

# DISCORDANT DEVELOPMENT AND INSECURITY IN AFRICA

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The good news about Africa is that many countries are now showing sustained economic growth. Not to be overlooked, however, are the persistent security dilemmas in many parts of the continent exacerbated by “discordant development.” Addressing these troubling problems of security and social unrest requires an understanding of the complex factors involved and the need for innovative approaches. The idea of discordant development conveys more than just “unequal development,” but rather how deepening inequalities and rapid progress juxtaposed with group distress can generate uncertainty and violent conflict. Unfortunately, continued discordant development is in the forecast for sub-Saharan Africa in 2013.

The International Monetary Fund’s *2011 World Economic Outlook* shows a score of fast-growing African economies. While such statistics reveal successful economic growth, they also often conceal discordant development. For example, in terms of GDP growth, over the past two decades Mali tracks just behind Ghana: 3.8 percent vs. 4.4 percent growth in the 1990s and 5.6 percent vs. 6.5 percent growth since 2000, respectively. The two countries do not seem that far off from each other in terms of economic

growth. Yet, this is the same Mali that is now sundered and in disarray; meanwhile Ghana has experienced both political and economic progress while at the same time strengthened national unity.

Another example is Nigeria, which has experienced a robust increase in GDP from 2.9 percent in the 1990s to 8.9 percent in the following decade. However, poverty rates in Nigeria have increased and continue to rise. Most of the northern part of the country has been in economic free fall, and the share of manufacturing—an essential component for job creation and employment growth—has been stagnant. Insecurity is the flip side of discordant development, whether previously in the oil-producing Niger Delta, in recurrent inter-communal violence in the Middle-Belt (central Nigeria) and recently in the appalling onslaughts in the northeast attributed to Boko Haram.

Unfortunately, much of the recent analysis of insecurity in Africa recommends action without delving into the underlying problems. There has been insufficient examination of the causes of Africa’s persistent unrest and violence, one of which is discordant development.

## Discordant Development and Insecurity

What are some of the principal causes of discordant development? The first is the African jigsaw bequeathed by the colonial carve-up of the continent. Governments located in the capitals of vast countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan, as Jeffrey Herbst shows in *States and Power in Africa* (2000), have never projected power over their extensive domains. African regional and continental organizations should take up an issue that is usually *verboden*: Are some post-colonial territories simply ungovernable? Can all of the massive DRC ever be governed from Kinshasa in its extreme southwest? J. Peter Pham (2012) advocates, as Herbst and others have long done, that the DRC should be subdivided into more viable states that can enhance security and promote development. In an era of renewed growth in Africa, many Congolese are condemned to lives of extreme deprivation.

Look at Mali on a map. It consists of one large triangle in the north connected to a smaller one in the south that includes the capital, Bamako. Travel throughout this “nation” of disparate peoples has been daunting at the best of times. There are calls for urgent international and continental action to re-establish sovereign authority in Mali and evict the jihadist regime from the north. As the prolonged failure to achieve such an outcome in Somalia demonstrates, external forces cannot rebuild nations in the absence of domestic forces able to cohere to pursue such an objective. The restoration of peace and stability in Mali must include a framework for making this sprawling and disjointed territory more governable.

Discordance has been fostered by state capture in countries that are ethnically, linguistically and religiously plural. New discoveries of exploitable oil, gas, coal and other minerals are increasing the stakes of state capture and prebendalism, i.e., government officials using state offices as prebends to serve themselves, their cronies and kinfolk but not the public (Adebani & Obadare, 2013). Therefore, the current African growth spurt should not lead to a relaxation of efforts to increase transparency, accountability and law-based governance. Without external pressure and scrutiny, the vast oil revenues of Angola, another increasingly discordant state, will continue to finance plush lives for the political leaders and their circle while basic services for the

population languish. After a half century of oppressive rule, a breakthrough to constitutional government in Guinea is at risk of following the path of the similarly richly endowed Congo, perennially wracked by war and predation. As Anne Pitcher demonstrates (2012), peace and democratic progress in countries such as Mozambique have enhanced significantly the prospects for sustainable development.

## Recommended Policy Responses to Discordant Development for 2013

How can African governments and agencies and their external partners respond to this commingling of progress and regress?

First, sustaining growth and avoiding discordant development require not only enlightened leaders but also robust democratic institutions and vigilant civil societies. As the cases of Zambia and Senegal demonstrate, a Frederick Chiluba or an Abdoulaye Wade, after coming to power through popular action, can slip onto the rails of nepotistic and prebendalist politics. Fortunately, their tenure of office was terminated by the same democratic system that put them there, and their countries were spared having political contestation disintegrate into violent struggle.

Second, it is important that analysts do not view Africa solely through “polarizing lenses,” either screening out security challenges in growing economies or overlooking axes of growth in conflict-plagued societies. Recent initiatives by the government of Brazil to promote affirmative action for the benefit of disadvantaged communities and to ensure the national sharing of oil revenues, can be profitably studied by Africa experts. Yet, just sharing revenues is not enough, as politicians can pillage the proceeds meant for their communities as the Nigerian experience tragically demonstrates.

Third, democratizing countries in Africa must ensure steady progress in the fairness of their electoral procedures and the appropriate behavior of politicians to avoid the provocation of violent upheavals. Elections in Kenya in 2007 and Nigeria in 2011 were followed by horrific communal conflicts, each severely damaging their economies. Ghanaians pulled back from the verge of a possible conflagration during the closely fought elections of December 2008. The December 2012 elections were conducted peacefully

despite polling difficulties and claims of electoral fraud by the opposition party. It is an example that Kenyan and other emerging democracies must emulate. Several Kenyan politicians will be made to account for their alleged role in inciting election-related violence in 2007-2008 by the International Criminal Court. But this issue cannot be left up to external agencies. Organized thuggery has been a part of electoral politics of many African countries for decades and must be eradicated.

The new era of accelerated growth requires the normalization and “pacification” of electoral competition. Even an ideologically polarized society such as Venezuela can conduct national elections in which votes are fairly recorded, and winners and losers move on to compete another day. The same goes for India, which, though riven by religious, ethnic, communal and caste divisions, conducts competitive elections without provoking inter-group slaughter. It is up to African organizations to build traditions of peaceful electoral competition and connect these to improving the environment for long-term capital investments. Vital leadership in this regard can be provided by regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

In the discourse on growth and development, appropriate attention should be devoted to the recognition that no African country will achieve sustainable progress while significant sub-groups of its population regress. Some of the

causes of discordant development have been highlighted here. Yet, there is significant variance among countries so no one formula can be applied to a continent of over 50 states. The guiding principle is that the now vital industrial transformation of African economies depends on the emergence of more effective states, law-based government and inter-communal peace.

## References

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