yet, we emphasise that

- appropriate economic and political measures may well be followed by gains in agricultural and industrial productivity;
- governments are able to guarantee food security;

- smallholders efficiently react to market incentives and can contribute to national food supply, presupposed the existence of a supportive policy environment;
- the implementation of efficient programmes to remedy ecological damage does have political chances.

In this context, the reader should not overlook local and subregional developments, nor those organisations of the people taking matters into their own hands: rural institutions, craftsmen's or agricultural co-operatives, some of which came into being completely on their own initiative, others with the co-operation of national or international sponsors. Some essays study the chances and capacities of decentralised and autonomous institutions of this kind in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mali, Rwanda, Togo, and Senegal. Although their perspectives are not independent from the governments' benevolence, some of the organisations showed a considerable potential for participation in development issues, which even gave them weight in national politics.

Programmes and priorities

Although the state of affairs in Africa seems to be hopeless when seen from a global point of view, and although many experts hold that in Africa pessimism means realism, promising attempts at economic and social reforms have been recorded. The *Yearbook* documents and analyses some of these programmes and plans, which were important in regional, national or international discussions. While the terminology partly differs, elements of a "development strategy with a human face" emerge, which the international community might agree to, in order to co-ordinate and intensify national and international developmental work.

Some contributions show the efforts of international organisations, national institutions of development cooperation, and of African governments to formulate plans of economic reforms, which duly take into consideration social aspects and basic conditions of human development. Based on a systematic examination of the concrete conditions of the application and the political chances for implementation of economic reforms "with a human face", the contributors specify the requirements for more realistic and appropriate structural adjustment programmes:

- economic reforms are to be linked with plans for full employment policy, distribution policy, and social policy;
- a strategy of debt relief is to be connected with new policy instruments in order to finance development of the poorest social strata;
- the programmes should permanently be monitored with regard to their social and economic effects;
- finally, a balanced development of agriculture and industry should be guaranteed in order to obtain food security in the long run as well as a steady supply of basic consumer goods and capital.

On the basis of these results, the reader is presented with elements of an alternative structural adjustment plan, in which the productive potential of the poorest people plays an important role. This strategy, developed by UNICEF and others, goes crucially beyond programmes to offset social hardships of structural adjustment. It is not limited to merely guarantee the basic needs of vulnerable target groups while keeping up conventional structural adjustment strategies, but it is aimed at radical changes intending to bring into the focus of development policy the potentials and needs of the poor, i.e. the majority of the African people. Strengthening the productive powers of the poor and enabling them to satisfy their needs by their own activities are founded on changes in the primary income distribution (by agrarian reforms, lending programmes, training and extension schemes), as well as on measures, which create the economic and social prerequisites for effectively using or improving the productive capacities of the poor.

This target is to be reflected in the distribution of public funds, which, even in spite of financial restrictions, might establish priorities such as:

- supporting rural sanitary posts instead of only concentrating on urban hospitals;
- promoting rural primary schools instead of focusing on universities;
- assistance for women working in agriculture instead of subsidies for mechanising agricultural production;
- abolishing the discrimination against craftsmanship and small-scale industries instead of protecting large-scale enterprises.

Other contributions of the *Yearbook's* first volume discuss in detail the sectoral and local levels of an alternative strategy plan. It would be a fatal error, if the necessary support of the still relatively neglected agricultural sector

would be given in form of a priority treatment to big commercial farmers and agribusiness, as it is already fact in some countries. This kind of agricultural policies to the smallholder's disadvantage would have a negative effect on national food security, income distribution, the situation of the urban poor, and the ecological development in many African countries. African NGOs can play an important role in the implementation of alternative strategies. When compared to state-run institutions, NGOs proved to be able to act quickly and flexibly, being close to grassroots levels, being politically independent, effective and innovative. Although it is difficult to generalise, especially as knowledge about NGOs is limited, one might state that in many regions NGOs supplied social and infrastructural services in rural areas or took part in the productive mobilisation of savings. These productive functions are still not fully appreciated and the ambivalent attitudes of governments impeded their development in many places. Given a suitable legal and political framework, however, their work might be highly effective.

Problems of political implementation

These considerations imply a critical revision of the proposals on reforms, which were made by international organisations. The fact that a critical view was developed even within their own ranks clearly shows how much the confrontation between those African countries in favour of the *Lagos Plan of Action*, and the international financial organisations, and the Western countries has lost in relevance since the beginning of the 1980s. As early as 1986, the formulation of the UN Programme for Africa signalled the efforts of all parties involved to find ways out of the crisis by an extensive international dialogue. The African governments as well as the international donor community partly dropped their old disagreements and both sides emphasised at that time the need for concerted action, i.e. intensified political reforms at national levels in Africa and a financial commitment by the industrialized nations.

The UN's provisional appraisal of the programme for Africa, however, reveals the fact that all the parties involved had, until now, hardly got beyond declarations of intent. Neither debt relief or financing schemes were carried out, nor did the necessary political reforms in African countries progress significantly. In spite of an obvious convergence in many issues of how to carry out structural adjustment programmes, there is still the risk for international cooperation to stagnate on a low level. Therefore the editors of the *Yearbook's* first volume made it their task to document the results of important discussions (e.g., the UN Programme for Africa.) and conferences (e.g., the Khartoum Conference and Declaration). Even if none of the previous declarations and commitments appears to be more than a list of well-meant calls for reform, the discussion of their scientific content and their meaning for development is not at all in vain, since it is most important to support those groups moving in the right direction and to provide an international forum for their arguments and positions.