



## **Towards a better agenda for the development of the Global South**

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The current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire in 2015. The MDGs were adopted in September 2000 through the Millennium Declaration at the 55th session of the United Nations General Assembly, convened as the Millennium Assembly. The MDGs, understood to be a global development agenda, focused on poverty reduction, access to education, gender parity, healthcare access, sustainable development and international partnerships. Although many milestones have been reached, Africa is set to miss most of the MDGs, so are many countries in the global south (with possible exception of Brazil and China which incidentally did not follow the orthodox prescriptions for development).

Most African countries perform poorly on human development. The African economy, broadly, performs below potential relative to its size, resources, and other factors. Poverty and inequality remain very high in most African countries. It is imperative that the post-2015 development agenda pay particular focus on poverty, inequality and human development. It should be noted also that poverty and inequality in Africa are structural. The structures of African economies favour capital intensity, mineral-energy sectors, and high level skills. As many have explained, the colonial project had shaped African economies – and those of the global south as a whole – as satellite economies in the periphery to serve the metropolis in Europe. It is also in this context that the African continent was inappropriately partitioned at the infamous Berlin Conference and colonialism reigned.

The global south, as Samir Amin has been arguing, need a different approach to socio-economic development – of course Samir Amin is pushing for socialism, while Ayi Kwei Armah and others view socialism and communism as inappropriate for Africa. I have been arguing for communalism, as described by Walter Rodney. George Ayittey has argued for a socio-economic development approach akin to communalism; a development approach that puts the peasantry at the center. Communalism, as a philosophical framework for Africa's development, would facilitate development as conceptualised by Claude Ake – Ake sees development as “the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realise higher levels of civilisation in accordance with their own choices and values...” It may very well be that different variations of communalism can be adapted for local contexts by the countries of the South.

There are various reasons why the global south, on average, remains on the periphery. For Africa in general, as I have argued elsewhere, the disappointing levels of socio-economic development are largely a result of inappropriate policies/reforms. Policies are considered inappropriate or weak if they do not take account of particular contexts. The global environment, different domestic contexts and other contexts change overtime; as such policy changes or shifts (i.e. reforms) and their sequencing have not been alive to new realities in Africa. Thandika Mkandawire has, over many years, been explaining the importance of policies, and social policy in particular for Africa and the developing world.

In the main, however, the skewed distribution of global power and unfavourable state-capital relations limit development in the global south as many have argued. The global north is clinging onto global political and economic power and uses all sorts of tactics to ensure that power is not shared equitably, globally. Unfortunately, as William Robinson puts it, post-independence African leaders have surreptitiously formed alliances with global capital as part of the Transnational Capitalist Class. Susan Strange talks of internationalisation of production networks as an inevitable outcome of global capitalism in which corporations seek outlets for

cheap labours, higher returns on investments, freer regime of trade, investment and capital, at the expense of development. With regard to state-capital relations, it would seem that the private sector has captured governments in the global south thereby privileging 'profit over people' (as Noam Chomsky would put it).

There is a general tendency to blame the woes of the global south, perhaps simplistically, on corruption, weak leadership, geography etc (as I have argued elsewhere). This is not to say that weak leadership and such are not constraints – they are just not binding constraints for the development of the global south. Indeed, corruption, which has led to the pauperisation of the citizens, has been a significant negative factor. Also, dependence on aid and foreign assistance has also obfuscated development in the global south. In the context of Africa, however, the culpability of African leaders in surrendering the development process on the continent to the logic of global capital cannot be denied, as many have argued. As George Ayittey puts it “the nationalist leaders, with few exceptions, adopted the wrong political systems, the wrong economic system, the wrong ideology and took the wrong path. Equally grievous, perhaps, was the low calibre of leadership...the leadership lacked basic understanding of the development process”.

Given the two fundamental challenges that constrain the further development of the global south ie policy constraints and skewed distribution of global socio-economic and political power – what could the global south do? At minimum, countries of the South should get policies right and pursue implementation effectively in order that effective development occurs. The countries in the global south should learn from each other – there are countries of the South like China, Brazil and Venezuela that have made commendable socio-economic progress because of the policies pursued. The post-2015 development agenda has to ensure that correct policies are in place: economic policies need to be improved and social policies have to be robust as well as labour market policies should be ameliorated. Most importantly, social and economic policies have to work together for reducing poverty and inequality. Of critical importance though, in the longer term, from a policy perspective, is the restructuring of the

affected economies to address structural poverty and inequality and effectively advance human development.

Fundamentally, however, global politico-economic relations should be reconfigured – the global and or geopolitical distribution of power must redress the peripheralisation of the global south and the current shift in global geography of power in favour of the South offers another rare opportunity. The global south needs its own development approach, adapted for local realities for the different countries of the south. The global south would do well if it listens to Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Adebayo Adedeji, Samir Amin, Yash Tandon, Issa Shivji and many others who have argued that what is needed is the complete decolonisation and deimperialisation of the global order. The peoples of the South must unite to defeat the interminable imperialism and coloniality which maintain the status quo that makes them worse off. The starting point is to get rid of the “leadership that lacks basic understanding of the development process” as George Ayittey has described our leadership.

As I argued in my recent inaugural professorial lecture ([http://www.vusigumede.com/content/2014/MARCH%202014/Inaugural%20Professorial%20Lecture%20\(19%20March%202014,%20Unisa\)%20-%20updated%20and%20final.pdf](http://www.vusigumede.com/content/2014/MARCH%202014/Inaugural%20Professorial%20Lecture%20(19%20March%202014,%20Unisa)%20-%20updated%20and%20final.pdf)), thought leadership, critical consciousness and thought liberation are the three main ingredients needed to take the global south forward – to be able to get rid of the incapable leadership, to get policies right, to get state-capital relations proper and to deimperialise as well as decolonise the global order. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chinweizu Ibekwe, Ama Mazama, Archibald Mafeje, Anibal Quijano, Dani Nabudere, Patricia McFadden among others, have long giving powerful pointers how to pursue the ‘three main ingredients needed to take the global south forward’. We must indeed burn the colonial library and challenge its epistemological violence, as Valentin-Yves Mudimbe would put it.