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Editorial

This issue of the Journal for Development Studies centres around various topical subjects related to efforts for the mobilisation of knowledge for development through competence and capacity building on the African continent and its utilisation for the common public good. Just recently, the New African Initiative document, adopted in July 2001 by the African Heads of State at their OAU Summit Meeting in Lusaka, emphasised with hitherto unheard determination that "Africans must not be wards of benevolent guardians; rather they must be the architects of their own sustained upliftment" (para 27; see for the full text and an analysis Melber 2001a). While the document identifies an impressive catalogue of tasks ahead, it offers surprisingly little on the full development of human resources through education, training, enhanced competence and capacity building as empowerment of both, people and institutions. Self reliance, however, has unavoidably this human and institutional dimension at the core of the matter. Instead, the educational objectives spelled out do mainly reproduce stereotypes and advocate an expansion more so in quantity than quality. In other words: there is hardly anything new in this New African Initiative concerning the frontiers of knowledge. This might sound like a harsh judgement. It is due to the fact that since the first euphoric educational expansion in the immediate post-colonial era hardly any African state has persistently pursued an investment strategy which puts people in the first place.

As a result of this negligence and subsequent decline in human resources development, external donors increasingly influenced and even shaped the developmental agenda concerning support to both formal education and other training and competence building initiatives. While the secondary and tertiary educational institutions were in a general process of decline from the latter part of the 1970s until the turn of the century, external support to other ways of knowledge production and dissemination gained ground during the 1990s. In combination with the notion of capacity building, the think tank concept successfully entered the arena of and discourse on topical issues such as empowerment of and within societies in the so-called South and has managed to achieve the status of a global approach even before globalisation became the dominant (albeit controversial and questionable) paradigm. "The recognition, in recent years, of the fundamental role played by institutions in economic and social development", notes de Vylder (1995: 21), "is encouraging, and has led to a broader and deeper understanding of the complexity of development". Think tanks and capacity building, as much as institution building (see for example the contributions in Wohlgemuth et. al. 1998) are catchwords for more recent paradigms which gained ground. They usually go hand in hand with the empha-

sis on the principle of good governance and the renaissance or (re-)discovery of the term civil society (as heterogeneous as the interpretations of the concepts referring or relating to the label might be – as illustrated in the variety of contributions to at least two particular previous issues of this journal, JEP 4/97 and JEP 2/01). As a result, the 1990s provided a fertile breeding ground for the mushrooming of so-called (semi-)autonomous think tanks in many African countries, which flourished mainly by external material support and were hence not as independent or autonomous as they pretended to be – though autonomous enough in some cases to become a challenge to the state authority's claim for exclusive power of definition over relevant issues of socio-economic concern (see for a Namibian case study Melber 2000).

While many were and are suspicious of these new initiatives in support of and fostering local competence and capacity building with the aim of policy advice, these particular new empowerment strategies are certainly not as much the result of an international donor conspiracy as some might assume. Think tanks indeed offer a relevant additional source of know how and knowledge production, as long as they are not pampered at the expense of other institutions for (higher) learning. To that extent they can well provide a source of enrichment within the variety of efforts to strengthen local expertise. In this issue, none of the articles pays particular reference to this new species, simply for a lack of space. Hence the explicit reference here.

In the introduction to his collection of lectures on "Development as Freedom", Amartya Sen (1999: 10) concludes that "Freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means". He points out that freedoms of different kinds are linked with one another. They include political freedoms, social opportunities, and access to economic resources. Knowledge in different forms is an ingredient to a notion of development based on freedoms. Political regimes in many of the African societies lack recognition of such contributing factors or even deny them. Instead, all too often the political environment has militated against freedom of thought and expression.

This reasoning seems to be widely accepted if not even *en vogue* in today's world of enlightened theories (and practices). But it has not yet received the full support and commitment of even those advocating the use of the vocabulary and its implementation: "Stripped of all the developmental rhetoric, capacity building issues fit uneasily into the conventional incentive structure of most international funding agencies despite all the current enthusiasm. This is particularly the case if such a focus is seen to come at the expense of more definable and measurable programme results." (Morgan 1999: 20) If this already seems to be the case, it is of little to no surprise that such an approach is still a far way from being accepted by at least most of the political leaders on the African continent. Quite in contrast, there is still a striking lack of suspicion and intolerance when it comes to what is perceived as intellectuals in the social context of African countries – especially when they maintain a certain degree of independence (see for the Southern African context the debate article by Melber 2001b).

At the beginning of the 1990s, therefore, when the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) started to gain momentum not only as an idea but also as an institution, one could still share the undisputable observation that "the political environment has militated against the development of high-performance intellectual excellence and rigorous policy analysis" (Murapa 1992: 30). As an almost logical consequence emanating from this evidence, the following demand could be formulated at the same occasion: "There must be independent critical voices that are able to question policy actions and offer alternatives, without fear of penalty for doing so." (Lesser 1992: 60)

Ten years later it might well be debatable if major achievements could be recorded when it comes to the improvement in terms of an overall awareness among political office bearers in most African countries with regard to the relevance of the non-governmental or private sector institutions operating in such areas: "In most African countries, the private initiatives of independent research institutions do not attract much recognition or patronage from the government. ... Beyond the regular funding of educational institutions, African governments need to take the issue of patronage for private-sector initiatives seriously." (Mkandawire/Soludo 1999: 137) The same certainly applies to the excessive tendency for control over state institutions operating for educational purposes, including the universities and colleges. But the same authors also warn to over-generalise a relevant insight by ignoring the empirical and historical realities under different social set-ups: "Each country must, out of its own historical experiences, forge its own vision and design the requisite institutions to achieve development. Outsiders can assist, but this can never substitute for local initiative." (Mkandawire/Soludo 1999: 140) This brings us back to the declaration of intent formulated by the New African Initiative, claiming to represent "a new framework of interaction with the rest of the world, – based on the agenda set by African peoples through their own initiatives and of their own volition, to shape their own destiny" (para. 47).

The contributions in this issue try to contribute to an assessment of the current point of departure in terms of empowerment through (human) resources development and the application of the full potential to the benefit of their respective societies. Stein Sundstøl Eriksen explores the dimensions of local government reform in Tanzania from the perspective of strengthening the grass root component *vis-à-vis* the centralized authorities. His conclusion shows the dangers and ambiguities which are part and parcel of almost any type of reform especially when imposed from above: "If efforts at capacity building are successful, it could lead to increased repression. Still, it remains a fact that there is no way around it." – One is tempted to draw the conclusion paraphrased in the slogan "Damned if you do, damned if you don't".

The main parts of this issue are devoted to the role of the African intelligentsia in the social sciences and the emerging trends in the development of the university landscape. After donors had discovered the think tanks in the 1990s (see above), there seems to emerge a certain reverse trend nowadays with increased attention paid again to the strengthening of academic institutions. The

emphasis here on both, African scholars and the role of universities suggests therefore a certain degree of fashionable trend. But less trendy are those, who explore the potential and scope of the African academia, their discourses and their institutions: Thandika Mkandawire, Ebrima Sall and Lennart Wohlgemuth are three long time activists in this particular field, with a longstanding track record of personal involvement in the matters of concern and under investigation. The same can be said for the last author Bawa Yamba, who adds reflections on the HIV/AIDS dimension from a deliberately personal viewpoint. It has been the understanding when conceptualizing this special issue, that empowerment and human resources development in the African context cannot ignore the effects of this pandemic.

The efforts failed, unfortunately, to honor another relevant dimension, which should have earned explicit recognition. The contributors as well as the subject matters reveal a gross gender imbalance despite attempts to avoid this predicament. It is therefore recommended that readers compensate to some extent for the lack of this aspect by taking note of a previous issue of this journal (JEP 3/97), which from a gender perspective managed to draw attention to issues of participation and institutional change so closely related to the topics of this current issue.

Henning Melber

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Stein Sundstøl Eriksen

Councils, Capacity Building and the State: The Context of Local Government Reform in Tanzania

Like most other African countries, Tanzania embarked upon reforms of the public sector in the 1990s. In addition to the standard World Bank/IMF policies of privatisation of public enterprises and retrenchment schemes in what is seen as overstuffed bureaucracies, the Tanzanian reforms have, like those of other countries, included programmes of *capacity building*.

Towards the end of the 1990s, when it became clear for all to see that the African state had to be strengthened rather than weakened, the emphasis on capacity building grew among donors, including the World Bank. An important sign of this was the 1997 World Development Report 'The State in a Changing World', which highlighted the importance of a strong and efficient state apparatus for economic development. The assumption underlying such reforms is that the "capacity" of public institutions is too low, and needs to be enhanced. Thus, the 1997 World Development Report makes it very clear that "for human welfare to be advanced, the capability of the state must be increased" (World Bank 1997: 3). Decentralisation and local government reform have been important elements in the reform programme. It is argued that moving decisions and responsibility to a lower level will lead to more efficient service delivery, more responsive government and more popular participation. In addition, decentralisation could be seen as an element in a political agenda, seeking to reduce the political and economic clout of the central government. This has been an explicit objective of the reforms sponsored by the World Bank.

In order to assess the prospects of such reforms it is necessary to understand the nature of the state whose capacity is to be enhanced and the context within which capacity building is to take place. This article focuses on the development of Tanzanian local governments. Thus, its focus is not on the ongoing programmes of local government reform and capacity building, but on the system, which these programmes seek to reform. It starts by presenting an analytical framework for the study of the state, local governments and administrative capacity. Next, it seeks to trace the development of local governments in Tanzania since independence. Third, in order to illustrate the outcome of these developments "on the ground", it makes an assessment of the capacity of one district council, Kigoma in Eastern Tanzania. Finally, I try to draw some conclusions about the prospects of capacity building.