

The Second Annual EISA Symposium

20-24 October 2007, Johannesburg, South Africa

In Search of Sustainable Democratic Governance for Africa: Does Democracy Work for Developing Countries?

The 2007 EISA Annual Symposium follows the inaugural Symposium (November 2006, Johannesburg) that focused on the theme **Challenges for Democratic Governance and Human Development in Africa**. The theme of the second symposium is **In Search of Sustainable Democratic Governance for Africa: Does Democracy Work for Developing Countries?**

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Goal and Objectives of the Symposium

While the principal goal of the inaugural Symposium of 2006 was to provide a broad situational analysis of the interface between democracy and development and how these two challenges are compounded by conflict in the African continent, the primary goal of the 2007 Symposium is to investigate how democracies lead to development of social policies that redress the scourge of poverty. We aim to establish the extent to which democratic governance in Africa is sustainable or reversible.

Specific objectives of Symposium

- Deliberate on current models of democratisation in Africa and policy challenges facing sustainable democratic governance
- Investigate whether poor countries can sustain democracy organically and reach their developmental goals
- Demonstrate how participatory democracy could enhance policy interventions aimed at poverty reduction through citizen participation, accountability, responsiveness and transparency
- Make specific recommendations regarding possible institutional and policy reforms that African countries could embark upon in order to strive towards sustainable democratic governance

Background

The deliberations of the 2006 EISA Symposium confirmed the widely held idea that the majority of African states have witnessed political transitions from authoritarian regimes of civilian or military rule to multiparty democratic dispensations, especially

since the late 1980s. It further established that sustainable democratic governance remains one of the major challenges facing the continent. While procedural democracy (with an emphasis on political rights and civil liberties) of a liberal type has become a norm, substantive democracy (emphasizing economic rights and social justice) is yet to be achieved. The challenge of moving from procedural to substantive democracy was considered even more onerous and daunting in those countries that have experienced spasms of violent conflict. This was how we interrogated the complex web of interconnections and causal interfaces between democracy, development and conflict in our inaugural Symposium.

The 2007 Symposium builds upon the fascinating policy debates that we opened up in 2006. We aim to deepen the debate, further teasing out relevant policy interventions. This time around, we wish to focus on how best democratic governance can be sustained in Africa. The 2005 Africa Governance Report aptly observes that democratic electoral transitions are becoming the constitutionally accepted mechanism for changes of power. Several African governments are in their third successive era of democratic change over of power (UNECA, 2005: xiii).

Suitability of democratic governance should, of necessity, transcend the holding of regular elections. It should move beyond mere procedures of democracy and the simple establishment of democratic institutions. It should denote the democratisation of socio-economic governance too. What does this mean? So far, democratic governance in Africa is confined to a liberal democratic form, associated with political rights and civil liberties. It is imprisoned within a neo-liberal orthodoxy which propounds the idea that democracy simply means a popular sovereignty where people have the power to elect leaders and remove them from office. Democratic governance in Africa needs to be liberated from this restricted definition. For Africa, sustainable democratic governance ought to address the dire socio-economic conditions of the majority of the people on the continent. To this end, it ought to aim to eradicate poverty, provide employment, provide shelter, facilitate easily accessible health care and expand opportunities for education. This is where the major problem lies. Does Africa have this kind of democracy? Does Africa require this type of democracy? How can Africa strive towards it?

Problem Statement

Available evidence suggests that the economic adjustment programmes imposed upon many African states between the 1970s and the 1980s have had a devastating effect not only on socio-economic development in these countries, but also on democratic governance. Undoubtedly, economic adjustment programmes propelled iron-fisted authoritarian regimes. The political conditionality of aid and foreign direct investment (FDI) has mounted external pressure on African regimes to reorient their governance processes towards democracy especially since the end of the Cold War and apartheid. It would be interesting to investigate what the emergence of China as a world power with massive interest in Africa would mean for the continent's democratisation agenda. Will China's influence mean that Africa postpones democracy and prioritises poverty eradication? Will China impel Africa towards a developmental state devoid of democratic content? The 2007 Symposium must grapple with these issues.

Topics to be covered

- Democratisation in Africa: State of the Art
- Structural Adjustment Programmes and Democratic Governance
- Gender Dimension of Poverty
- HIV/AIDS and Democracy
- Trade, Investment and Democracy
- The Politics of Poverty and Poverty Reduction Strategies
- Political Conditionality of Aid and its Impact on Democratic Governance
- The Significance of a Developmental State in Africa
- The Significance of Leadership for Sustainable Democracy
- Developing a Political Culture for Democratic Governance
- China's Foreign Policy Towards Africa and Implications for Democratic Governance and
- Democratisation in emerging Middle Powers, (e.g. India, Brazil etc) and Lessons for Africa