

RDD

Regional Development Dialogue

Vol. 33, No. 2, Autumn 2012

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The Poverty Dilemma in Africa

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Pan-Africa and the African Union



United Nations Centre for
Regional Development
Nagoya, Japan

RDD

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Editorial Introduction

James-Herbert Williams and John F. Jones

Socioeconomic Development in Africa

This is a special issue of *Regional Development Dialogue (RDD)* devoted to human security, conflict resolution, capacity building, and sustainable livelihoods in Africa. The articles and comments provide a critical and scholarly look at these four themes, each very relevant to the challenges that Africa faces at present and into the future. In comparison with past decades this is a time of global prosperity, but ironically there also exists a growing atmosphere of danger. In both wealthy countries of the global North and in poorer developing regions of the global South fears of armed violence, terrorism, poverty and disease are all too real. Felt worldwide, the need for safety has crystallized in the words “human security.” The phrase, which acquired its modern colour and currency within the last forty years or so, owes much of its prominence in development circles to the United Nations (UN). Through its *Millennium Declaration* of 2000, the UN raised the awareness of the international community to a worldwide crisis from the perspective of human security.¹ This millennium alert has focused attention on the inherent risks of absolute poverty, war, famine and terror wherever this exists. While not precisely a global village, the world is small, linking nations economically and socially to an extent unimaginable in the past.

Human Security

The term “human security” may be defined as a process of intervention to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment through protection of civil rights and provision of basic human needs. The definition is based on that of the Commission on Human Security (CHS), but with the additional explicit reference to civil rights and basic human needs — not the Commission’s original wording.² Taylor Owen has proposed adding to the Commission’s notion of enhancing human freedoms and human fulfillment the words “in critical and widespread threats and situations.” His rationale is the need to narrow the focus to imminent and severe crises — extreme poverty, massive displacement of people, the scourge of civil war or looming famine — rather than an excessively wide social development orientation.³

Two contrasting approaches to defining human security are evident among scholars, policymakers and practitioners in the field. The first puts main emphasis on threats of physical harm, with the remedy sought in the protection of communities and individuals from internal and external violence. Dispute resolution between combatants is front and centre in this interpretation. A broader, more global perception of human security includes — besides threats like war and genocide — ecological crises, natural or manmade disasters, famine, poverty, hunger, and disease. While direct intervention in violent situations is also recognized in this second approach, equally important is the prevention of conflict through civil rights legislation, health services, and poverty reduction. Although neither concept contradicts the other, the strategies adopted by the proponents of each approach vary, as do the criteria chosen to mark progress towards the achievement of human security goals.⁴ While recognizing the necessity of conflict resolution, by armed force if necessary, this second approach is very conscious of global poverty, inequality, and disease, and all that feeds and inflames human crises. It seeks solutions in the protection of civil rights and the provision of basic needs. This broader interpretation of human security is the one taken by most authors in this volume.

Conflict Resolution

The resolution of conflict depends on building new sustainable relationships between hostile groups. It demands the acknowledgement of divisions while focusing on the core reasons for the quarrel.⁵ The intent is to tackle hostility constructively so that violence is minimized, antagonisms overcome, outcomes made mutually acceptable, and settlements made secure.⁶ Ethnic minorities are especially vulnerable. The multidimensional causes of conflict — economic, cultural, and political — include inter- and intra-ethnic strife in Africa. For all parties the basic conditions for a just peace are, in human security terms, the two freedoms — from want and fear. While these conditions may sometimes remain long-term aspirations, there are steps that can be taken to make peace a reality. Even when macro in scope, massive conflict calls for an understanding of human needs and a willingness to use micro techniques when dealing with political or even military issues.

The tools for conflict resolution are many, but foremost among them are negotiation and mediation, calling at different times for individual mediators, civil bodies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and governments.⁷ Structuring integrative solutions to ethnic conflict presents a particular challenge. The continent of Africa has had throughout its history complex ethnic interaction, tribal war and peace, and the false frontiers imposed by colonialism. Many scholars are more inclined to put the blame for armed conflict and civil war on access, control, management and exploitation of natural resources. Much of the ethnic or racial conflict in Africa, that argument goes, has simply been clashes between competing elites for state power and guaranteed access to certain material resources.⁸

The struggle to control natural resources may motivate not just domestic actors but also external players, such as multinational corporations. Competition for such access and control has often turned deadly, resulting in civil conflict. Mismanagement of natural resources and their exploitation very easily leads to the plunder of resources by both domestic and external actors, dividing the local or national community. The lack of government control has led at times to anarchical free-for-alls, resulting in the pillage and plunder of resources by both locals and foreigners.⁹ Civil wars in countries rich in

precious commodities have escalated beyond national borders when rebel groups control their production and marketing.¹⁰ Clashes over common resources, such as river and lake waters that transcend state boundaries, are also the cause of armed conflict between states.

Sometimes the resource wars concern precious materials, like diamonds, as happened in Angola where decades-long armed conflict resulted in the loss of over a million lives and the displacement of millions more. The violence led the UN to intervene. In 2000, the UN Security Council announced that it would impose economic sanctions on any country that allowed itself to be used by Angola's rebel group the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in the shipment of diamonds to overseas markets.¹¹

The finding and use of natural resource wealth even where the market works according to plan can leave a country's poor no better off and sometimes worse off than before. Resource exports can cause a country's currency to rise in relation to other currencies, thus making its non-resource export activities, such as agriculture, uncompetitive. Collier cites the case of Nigeria in the 1970s where, as oil revenue rapidly increased, its exports of peanuts and cocoa decreased precipitously in value and, becoming uncompetitive, collapsed.¹² The dependence on resource exports to the neglect of other potential sources of wealth can damage a country's growth process.

Capacity Building

The capacity of communities to create and sustain their livelihood is necessary for their survival. To ensure conditions that hinder or threaten access to food, shelter, health services, personal liberty, and economic security, community capital should include control over human and natural resources. The framework for capacity building involves individuals with their own identities, group organizational dynamics, and social networks in communities. These entities are individually and collectively agents that play their respective roles in planning and taking collective action that are influential in livelihood creation. Planning encompasses both social and economic policy.¹³ The practice component requires education and training.¹⁴

Capacity building in Africa demands coordinated social development enterprises in planning and implementation. The World Bank has attempted to extend its traditional focus beyond building organizations and individual skills to more effective programme support.¹⁵ Traditional tools such as technical assistance and training are not always successful in building capacity in the public sector. Although capacity building is a stated corporate priority, many activities lack standard quality assurance processes in the design stage, and interventions are not routinely monitored and evaluated. Support for capacity building in country programmes remains fragmented. This makes it difficult to assess cross-sectional issues and opportunities.

Generally, capacity building support is designed and managed on a case-by-case basis, and lacks adequate needs assessment. In the view of the World Bank, capacity building in Africa fails to evaluate the appropriate sequencing of measures aimed at institutional and organizational change and individual skill building. To improve the situation it is first necessary at the corporate level to strengthen the knowledge base and amplify the capacity building framework to improve the capacity building activities of countries; secondly, the institutional, organizational, and human capacity developments should be more effectively connected; and lastly, traditional capacity building tools must

be transformed to bring about the desired outcome of programmes.

Sustainable Livelihoods

The creation and maintenance of sustainable livelihoods require government support, NGOs, and other agencies that are external to the communities of concern. Necessary government support includes: introduction of new farm management methods; extension services to subsistence farmers in crop production; and the provision of veterinary services to manage and control animal disease for high yield livestock production in pastoral communities, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. There are different entry points for livelihood creation in communities. New capacities for livelihood creation must be based on resource use and economic production practices that have the potential for further fostering sustainable development.¹⁶

One of the best means of alleviating poverty is to concentrate efforts on people and their livelihoods. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, a region marked by desert, jungle and arid or semi-arid conditions, these livelihoods more often than not depend on natural resources, climate and other environmental factors. Rural livelihoods affect and are affected by natural resource management initiatives. The effects of environmental degradation are a major determinant of poverty, impacting livelihoods, health and security. The poor are most affected by water scarcity because of their greater reliance on natural sources to generate sustainable livelihoods. Most environmentalists would agree that improved access to domestic water offers greater equity and food security benefits to poorer households whether in agricultural farming or nomad pasturing.

Livelihood analysis and planning are key requisites in land reform, community based natural resource management, and district development planning. Such data analysis serves as a guide to understanding the concept of sustainable livelihoods, and offers a framework for development and project planning. While communities and individuals have options for livelihood creation and maintenance, they are enhanced or restricted by factors in the external environment. There exists a relationship or interplay between the household and its locality, and a wider one at the provincial, national, and global levels. Furthermore, the environment, social relationships, and economic circumstances are forever changing, making it essential to continually monitor and assess the social and economic context of sustainable livelihoods.

Aspects of Africa's Security, Peace Prospects, Capacity Building, and Livelihoods

In this issue the reader will find seven articles where the authors share case studies, programme assessments, and theoretical concepts related to development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Three articles focus on research, capacity building, and sustainable livelihoods in Kenya. In the first article, Asfaw Kumssa provides an overview of a capacity building research and training project on human security and conflict resolution in northern Kenya. The article presents a comprehensive narrative of the achievements and lessons learned from this research and capacity building project. This three-year research-cum-capacity building project was a joint partnership between the United Nation Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), the Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) at the University of Denver, and the University of Nairobi. The project entitled: "Human Security and Conflict in Northern Kenya: Assessment, Capacity Building, and Operational Tools to Promote Sustainable Livelihoods and Conflict Management" had a primary

focus of reducing community vulnerability and assisting communities affected by conflict in northern Kenya. Kumssa presents an overview of the research design and implementation of capacity building strategies in the Garissa, Laikipia, and Marsabit districts in northern Kenya to identify the causes and effects of conflict and to build capacity in the community by empowering vulnerable groups affected by conflict. The project design focused on conducting research on human security, conflict, and livelihood creation during the first phase and conducting workshops to build the capacity of communities in conflict resolution and alternative livelihood creation. The project also identified sustainable livelihoods in the community and trained community stakeholders with various conflict management strategies.

The second article by Patrick O. Alila continues to focus on capacity building and the Kenyans. This article investigates the capacity building processes needed for sustainable livelihoods in agrarian and pastoral communities. Similar to the first article, Alila also concentrates his research on northern Kenya. This article examines how the institutionalization of capacity building methods and strategies promotes sustainable livelihoods among agro-pastoral societies in Kenya. The author imparts findings based on community based research and workshops on human security and conflict held in Garissa, Laikipia, and Marsabit districts in northern Kenya. This article posits that the institutionalization of ongoing capacity building processes is important to the peaceful coexistence in these communities and supports the development of sustainable livelihoods. The article continues with the postulation that actual sustainable development can only be achieved by engaging empowered community members to participate in the development and implementation of sustainable livelihood strategies.

The third article with a specific focus on Kenya in this issue is by Geoffrey R. Njeru. This article discusses agricultural innovation and capacity building approaches in Mbeere, Tharaka, and Mwingi, three semi-arid areas of Kenya. The author indicates that many Kenyan communities located in the arid and semi-arid regions continue to encounter multiple challenges in their efforts to build capacities for sustainable livelihoods and social development. These communities have historically practiced mixed agriculture (mixed crop production and animal husbandry). During the first two decades of independence (1963-83), the government provided subsidies to these communities through free agricultural extension advice and a Guaranteed Minimum Returns (GMR) package which compensated farmers in case of crop failure. The past three decades has seen a collapse of these supports due to the World Bank initiated Structural Adjustment Programmes and the onset of globalization. These structural changes, coupled with decreasing land size and dwindling natural resources, have forced communities in arid and semi-arid lands to rethink their production systems through innovative resource use. This article examines the various attempts by subsistence farmers in the three semi-arid regions Kenya as mentioned above, to improve crop and livestock production in the absence of government subsidies and programmes. The author also analyses new capacities and different entry points for capacity building for livelihood creation and sustainable development among communities living in contexts of both natural and human conflict triggers and multipliers.

Similar to the three articles specific to Kenya, the article by Rodreck Mupedziswa and Dolly Ntseane is also country specific. Mupedziswa and Ntseane focused their research on human security in the South African Development Community (SADC) with a specific focus on social protection initiatives in Botswana. The SADC is a regional

economic block comprising fifteen countries. Many of the countries in SADC are confronted with considerable human security challenges. The authors indicate that even the stronger economic countries in SADC (e.g., South Africa and Zimbabwe) are struggling in addressing human security concerns. Botswana appears to be an exception. Over the last two decades, Botswana, a relatively small country with a population of approximately 2 million, has made consistent progress in addressing human security concerns. Consistent economic growth and development and political stability have moved Botswana from poverty to a middle-income country. The article argues that while Botswana may have a smaller population size and less infrastructure, the country is an excellent example of success in providing social protection as compared to other SADC countries. The authors discuss the social protection initiatives currently implemented by the government of Botswana to draw lessons for the rest of the SADC region.

Three articles in this special edition take a more macro approach to discussing human security. These authors address issues and dilemmas that affect the African continent as a whole as compared to one specific country. The first article, discussing issues of the African continent, expands beyond one specific Sub-Saharan African country to discuss the impact of human security dilemmas across the African continent. Aloysius C. Mosha discusses how environmental changes, specifically climate change, has and will continue to have a profound impact on food security, agriculture, and natural resources in Africa and across the planet. Climate change is probably the most significant risk factor impacting human security in Africa. This article provides the readers with an assessment regarding the impact of climate change on food security across the African continent. The primary theme of this article is that, as a continent, Africa has had a long-standing problem with food security. The continued reliance on rain-fed agriculture by African farmers is an unsustainable farming practice, and global climate change will have a significant effect on food security in Africa. Mosha discusses the various adaptation and mitigation measures that have been executed by individuals, NGOs, and governmental agencies to abate the impact of climate change. The author indicates that the success of these various adaptive and mitigation strategies has been mixed and limited.

In their article, Asfaw Kumssa and John F. Jones address poverty in Africa. They discuss the implementation of policies to meet the goals of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The alleviation of poverty in developing nations across Africa is imperative to overall sustainability and political stability. The authors discuss the various poverty reduction strategies implemented by international organizations, multilateral and bilateral donors, and governments. The articles specifically focus on the endeavours of UN MDGs. The UN MDGs have received universal acceptance and support. The MDGs have set specific, measureable, and achievable time bound targets. This article discusses the challenges for poverty reduction in Africa and the progress to date in achieving the UN MDGs and examines development policies in an historical context. The authors also propose key intervention areas for poverty reduction in Africa.

The last article in this issue by John F. Jones provides a historical context for Pan-Africanism and the predicament that the African Union (AU) faces when it seeks to reconcile the dream of continental unity with the current socioeconomic and political realities of contemporary Africa. Caught between Africa's hope for a united continent and conflicting demands of African sovereign states, AU has had to compromise. Struggling with the complexities of a global economy and the poverty of Sub-Saharan Africa,

it has devised an array of new human security strategies to meet this challenge.

Overall, the articles in this special issue provide an exceptional overview of the various contextual variables impacting human security across Africa and make a significant contribution to the human security knowledge base. The authors summarize several key themes of human security in Africa from several research studies and programmatic strategies. There are several implications for research and social development practice in this special edition. Given the major challenges of poverty, climate change, conflict management and resolution, food insecurity, human and environmental insecurity, it is imperative that continued research, programming, and interventions are conducted and implemented to promote capacity building and sustainability. As researchers and scholars, we need to continue to build on the knowledge base to advance policies and programmatic effectiveness. These studies are essential to influence funding for programme implementation and to continue programme development to support substantial changes in Africa.

NOTES

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