



**Thandika Mkandawire: Development, African Nationalism and Pan-Africanism**  
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**Introduction**

There are many themes that can be discussed when examining Thandika Mkandawire's archive. And there is more that he has done that can also warrant detailed treatment. For instance, Mkandawire has mentored many scholars. This paper focuses on his writings regarding African nationalism and pan-Africanism, although he has not written significantly on these two areas compared to other areas he has written on (i.e. social policy, developmental states and development broadly).

The central or overarching theme in Mkandawire's publications and other materials he has written is: development. Mkandawire has published extensively on social policy, developmental states, regional integration and economic development as well as various macroeconomic and political economy issues. He has looked at all these themes from a developmentalist perspective (in the sense that development is critical for Africa, and that we must better understand what has constrained development in Africa as well as ensure that inclusive development occurs).

Mkandawire is among a few unusual economists given work he has done on nation building, the national and social questions, social cohesion, social compacts/pacts and other phenomena usually outside mainstream economic thinking. He has challenged neo-liberal perspectives and written extensively critiquing Structural Adjustment Programmes and other schools of thought that have either oversimplified the African development challenge or misunderstood it. He has emphasized the importance of non-economic factors in studying economic development, hence his stance that social and economic policies should talk to each other instead of being disparate policy interventions. Interestingly, he is a self-proclaimed 'pan-Africanist of Nkrumahist mode' (Mkanadwire, 2014, p. 02).

This paper focuses on Mkandawire's views regarding development broadly and his take on regional integration, African nationalism and pan-Africanism. Although he has not published on African nationalism and pan-Africanism (as indicated above) as much as in other areas, there is an important thread that weaves together all his works that is also explicit in his writings on regional integration and pan-Africanism: case for African nationalism. Put differently, ideologies associated with African nationalism remain pertinent when we study African development (Mkandawire 2011: p6). The central message from his works is that development has been the preoccupation of founding fathers of the political independence of Africa and that post-independent Africa has been preoccupied with development; as a "late comer" urged to "run while others walk" in order to "catch up" with the so-called developed world (Mkanadwire, 2011 & 2003). As demonstrated in the paper, it is in this context that Mkandawire has disagreed with various explanations put forward by other leading development scholars as far as economic development is concerned for Africa.

The next section discusses development in Africa, clarifying and supporting Mkandawire's central arguments regarding economic development in Africa. Then follows a section on social policy in the context of development; another area that has preoccupied Mkandawire for decades in relation to developmental states in Africa, the national question, the social questions and nation building as well as social compacting. I then discuss his views on African nationalism and on pan-Africanism, linking them with the overarching theme of his archive (i.e. development) and other relevant issues such as regional integration (or developmental regionalism as he prefers). The last section concludes.

### **Development in Africa**

To start with, why has inclusive development remained elusive in Africa? Undoubtedly, there are many factors that have constrained development in Africa – Mkandawire might however argue that we have not yet fully understood the fundamental factors that have limited economic development in Africa in particular, and that some of the explanations are inaccurate. By inclusive development, it is meant development, or the advancement of wellbeing, that is inclusive (as in involving all the people) and that those affected or are supposed to benefit from

development are involved in the conceptualization and implementation of pertinent initiatives (as Claude Ake put it in his *Democracy and Development* book).

Mkandawire uses the 1955 Bandung Conference (Declaration) in crafting his conception of 'development'. As captured by (Ndlovu-Gatheni, 2012, p2), Mkandawire views development as a "liberatory human aspiration to attain freedom from political, economic, ideological, epistemological, and social domination..." It is not surprising that Mkandawire and his generation are influenced by the ideological orientation informed by Bandung. It is in this context, perhaps, that Mkandawire has insisted that we need to better understand the "nationalist developmentalist framework" than just dismissing it because, in his view, the nationalist developmentalist framework was aimed at nation building and socio-economic development (Mkandawire, 2010, p65). Earlier, Mkandawire (2003, p291) made the point that "developmentalism, in the sense of the successfully promoting rapid economic transformation, is [was] the core concern of leaders and citizen in African countries."

There are other conceptions of development that can be distilled in Mkandawire's archive. For instance, when Mkandawire talks about developmental states, inclusive development is at the center. It is not surprising – actually it is to be expected – that Mkandawire laments that: the developmental state literature has ignored social policy as constitutive of such states. As hinted earlier, it is also to be understood that Mkandawire's conception of development is similar or has been influenced by his peers such as Samir Amin and the late Claude Ake. Claude Ake (1996, p125), in particular, viewed 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 – development is something that people must do for themselves". It might be in this context that Mkandawire centres social policy in development because "Africa has undergone dramatic social change since independence, and that much of these changes have continued despite economic stagnation...social policies be used to enhance social capacities for economic development without, in the process, eroding the intrinsic values of the social ends that policy makers purport to address" (Mkandawire, 2004, p4).

As argued elsewhere, weak inclusive development in Africa – I suspect that Mkandawire might disagree with this formulation – largely has to do with, from a political economy perspective, with poor economic development which results from lack of appropriate policies/reforms, overreliance on natural resources, absence of an original economic development model, poor implementation etc. Then there are numerous social problems (i.e. unnecessary civil wars, poor educational outcomes, xenophobia etc.) that make development intractable. Then there is a challenge of political and institutional weaknesses (which allow negative external influences and interference, weak leadership, corruption etc.). This catalogue, which is a summary of what many say are the challenges facing the African continent, would most likely get Mkandawire pulling his hair.

As indicated earlier, Mkandawire is of the view that we have not fully understood what has constrained development, and particularly economic development in Africa. For the record, Mkandawire argues that attributing slow economic performance of African economies to neopatrimonialism as an example is problematic. As he puts it, “while neopatrimonialism can be used to describe different styles of exercising authority, idiosyncratic mannerisms of certain individual leaders, and social practices within states, the concept offers little analytical content and has no predictive value with respect to economic policy and performance”(Mkandawire 2015, p. 2). He describes “neopatrimonialism [as] a marriage of tradition and modernity with an offspring whose hybridity generates a logic that has had devastating effects on African economies” (p3) and that it is factually incorrect that the African economy has not performed well as the neopatrimonial logic suggests.

Indeed, the performance of economies in Africa has not been as dismal as the neopatrimonial school (and others) suggest. Table 1 indicates that Developing Economies in Africa have performed better than the World average during 1970-1980. Mkandawire has shown that per capita income growth in Africa grew much faster during the first 20 years or so of the post-independence period, hence the narrative of “Africa rising” is questionable because Africa is returning to levels of growth that it was at before Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).

**Table 1: Annual Average GDP Growth Rates, by Regions**

Real Gross Domestic Product by Regions (Percentage)								
	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2005	2005	2006	2007	2008
World	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.8	3.4	4	3.8	2.1
Developing Economies	5.8	3.9	5	5.4	6.7	7.1	7.3	5.5
Economies in Transition	4.9	1.2	-4.8	5.4	6.1	7.2	8.2	5.4
Developed Economies	3.4	3.2	2.5	1.9	2.3	2.8	2.5	0.8
Developing Economies in Africa	4.5	2.3	2.8	4.8	5.7	5.6	5.9	4.9
Developing Economies in America	5.8	1.7	3.2	2.7	4.7	5.4	5.7	4.4
Developing Economies in Asia	6.2	5.7	6.3	6.5	7.5	7.9	8.1	5.9

Source: Gumede (2013, p487)

As Mkandawire has argued, particularly in Mkandawire (2015, p580), the economies in Africa have performed relatively well – this does not mean that they have done well per se. I have argued that the African economies, though they have done relatively well, have performed below par given their potential (see Gumede, 2011). Table 1 (which deliberately ends before the full impact of the ongoing global economic crisis is felt) supports the argument that Mkandawire has been making: the averages, for instance, for growth in GDP for 1980-1990, 1990-2000 and especially 2000-2005 have been respectable. In fact, African economies – developing economies in particular – have done well until 2008 or so, before the global financial and economic crisis impacted on the economies in Africa.

At issue should be why economic development has not been fast enough. The related question is: why has economic development not resulted to effective human development. As argued and shown in Gumede (2013), human development in Africa remains very low. Looking at the period from 1980 to 2010, as an example, sub-Saharan Africa’s Human Development Index (HDI) has remained comparatively too low, even compared to South Asia. Comparing sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, the point made above – that Africa remains behind other regions – is glaring.

**Table 2: Human Development, by Regions**

	1980	1990	2000	2005	2009	2010	2011
Very high human development	0.766	0.81	0.858	0.876	0.885	0.888	0.889
High human development	0.614	0.648	0.687	0.716	0.734	0.739	0.741
Medium human development	0.42	0.48	0.548	0.587	0.618	0.625	0.63
Low human development	0.316	0.347	0.383	0.422	0.448	0.453	0.456
Arab States	0.444	0.516	0.578	0.609	0.634	0.639	0.641
East Asia and the Pacific	0.428	0.498	0.581	0.622	0.658	0.666	0.671
Europe and Central Asia	0.644	0.68	0.68	0.695	0.728	0.744	0.731
Latin America & the Caribbean	0.582	0.624	0.68	0.703	0.722	0.728	0.731
South Asia	0.356	0.418	0.468	0.51	0.538	0.545	0.548
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.365	0.383	0.401	0.431	0.456	0.46	0.463

Source: Gumede (2013, p490)

As discussed in Gumede (2013, p490), again, the 2013 Human Development Report indicates that the average Human Development Index (HDI) value for sub-Saharan Africa is 0.475 (which is the lowest of any region, although, granted, the pace of improvement is rising). Between 2000 and 2012, sub-Saharan Africa registered average annual growth of 1.34 percent in HDI value, placing it second only to South Asia. Although the index itself is debatable, as to what it exactly means or measures, the HDI gives a sense of overall general wellbeing of a society or a region. The low the HDI, by implication, the low is the quality of life because the HDI takes into account levels of educational attainment, access to healthcare and the levels of per capita incomes.

Overall, although Mkandawire insists that we need to think deeper and harder about economic development and associated factors in Africa he acknowledges factors such as the role of

external players in retarding development in Africa. Also, he has emphasized the importance of getting policies right; that economic policies have not been robust and there has been a glaring absence of social policy in many African countries. In other words, even in the context of various (externally imposed) constraints to economic development with the contextually relevant policies Africa would be having better economic development than what has so far been witnessed. And with social policy, not only economic development would have been better advanced but national and social questions would have been better addressed.

### **Social Policy for Developmental States**

It is important to start this section with Mkandawire's view of (1) what a developmental state is or should be and (2) transformative social policy. Broadly, Mkandawire (2001, p296) views a developmental state as the state that is able to set developmental goals and is willing to create and sustain a policy climate and an institutional structure that promotes development. It is in this context that Mkandawire emphasises that, distilling from literature, there are two aspects that determine or are critical for a developmental state: ideology and structure. Mkandawire's conception of developmental states covers all the critical aspects of what a developmental state is or could be: developmental ideology (i.e. developmentalism etc) and institutional capacity (i.e. capacity to implement policies etc). Also of critical importance is that Mkandawire (2010, p69) argues for *democratic* developmental states, not just any developmental state.

Regarding social policy, Mkandawire (2001, p12) views "social policy as an instrument for ensuring a sense of citizenship is an important instrument for conflict management, which is in turn a prerequisite for sustained economic development..." Social policy, as Mkandawire has been arguing and demonstrating, is critical for development. For instance, Mkandawire (2009, p141) makes a point that "social policy [as] important in the nation-building project." As he had earlier put it, "in developmental contexts, social policies typically have multiple objectives" (Mkandawire 2005, p13).

It is important to note that Mkandawire does not just talk of social policy; he (and Jimi Adesina actually) talks of *transformative social policy* – transformative social policy has to do with processes for transformation, as in transforming social relations and institutions. Also,

Mkandawire explains that social policy has three important roles (1) productive functions (i.e. producing human capital), (2) redistributive and (3) protective roles. Of critical importance – an overarching theme in Mkandawire’s works – is that there should be a link between social and economic policies: “Social policy [should] work in tandem with economic policy to lead to socioeconomic development” (2009, p22). Also, like other policies, social policy is sensitive to politics. As Mkandawire (2001, p25) puts it: “Social policy is a highly political process, touching upon power relations, access to resources and ideological predilections about the role of state and markets.”

Among fundamental points that come out of Mkandawire’s works is that social policy is critical for developmental states too – not just development broadly. Most of literature on developmental states emphasises economic growth (and not even economic development). This is problematic because economic growth, also economic development to some extent, is not a good measure of socio-economic progress. Mkandawire (2001, p290) argues that “any definition of a developmental state that is drawn deductively from the performance of the economy, runs the risk of being tautological.” It is indeed problematic that literature on developmental states mainly sees a role for economic policy and not social policy. As indicated earlier, transformative social policy that Mkandawire explains has a significant role in development. Mkandawire (2016) makes a point that social policy should have a link with economic policy, and he explains that even during the Golden Age social policy worked in tandem with economic policy.

Linked to the role of social policy are: the national question and the social question. Social and national questions are important for most, if not all, of African countries and they should be addressed. By the way, Mkandawire (2009, p132), says that “the social question addresses problems engendered by social differentiation along class, ethnicity, gender and other social cleavages that arise or are unresolved within a nation” – and he appeals that we must not conflate the national question with the social question. As Mkandawire (2009, p1) puts it, the intersection between race and class as well as “horizontal and vertical inequalities” make attention on social and national questions in Africa critical. For development to be effective and or inclusive, it is no gainsaying to argue that both the social question and the national question should be addressed.



As indicated earlier, social policy has a critical role to play in development and, as Mkandawire (2009, p141), argues “social policy is important in the nation-building project.”

### **African Nationalism and Pan-Africanism**

Making a distinction between earlier African nationalists and the new African nationalists, Mkandawire emphasizes the link between African nationalism and pan-Africanism as far as the pursuit of development is concerned. His central argument, making reference to Joseph Ki-Zebro, is that development was the primary preoccupation of earlier African nationalists. While “nationalism saw itself as up in arms against imperialism and the retrograde forces of tribalism”, “pan-Africanism, to which the African nationalists usually adhered, dictated that something be said about the eventual integration of the independent state with other independent African states” (Mkandawire, 2005, p33). Mkandawire also acknowledges the tensions associated with African nationalism – and especially the difficult relationship between African intellectuals (after political independence of many African countries) and African nationalists (largely because some of early African nationalists, after political independence, became authoritarian).

For Mkandawire (2002, p78), African nationalism was about: complete decolonization of the continent, nation-building, economic and social development, democratization, and regional cooperation. Pan-Africanism on the other hand, particularly after the 1958 Accra Pan-African Congress, could be viewed as a movement for both “collective self-reliance and new regionalism” (Mkandawire, 2011, p31). And, as he argues, Pan-Africanism succeeded in the complete political liberation of the continent but it has not succeeded as far as continental unity is concerned. Hence his view that the new Pan-Africanism must take on a more democratic and participatory process also involving social movements; that Pan-Africanism must talk to contemporary issues. This is insightful as it is along these lines that Ras Makonnen (born as George Thomas Griffiths in Guyana) felt during his time with Kwame Nkrumah (as captured in *Pan-Africanism from Within* that was put together by Kenneth King during the time Makonnen lived in Kenya where he died in 1983). Ras Makonnen emphasized the need for a new Pan-Africanism; a practical Pan-Africanism as he put it. The issue of democratic and participatory processes as well as support or keenness for social movements is actually a recurring theme characterising the perspectives of Mkandawire and his generation – Samir Amin, in particular,

has always and consistently pushed for social mobilisation, placing faith on social movements. Claude Ake had a lot to say about democracy, so is Joseph Ki-Zerbo and others.

Linked to the notion of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism is, for Mkandawire, regional integration – or *developmental regionalism* as he puts it in most of his writings. Pan-Africanism, for Mkandawire and many others, was a global movement and also a programme for uniting Africans which later became state-centric and was concerned with the development of the African continent. African nationalism, which always contained some notion of cultural reaffirmation and race liberation, was concerned with (economic) development and nation-building. As Mkandawire (2005, p13) puts it, development – the eradication of the “unholy trinity of ignorance, poverty and disease” – was a central component of the nationalist agenda. Hence, as indicated earlier, he laments critiques of nationalism saying that one feature of such criticisms “is the extent to which the complexity of the problems faced by nationalists and the structural context of their eventual failure are downplayed.” For Mkandawire, “to understand the case of the nationalists, one has to understand that the central premise of most of them, even when they lacked a ‘state project’, was that the struggle for independence and nation-building would take place within the confines of the territorial space drawn up by colonialists” (Mkandawire 2005, p11).

Regarding regional integration – *developmental regionalism* – Mkandawire makes a point that we have not sufficiently understood the extent and dynamics of regional integration in Africa. Mkandawire (2014) argues that we make inappropriate comparisons between Africa and Europe when it comes to regional integration and he makes a case for ‘Afrocrats’ (i.e. technocrats who are competent and driven by a pan-African vision). Among important factors in Mkandawire’s take on regional integration, which he views as a political project, is the importance of non-economic factors (i.e. such as collective self-reliance, peace and conflict management, and diplomatic concerns) although he acknowledges that “the arguments for regional integration are very structuralist, about economies of scale, about complementarities and so forth and if you don’t have the same understandings of how individual economies function, it’s very difficult to think of how the regional project will look like” (Mkandawire, 2014, p4). Lastly, Mkandawire (2002) makes a point that we should “rethink the attributes of a nation-state in Africa—in terms

of cultural basis and territorial exclusivity — in order to give greater authority to regional arrangements and strengthen regional self-policing” (p101). Earlier, in a paper he presented at the first conference of the African Union involving Intellectuals of Africa and its Diaspora that took place in Dakar, Mkandawire (2004, p3) makes the point that the very nature of statehood has an impact on regional integration. And that regional integration in Africa has failed because of lack of national anchoring yet the politics of the constitutive national entities of Africa are crucial to the success of the Pan-African project.

### **Synthesis: Africa’s Development**

There are many important lessons from Mkandawire’s perspectives regarding Africa’s development. Among the most important ones is that we need to be thorough in our efforts aimed at understanding developmental challenges facing Africa, and we must be weary of the comparisons we make between Africa and other parts of the world (especially the West). In fact, the recent and ongoing work that Mkandawire has and is pursuing make a point that we have not fully understood the African development challenge. It would be important, as an example, to revisit research or the analysis of the “lost decades” to better understand why Africa ended up with “lost decades”. As Mkandawire (2005, p34) has argued, “Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) marked a major defeat of the ‘developmentalist project’ [in Africa] – a defeat from which Africa has yet to recover”.

And then, there are practical implications for policies from Mkandawire’s perspectives. Among the many, which can be discerned from this paper, relate to social policy and to regional integration. It is clear that social policy must take center stage when it comes to the pursuit of inclusive development in Africa. And, as Mkandawire’s works demonstrate, social and economic policies must work in tandem – not in contradiction – in ensuring inclusive development. Linked to this are the necessary policy reforms (and institutional reforms) that African countries must implement if development has to be inclusive or effective. As for regional integration – or developmental regionalism as he prefers – “it is important that regional integration of any type has some social welfare underpinnings...” (Mkandawire, 2014).

In the context of the “new Pan-Africanism”, “developmental regionalism”, the original mandate of African nationalism (and the many unfinished tasks), as Africa a “late late comer” “running while others walk” to “catch up” and as Africa works hard to recover from the “lost decades” unleashed by the Washington Consensus that brought with it Structural Adjustment Programmes, the question of how should Africa pursue development remains. Mkandawire and his generation of development thinkers have robustly analysed the development dynamics for the African continent. In addition, they have provided us with tools, frameworks, terminology, methodologies, epistemology and insights to better understanding the African condition. As we unpack their perspectives, say to make Pan-Africanism relevant to contemporary issues, a fundamental question about the approach to Africa’s development remains.

Essentially, Mkandawire’s archive suggests that we can make development feasible within the given constraints. This makes Mkandawire slightly different from his generation of scholars, in a way. Samir Amin (1972), for example, has been firm (for decades) that an “alternative social project” is necessary for Africa to fully develop – this is over and above his argument for “delinking”; ideas that have fascinated some of us and we are revisiting as these might actually be answer to the development quandary that Africa finds itself in. Mkandawire has walked his own path in thinking about development in Africa. Interestingly, he cannot be compartmentalised or categorised into any existing school of thought, although he could easily be confused for a heterodox economist. He has described himself as a Pan-Africanist; not as an Economist or Political Economist or any other academic inclination.

So, it might very well be that it is enough for Mkandawire to have problematized development questions for Africa. It is commendable that he has made a case for democracy; that democracy and development are not incompatible. It should be celebrated that he has provided us with new insights about how to think of inequalities (i.e. personal versus functional distributions of incomes). Now that we have a better understanding why Africa remains at the periphery, what should be done practically to ensure that Africa decisively deals with the “unholy trinity of ignorance, poverty and disease” (which was a central component of the nationalist agenda as he has argued). Given his perspectives on how could Africa better pursue economic restructuring and developmental regionalism – and the practical programmes for that, including the necessary

capacity building for Afrocrats – is the question about the socio-economic development model for Africa settled? It might very well be that the task of crafting an effective socio-economic development approach for Africa’s development, like crafting a new Pan-Africanism, is the task that the new generation of scholars must prioritize.

## **Conclusion**

At a policy level, from Mkandawire’s works, one fundamental point is clear: social policy – transformative social policy – is critical for development. Democratic developmental states cannot happen without social policies, so is inclusive development. One issue that requires further attention as the preceding section suggests is that economic transformation is not enough to fully advance wellbeing in Africa (and probably the world at large). By restructuring economies in Africa not much would be achieved. Similarly, democratic developmental states would not achieve much. Therefore, what is at issue is changing the entire development model.

The starting point would have to involve clarifying an ideal philosophical or conceptual framework that should inform Africa’s socio-economic development agenda. As argued elsewhere, it might very well be that we need to first better understand the African economy and society before colonialism and colonization (Gumede, 2013), or the pre-mercantilist era as Samir Amin (1972) has argued. As Gumede (2016) advances, a modified version of communalism (as described by Walter Rodney and others) could be that philosophical framework. Walter Rodney (1973:12) defines communalism as a system where “property [is] collectively owned, work done in common and goods shared equally”. This is in sharp contrast to capitalism, which came with colonialism, which, according to Rodney, resulted to “concentration in a few hands of ownership of the means of producing wealth and by unequal distribution of the products of human labour.” Gumede (2016) has made an attempt to unpack aspects of a new socio-economic development approach which include a robust social policy (a recommendation influenced by Mkandawire’s works). Thorough work needs to be undertaken regarding this, and also revisiting ideas contained in the works of Mkandawire and his generation of African intellectuals.

In the meantime, we need to be working hard in finding workable solutions to the unfinished tasks of the African nationalist agenda. This work is ongoing. We need to think creatively about the policy options to ensure that nation-building, economic and social development, democratization and regional cooperation become reality – African nationalism delivered political independence, but the rest still requires a lot of work. We must however be mindful that “many of the virtues of nationalism - a sense of community, patriotism, a sense of a shared historical past - are also its dark side - strong communal feeling can easily turn into xenophobia, and the need for unity can generate pressures for conformity that can stifle intellectual work” (Mkandawire, 2005, p21).

The paper intended to examine three aspects of Mkandawire’s works: development, African nationalism and Pan-Africanism. It has also looked at social policy, developmental states, regional integration and economic development as well as various macroeconomic and political economy issues contained in Mkandawire’s works. The entire Mkandawire archive is developmentalist in perspective. The paper has problematized Mkandawire’s works and it argues that there is important work that needs to be undertaken to bring about effective socio-economic development in Africa and ensuring practical Pan-Africanism.

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