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# Democratisation and Development in Tanzania: Complimentary or Contradictory Forces?

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MARC WOONS, APR 9 2013

To what extent does democratisation promote development? Critics suggest the idea that democratisation fuels development has the relationship backwards. They feel that the authoritarian traits of newly developed states like South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore played a critical part in explaining their development. Without denying such successes, this paper challenges the belief that democracy hampers development. In other words, development in authoritarian regimes is the exception and not the rule.

The first section offers a brief overview of the terms development and democratisation. The second reviews the literature by comparing those who feel democratisation has a role to play in development and those who do not. Highlighting weaknesses found in the literature, the third section suggests that the best path to development in failed authoritarian states requires support for “bottom-up” democratisation. This approach is tested in the fourth section by looking at how well it explains Tanzania’s developmental challenges and successes. The conclusion discusses how bottom-up democratisation helps explain development in countries like Tanzania and offers a better road map even if the promised results fall short of the East Asian experience.

## **Defining Development, Democratisation and Good Governance**

**Development theories have generally shifted to include a broader range of goals. Three definitions reflect this trend since World War Two. Initially, modernisation theory focused narrowly on economic growth, proposing developing nations needed to ‘catch-up’ to Western countries (Turner & Hulme, 1997). Lewis (1955: 9) stated, “our subject matter is growth, not distribution.” This view persisted until the 1960s when it was rejected failing to promote growth and for being ethnocentric. In its place emerged new goals related to wealth distribution such as eliminating poverty, providing basic education and medicine, reducing inequality, and securing human rights (Seers, 1977; Bhagwati, 2002). Most recently, Indian Nobel laureate Sen proposed that development goes beyond a material focus to include the expanding freedoms. “[F]reedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they**

**are also among its principle means” (1999: 3). Development clearly requires a great deal of societal transformation, to paraphrase Stiglitz (2003), where the causality between goals and ends is sometimes complex. It is therefore difficult to establish a precise definition. However, development used here follows the second definition of promoting material growth *and* distribution. Where Sen’s views reinforce such development, they are also supported.**

Democratisation refers to administrative reforms that enhance democracy. Ideologically, democracy is fundamentally about governance-by-consent – citizens must be capable of holding governmental bodies affecting them accountable (Johnson, 2001; Bhagwati, 2002). Institutionally, it promotes universal suffrage, regular multi-party elections, an independent judiciary, and a role for public interest groups. It is also worthwhile to differentiate democratisation from good governance for the two often intersect and sometimes get mistaken for each another. Good governance includes items that support democracy but could also support authoritarianism. With respect to the latter, an efficient public service, rule of law, financial accountability, and public auditors come to mind. Others do not seem easy to separate from democracy such as universal human rights and a free press (Leftwich, 1993). Good governance is crucial to development whether it comes about through democratic or authoritarian means. It also relates to politics, which Leftwich defines as:

all the many activities of cooperation, conflict and negotiation involved in decisions about use, production and distribution of resources, whether these activities are formal or informal, public or private, or a mixture of all (Leftwich, 2008: 6).

Democratisation therefore must be judged on its intent, structure, *and* political use. It must be measured according to its ability to promote good governance and therefore development.

## **The Relationship between Democratisation and Development**

**Proponents of democratisation believe democracy helps development in several ways. Democratisation represents a good in itself that *increases the quality* of development even if it slows it down (Helliwell, 1994; Sen, 1999). This argument is rather weak given the material view of development adopted here, particularly in cases of tremendous human suffering. It is nevertheless important to recognize a generally strong moral bias toward democratisation even by those who feel it detracts from development (e.g., Leftwich, 2008). Instrumental arguments include the fact that democracy promotes *stability* evidenced as democracies rarely go to war against one another. Third, democracy *empowers citizens* to garner the attention of decision-**

**makers by allowing for debate and discussion on issues affecting them and their interests (Sen, 1999; Bhagwati, 2002). Sen draws particular attention to the ability of a democratic citizenry in preventing famines in India. The last argument on *accountability* is the strongest for development.**

Detractors feel democratisation, at best, has no effect on development and, at worst, stifles development. In most developed states democracy was only possible once development had delivered on promises of high literacy rates, a strong middle class, and relative social equality (Lipset, 1959; Leftwich, 1993). Second, democratisation promotes reforms that make the radical transformation required for development difficult to achieve. "Democratic politics is seldom the politics of radical economic change" (Leftwich, 1993: 616). Others suggest that democracy incites instability and chaos, giving voice to social cleavages that tear the state apart (Johnson, 2001). One empirical study suggested that below a certain income threshold democracy increases the possibility of political violence (Collier & Rohner, 2008).

Leftwich leads the most comprehensive attack on democratisation. Instead, he believes a different set of factors describe successful developmental states (Leftwich, 1993, 1995, 2005). First, a determined developmental elite, with strong ties to the bureaucracy, need to exercise authority at the expense of the legislative branch. Second, the state must enjoy autonomy beyond any special interests in defining the national interest. Third, developmental states should weaken civil society. Fourth, performance goals should trump civil rights. The fifth and sixth goals deal with ensuring the state has an effective economic bureaucracy and means to manage the national economy including non-state interests. Development and democracy are therefore institutionally incompatible. Leftwich now appears to take a less institutional approach, focusing more on the political dimension mentioned previously. He states that the establishment of developmental states "depends crucially on the politics and political processes which forge and sustain them – whether authoritarian or democratic, and whether run by a single dominant part or a shifting coalition of parties" (Leftwich, 2008: 17).

## **The Case for Bottom-Up Democratisation**

Critics of democratisation underemphasise the fact that most developing authoritarian regimes have not joined the club of developed states. Moreover, a few democracies have developed such as Finland (Jäntti, Saari & Vartiainen, 2005) and Botswana (Siphambe, 2003). Why have so many authoritarian regimes failed? Primarily because they are predatory, robbing society for the benefit of an elite few with limited accountability to the public.

Termite-like, Africa's primordial and patrimonial relationship (what Göran Hydén refers to as the 'economy of affection') has eaten into the very core of the edifice of modern administration rendering it both weak and incoherent (Mkandawaire, 2001: 298).

Because authoritarian regimes maintain the status quo just as easily as any democracy, it appears that the citizenry themselves need ways of pressuring the political and bureaucratic elite to develop. This aligns well with the empirical evidence, which has a hard time linking development to democracy but is much clearer on the importance of good governance in promoting development (Minier, 1998). Because democratisation helps promote good governance in non-developmental authoritarian regimes (Rivera-Batiz, 2002), it follows that development requires democratisation in such cases. The alternative involves persuading those with the most to lose to become benevolent leaders.

Leftwich correctly suggests that development requires political leaders, bureaucrats, and markets to align with a unified goal of development. These conditions are more likely to manifest by pressuring those with power through *bottom-up democratisation*. Bottom-up democratisation involves reforms that assist citizens to persuade non-developmental authoritarian regimes to pursue developmental ends. It assumes that while dictatorial development may be preferable, democratisation represents the only viable alternative when leaders resist (Spalding, 1996). It

# Democratisation and Development in Tanzania: Complimentary or Contradictory Forces?

Written by Marc Woons

requires pressure for reform. Luckily, international pressure and internal discontent over poor economic performance pressures authoritarian regimes to consider democratic reform (Mkandawire, 2001; Zack-Williams, 2001). "Authoritarian regimes are more likely to break down during economic crisis" (Geddes, 1999: 140). The 'economy of affection' also must be challenged. The predatory state cannot continue separate from society for development to take hold. Many prominent scholars argue that a balance must be found between a strong state that provides order and direction and a vibrant civil society that holds the state accountable to developmental goals (Evans, 1992; Spalding, 1996). A strong civil society also promotes support for alternative perspectives and an effective opposition inside and outside formal institutions. The empirical evidence from 42 African countries shows that well-organised civil societies are now leading transitions toward development. "Transitions in Africa seem to be occurring more commonly from below...rulers are driven by calculations of personal political survival: They resist for as long as possible" (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997: 83). Democracy appears vital in establishing many of the conditions of good governance Leftwich narrowly misattributes only to authoritarianism.

## Can Bottom-Up Democracy Stimulate Development in Tanzania?

**Bottom-up democratisation departs from the authoritarian approach on a key point. Where elites do not make development a priority, civil society, special interests, legislatures, opposition parties, and other pressures are needed to stimulate development. This section studies the case of Tanzania, suggesting that bottom-up democratisation better explains its past failure and future potential for development. It first examines the relationship between authoritarianism and development in the period between independence and the end of the Cold War (1961-1991). During that time, Tanzania was clearly an authoritarian non-developmental state with a strong economy of affection and general lack of accountability. The second part looks at the post-Cold War period as one of renewed hope that democracy could fuel development. Sadly, studies of development are few in Tanzania. Nevertheless, evidence exists to propose that bottom-up democratisation offers the best chance of improving on the status quo.**

Tanzania is an example of authoritarianism gone awry. Much of the period from 1961 to 1991 centres on the shifting politics of Nyerere, Tanzania's first president. His 1967 reforms, known as *ujamaa*, officially promoted democracy and equality focused on local development. "The philosophy implied not only that a strong state was based on a strong civil society, but that the state would be supplanted by local autonomous communities working for the good of the whole" (Spalding, 1996: 77). In other words, *ujamaa* promoted and promised bottom-up democratisation. The policy was very different when put into practice. *Ujamaa* resulted in top-down socialism that strangled local democracy by nationalising the means of production and forcibly resettling millions of farmers in communes. Top-down rule interfered in agricultural cooperatives, imposed a police state, and destroyed civil society in the name of national development. This ultimately led to economic crisis in the 1980s as basic needs such as food, education, and health care diminished (Spalding, 1996; Hydén, 1999). Political power became so centralised that Nyerere

# Democratisation and Development in Tanzania: Complimentary or Contradictory Forces?

Written by Marc Woons

easily ignored reforms proposed by his senior economists, prioritising socialist goals despite increasing internal and external pressures (van Cranenburgh, 1996). Ultimately, “it became increasingly clear that [Nyerere’s] top-down policies and control of the economy were crippling the country’s development” (Hydén, 1999: 144).

How should Tanzania’s failure during this period be explained? For starters, the state actively weakened civil society without filling the void. Reflecting on this period, Spalding states that,

the strengthening of the state at the expense of a weakened civil society is likely in the long run to weaken the state and society as a whole. The institutions of civil society perform necessary functions. What is dismantled must be rebuilt, but that rebuilding may be far more difficult than the dismantling (Spalding, 1996: 73).

Ironically, this weakened the state to such an extent that civil society could return in the 1980s. Journalism, gender advocacy, and environmental groups are just some examples of civil societies re-emergence (Kelsall, 2003). Second, Tanzania was not immune from an economy of affection. Patronage networks, corruption, and land concentration among the wealthy worsened over time, and became entwined with the ideology of the state (Hydén, 1999). While in places like Angola it was obvious for all to see (Kibble, 2006), in Tanzania it seems that the public turned a blind eye because they valued Nyerere’s ability to maintain peace and order (Kelsall, 2003). Lastly, Nyerere and his regime’s counter-development decisions were largely made without question or general consultation. In the end, socialism and stability trumped the developmental interests of society. Senior economists were ignored. These are all failures to enact good governance made possible by authoritarianism. Though democracy is imperfect, linkages with the people make elites *sensitive* to the people’s needs and *accountable* to developmental goals. Eventually, international and internal pressure led to louder calls for democratisation – calls that even Nyerere eventually supported (Luckham, 1998; Vener, 2000).

In step with other African nations during the 1990s, Tanzania found itself (again) officially promoting democratisation. The ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), supported a package of democratic reforms put forth by a presidential commission headed by Chief Justice Nyalali. Most notably, the reforms established regular multi-party elections, presidential term-limits, and gender quotas (van Cranenburgh, 1996). The limited scope and nature of the reforms has led some to call it “top-down democratisation” (Hydén, 1999). Tanzanians have lost confidence in the state’s ability to promote development (Lange, 2008). Little evidence suggests that the reforms have reversed this perception. First of all, patronage still exists in Tanzania, as elites serve their own interests through privatisation and meddling in markets. Kelsall (2003) highlights examples involving petroleum, mining, sugar, dairy, and shipping industries. Multi-party elections also failed to ensure government accountability. The policy differences between parties remain minimal, with the focus more on personalities vying for power based on patronage networks (Luckham, 1998; Liviga, 2009). CCM has also remained unchallenged, though the 1995 and 2010 elections show the possibility of an opposition emerging. The legislature also has not successfully challenged the executive branch’s dominance. The legislatures “functions of control, oversight and representation are hardly fulfilled” (Liviga, 2009: 37). Returning to Leftwich’s concept of politics, simply changing the institutions without changing the players has little promise.

Bottom-up democratisation offers a missing ingredient that, over time, reinforces civil society, holds leaders accountable, and helps to engage the entire nation in development. The limited Tanzanian examples of bottom-up democratisation offer some hope. Igoe (2003) highlights strides made by locals in Maasai and Barabaig in re-establishing local rights over traditional grazing who came together to assert themselves against unresponsive local leaders. They began to gain legitimacy from below and from above, although the latter was more difficult to attain due to government discomfort. The result was improved access to vital lands for pastoralists. Similarly, Lange (2008) outlines two examples of community development that were fostered by devolving developmental responsibility to local governments. In Mwanza, significant progress was made when the people came together to raise the majority of the funds needed to improve access to permanent housing. It was clear to people that development was now possible. Democratic processes had given them their optimism back. Lange highlights a similar story in Bagamoyo, where the Tanzania Social Action Fund allowed people to identify and fund their own developmental needs. In overwhelming numbers, the people agreed to build a dispensary to provide improved health care.

# Democratisation and Development in Tanzania: Complimentary or Contradictory Forces?

Written by Marc Woons

Yet, in all three cases serious challenges persisted that relate not to the inadequacy of democracy, perhaps to the nature of politics, and most certainly to Tanzania's authoritarian past. Democratisation in each case was to some extent held captive by elites. In Maasai and Barabaig, it was the state who accessed and controlled international financial aid, giving them control over pastoralist organizations and thereby reducing their effectiveness. In Mwanza and Bagamoya, local politicians and bureaucrats fought each other for their own personal gain, jeopardising development. Despite these problems, the examples show progress and have mobilised people to hold the state accountable for promoting development. The challenges highlight a need for more effective forms of democracy. Local politicians and bureaucrats need democratic pressures and incentives to promote the collective interest. These are further questions about how democratic institutions best promote good governance and ultimately development. Tanzania is admittedly far from realising the levels of development needed to secure an adequate standard of living for everyone. Tanzania will nevertheless find its successes through democracy, not despite it.

## Conclusion

One must be careful in asserting that democratisation promotes development. After all, the quality of life for many people hangs in the balance. It is therefore a difficult and dangerous assertion to make. Democratisation has a relatively weak track record, particularly compared with historical evidence that shows most developed nations pursued development before democratisation. The key point made here surrounds predatory authoritarian regimes that for reasons discussed simply reject or cannot follow the developmental path followed by others. For development to take hold in such situations, citizens require democratic channels to pressure elites. This requires bottom-up democratisation, which has the least chance of being exploited by elite factions. It calls for a strong civil society, opposition parties, and decentralisation. The bureaucracy must support the state and act on behalf of the public interest. In other words, greater balance between rulers and ruled should promote development. As one would suspect, the evidence from the Tanzanian case shows that even bottom-up development struggles. It struggles against internal conflicts and interest driven politics as claimed by democratisation's critics. Yet, Tanzanian experience also shows that expecting top-down solutions to work is even riskier.

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# Democratisation and Development in Tanzania: Complimentary or Contradictory Forces?

Written by Marc Woons

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# Democratisation and Development in Tanzania: Complimentary or Contradictory Forces?

Written by Marc Woons

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