

Development issues in Africa: challenges, concepts, opportunities

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Journal of International Relations and Development (2011) **14**, 96–97.

doi:10.1057/jird.2010.18

The idea for this Forum emerged during the fourth GARNET Capacity Building Workshop in Cape Town, South Africa, in November 2008, convened by The Evian Group at IMD, an international coalition of corporate, government and opinion leaders, based in Switzerland, in association with Mthente, a South African research-driven consulting firm. The workshop, entitled *The Challenges of Youth in the 21st Century: Africa — Creating Opportunities through Entrepreneurship and Education*, brought together about 60 participants and experts on the topic, representing civil society, government and business as well as academia to engage in a lively dialogue on the pressing issue of development on the African continent and the role education and entrepreneurship plays in this respect.

Fifty years ago, after the demise of colonialism, Africa was expected to grow faster than Asia. Much hope was pinned on the continent. Yet over the past decades we have witnessed economic growth and increasing wealth across Asia, while much of Sub-Saharan Africa has suffered from relative economic stagnation, extensive civil strife, and generally poor development indicators. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by their diversity, distinct cultures and historical trajectories. These specificities must be accounted for in tackling past and present challenges. A shared structural feature, however, is youth. In 2005, over 60 per cent of the region's population fell below the age of 25. This demographic transition, which will not stabilise before 2050, implies huge pressures for sustainable job creation in all African countries over the coming decades. Youth unemployment and education are therefore crucial problems for policy-makers to be addressed to shape future development outcomes. Yet the problematique is much broader and more complex than that. The roles of international organisations, multinational corporations or trade cooperation with other regions in the world are but a few factors in the international political context that matter as well for development results in Africa.



This Forum brings together a variety of authors on these topics and presents short pieces from academics, policy-makers and development aid practitioners from the continent as well as abroad. It does not claim to capture the complexity of development issues in Africa but provides a few snapshots based on the expertise of the respective authors that shed light on the challenges ahead, newly emerging development concepts, and opportunities that arise. The *Journal for International Relations and Development* is an excellent outlet for such a Forum as it highlights the links between international relations theory and development studies and the need for more theorising in this field.

The state of development in Africa: concepts, challenges and opportunities

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Journal of International Relations and Development (2011) **14**, 97–108.

doi:10.1057/jird.2010.22

African under-development in context

Africa's marginalisation and development challenges are extensively documented. Africa's underdevelopment is a product of the interplay of external and domestic factors including slavery and colonialism, economic mismanagement, ill-conceived structural adjustment policies, inter-state and intra-state conflicts, failed regionalism, unfair trade terms, foreign debt, aid dependence, poor governance, weak states, and institutional decay. It is also a consequence of the legacies of history impacting on the present. Consequently, it is important to recognise that 'there are lines of continuity that run from the pre-colonial period, through the colonial era, right into the modern age' (Thomson 2000: 7).

Slavery contributed to Africa's underdevelopment by fostering ethnic divisions and, as Nunn (2007: 1) asserted, 'the largest numbers of slaves were taken from areas that were the most underdeveloped politically at the end of the 19th century and are the most ethnically fragmented today'. The imposition of arbitrary boundaries on Africa by the colonial powers completely disregarded existing societal and geographic boundaries and disadvantaged many countries