

The Logic of African Neopatrimonialism: What Role for Donors?

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Today a number of sub-Saharan African countries display the outward signs of modern, democratic states. International aid agencies often treat them as though power and decision-making reside within government institutions and that they function as designed. When they do not they are labelled dysfunctional though their action is actually quite logical when viewed through a 'neopatrimonial lens'. This article outlines a number of neopatrimonial practices observed in Africa in the past two decades and attempts to explain the 'logic' that underpins them. It provides several recommendations about the way donors should assist states where deeply rooted anti-democratic and non-developmental behaviour dominates.

1 Introduction

Since the 'third wave' of democracy broke in the early 1990s (Huntington, 1991), practitioners – both local campaigners and imported governance specialists – have been disappointed to see just how difficult it is to build democratic, accountable states in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Specifically, in the last fifteen years we have learned that democratic transitions in many aid-recipient African countries have stalled, that some regimes follow a logic that is largely non-developmental even though states have a central role to play in developing a nation, that the capacity of outsiders to motivate change is limited in comparison with both the amount of effort they invest and the intransigence of some domestic political forces, and that national economic development is dependent on Africans 'getting their politics right' (Fritz and Rocha Menocal, 2006).

What we have now are a number of African countries that display the outward signs of a modern, democratic state – i.e., they hold elections and have democratic-style institutions, such as a presidency, a parliament, political parties, a police force and a judiciary, which many assume will function as in the West. Donors and international agencies interact frequently with these institutions, giving funds to ministries, monitoring their operations and strengthening civil servants' capacities, for instance. For reasons that suit the internal dynamics of individual donors, the global aid regime, and African governments, all behave as though power resides within these government institutions and that they function as designed. Moreover, when they do not, they are labelled 'dysfunctional' rather than their behaviour being seen as logical according to a frame of reference that is rooted outside the rational, democratic state in traditional

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socio-economic and political processes. This delusion, as well as donor funding, helps maintain such hybrid regimes.

Studies of neopatrimonial states provide us with a theoretical understanding of how the elite operate and the logic that drives them (O'Neil, 2006). The experiences outlined below, gleaned from living for a decade in Malawi and working for nearly two decades on governance and human rights in southern and eastern Africa, are meant to describe what such behaviour looks like on the ground. This article does not do justice to the variations in governance on the continent, or to the progress made in some SSA countries. It is instead an attempt to show that politics in some poorly performing states works in a logical way when viewed through a neopatrimonial lens. What donors are meant to do in such countries, where there is deep-rooted and durable anti-democratic and non-developmental behaviour, is one of the most important questions facing the aid establishment at the moment. A brief list of suggestions, which emerge from the analysis, is provided below.

2 Neopatrimonial states in practice

What scholars like Chabal and Daloz (1999), Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and others have shown us is that, in states labelled neopatrimonial or hybrid,¹ real power and real decision-making lie outside formal institutions. Instead, decisions about resources are made by 'big men' and their cronies, who are linked by 'informal' (private and personal, patronage and clientelist) networks that exist outside (before, beyond and despite) the state structure, and who follow a logic of personal and particularist interest rather than national betterment. These networks reach from the very top through dyads connecting the big man, MPs, chiefs, party officials, and government bureaucrats to villagers. Corruption is rampant because private and public funds are co-mingled by those in power. Though there are differences between regimes, their overarching logic is to gain and retain power at all costs. In such circumstances, policy decisions about development and governance are subordinated to that single, overriding goal. The idea of democracy – acceptance of a 'loyal opposition', a tolerance of dissent, effective checks and balances, a rotation of parties to power through fair elections, a vocal and organised public – is anathema if these result in the big man and his associates being ousted from office.

Why are some African states stuck at this stage of political development? In a way that creates a 'Catch-22' situation, these countries remain at a pre-capitalist or semi-capitalist stage of economic development, at a stage before class interests have united individuals and groups horizontally and broken down particularist and vertical networks (Sandbrook, 1985). Communities remain highly reliant on patrons, and there are few contrary influences that would undermine these upward ties – for example, higher education, foreign interventions, innovative organisational forms, extensive travel or wider communication, etc. Other factors making this system of rule more robust include the legacies of colonial rule (fostering particularism, and lack of government

1. They are called 'hybrid' because they variously mix elements of patrimonial states and rational bureaucratic ('Weberian') states. This mix is context-specific, so it varies from one country to another, and changes over time. States can become more or less modern/patrimonial.

transparency and accountability), some cultural values (Chabal and Daloz, 2006; Harrison, 1992), and the input of aid and windfall profits, which can be used to 'grease' the clientelist machine.

Because of its poor economic performance Africa produces little wealth (by global standards), and state resources (including aid) are the main source of income in many SSA countries. Thus, rulers and their dependent elites have every reason to try to stay in power, for not having control of government deprives them of wealth and influence. Losing an election can mean quite powerful people, such as a cabinet minister, returning to the village, obscurity and relative poverty.

Importantly, those not in office but attempting to get there, generally view this political system as legitimate. That is, they do not protest about a system where politicians 'eat' while in power; instead they fight for 'change' because *they* are not eating. (This is evident when these new people come to power and behave like those before them.) Thus, it is not uncommon to hear African candidates tell voters, 'You will not "eat" if I am not elected' (ARTICLE 19, 2000). What the voters hear in such cases is: 'You will not have schools, roads, clinics, and other social goods, including relief when needed, if you do not vote for me.' Partly because of the traditional requirement on leaders to share their wealth in many of these societies, constituents do not see this bargain as unreasonable or corrupt. Determining how to cast a ballot therefore depends on what voters think they can get from a candidate, how well he (or, rarely, she) is connected to those with access to resources (ultimately, the 'big man'), and how generous (s)he has been in the past. If the 'bargain' between leader and followers is actually carried through – and a smart politician ensures that it is or can convincingly blame others if it is not – then it is normal for the recipients to continue to support him. In any case, electing a person from outside their immediate area would be even more risky than re-electing a poorly performing local.

Relatively less important to the ordinary person is the modern method of obtaining public services – through formal state processes. The fact that the state is unable to provide such services consistently or straightforwardly makes it an easier decision: why expect the inefficient agricultural marketing board to deliver fertiliser when it is easier to obtain bags illicitly from a local councillor who distributes them from the MP's private stock? Who to turn to when in need of medicine: the empty shelves and rude staff at the government clinic or the local party boss who can provide a little cash to purchase tablets in town? In other words, staying locked-into the patronage system benefits those at the bottom as well as the top and helps explain why civil society in many countries remains 'weak' and silent, not easily roused to civic action, or demanding of government, even after years of 'strengthening'.

This system has implications for national development. How funds are used, what policies are promoted, how appointments are made, what decisions are taken – these can be dependent on whether they help the president and his network of supporters. But it would be a mistake to assume that these politicians do not understand that an efficient, independent (from political pressure) and meritocratic state bureaucracy is needed to implement national development policies. The point is, such a bureaucracy would be less pliable and politically reliable and more likely to expose malfeasance. So it is no accident that neopatrimonial states are burdened by bureaucracies whose appointments are made according to tests of loyalty, and which ineffectively account for public funds

siphoned off to spend on political projects. Such public servants are generally poorly paid and demoralised; they learn that corruption goes unpunished and they act accordingly. In other words, this is not a dysfunctional public service but one that functions according to a different logic.

Other characteristics typically found in such states also seem logical when viewed through this neopatrimonial lens. For instance, the international community often complains that SSA elections are not contested around 'issues'. In fact, in these states there are rarely any issues dividing candidates or parties. Instead, campaigns and parties are centred on personalities – individuals and their historical connections – rather than on voting records, platforms or principles. In fact, a politician can take a stand at one time which (s)he will diametrically oppose only a few months later.² He will be extreme in his condemnation of an opponent, only to embrace him a short while later. This makes coalition politics the norm. Moreover, these coalitions are extremely fluid (and expensive), as recruits are won over easily and lost just as quickly. Successful party leaders have to stay on their toes, constantly trying to bolster their support against rival bidders.

One relatively stable factor generating loyalty is particularist divisions – the vertical ties that bring access to services and goods that were mentioned above. So, typically, a villager will vote for a candidate because he comes from his 'area' or belongs to his tribe. A relatively successful campaign strategy for a candidate is to bring to voters' attention an opponent's 'foreign' roots (say, in a different part of the country), no matter how long the incomer has resided locally. A person's religion can also make them unelectable in some parts of a country, and guaranteed a seat elsewhere. Thus, region, religion, tribe and ethnicity figure prominently, while policies and even the lack of development will be ignored by both candidates and voters.

Governments tend to be unresponsive to their citizens in these sorts of states – i.e., there is little accountability or transparency. Indeed, governments will go out of their way to crush civil society organisations (NGOs, church groups, trade unions, etc.) and their initiatives if they are seen as threatening. One method is by forcing them to register with government, and to promise formally not to be political or to accept donor funding. NGO leaders are often viewed as political rivals – indeed, sometimes they are failed politicians or politicians-in-waiting – and governments may go so far as to form their own 'non-governmental' organisations, staffed with loyalists and funded from state coffers.

Similarly, governments will attempt to control the private media – by refusing, for instance, to register new broadcasters or to place lucrative state advertising with newspapers seen as disloyal. They also decline to register independent radio stations on technical grounds. Others will be registered, but not allowed to broadcast news. As a result, the privately owned and truly independent media are few and weak. Nevertheless, a country's media can appear 'vibrant' to donors – who philosophically support free expression and private media – who see party-political battles aired in public, mistaking this for real analysis and debate of issues. In fact, the bulk of newspapers may well be owned by politicians or their families, who follow a party line.

2. For instance, United Democratic Front politicians in Malawi have argued vociferously in favour and then against MPs being allowed to 'cross the floor' (Cammack et al., forthcoming).

Slander is a regular occurrence. In keeping with trends noted above, newspapers and radio stations owned by people not in power may demand openness from government, as well as honesty and reform, but when their patrons get into power, they will become silent and behave as their successors did. Such media do not serve as 'watchdogs' in any real sense.

In these states there are often ministries of information to pump out ruling-party propaganda via the state-owned media. These regimes populate communications boards with their own people, which guarantees control of media output while providing opportunities for rent-seeking. They will seek to avoid or circumvent any reform that leads to the government relinquishing control of the public media (especially radio, which most effectively reaches the rural areas). Similarly, state-owned television is used to promote ruling-party interests amongst the middle class; the evening news, for example, will consist of a stream of film reports about the ceremonies attended and the speeches given by ruling-party politicians during the day, always starting with the president. Moreover, public media benefit from resources siphoned off from the treasury to build up their staffs and transport, and during elections to follow ruling-party candidates and report their rallies (while ignoring opponents' meetings and speeches). The more powerful communications boards are – ironically, bolstered by donor funding – as well as censorship boards where they exist, and ministries of information, the more able neopatrimonial governments are to control all media, private and public. Captured by government, they will make few demands on political leaders.

Parliaments in such states are also generally weak. This is because real decision-making is done outside formal institutions, though some individual MPs, because of their familiarity with the president, may be exceptionally powerful. Such parliaments rarely initiate independent-minded legislation or reject policies coming from the president; instead they tend to rubber-stamp his initiatives. At their best these parliaments will consider and enact new laws or debate budgets, but at their worst bought MPs will vote for presidential third terms with impunity. Nowadays parliamentary committees in states (such as Malawi) where the president and parliamentary majority belong to *different* parties – and where committees have been strengthened by donor-funded training – appear to have taken on their checks-and-balances role. But the real test of these MPs will come when they have to function independently after their *own* man has been elected president (as in Uganda) (Cammack et al., forthcoming).

One cause of parliamentary weakness is the fact that politicians generally account upwards rather than downwards to their constituents. Specifically, a party's leader may literally own his party – for example, its vehicles, buildings, and computers – and thus its MPs. Certainly these big men generate the funds that keep the party running – funds given by interested foreigners sometimes, diverted from the state treasury illegally, or generated through business ventures started and supported by party officials using government resources (for example, access to land and to licences to construct). Party cash is then handed out by staffers to activists, voters and thugs.

Some political parties rarely hold party conferences and their leaders select parliamentary (as well as local-level) candidates who are imposed on constituents during campaigns. Other actions also ensure that leaders retain control of MPs. For instance, in Malawi the article allowing popular recall of MPs that was written into the

Constitution during the transition was removed by the National Assembly as it undermined party leaders' powers. Similarly, laws regulating MPs 'crossing the floor' have been enforced or abolished (depending on circumstances) to ensure party leaders improve their control of legislators.³ In either case, such legislation weakens MPs' capacity to act independently of their party leadership, or to vote on issues based on a principled position. Similarly, because decentralisation generally fosters devolution of central power – anathema to 'big men' – changes in laws and regulations have been instituted in order to ensure that people in key positions – for example, mayors and district commissioners – are answerable to the executive (Cammack et al., forthcoming).

With so little accountability, so much centralisation of power, and such high political stakes, it is not surprising that human rights abuse and politically inspired crime are common in these states. Rights abuse often takes the form of arrests without warrants (detentions) and physical attacks and threats, often of political opponents (for example, newspaper editors, opposition politicians, NGO leaders) and their staff. The rule of law is typically weak – the police are politicised and judicial independence is undermined – which means that offenders get away with their crimes. Naturally, investors shy away from states where they have no recourse to honest police or fair courts to protect their interests; lack of investment completes the vicious politics-economy circle by keeping the nation from progressing economically.

In a functional democracy the judiciary is central to the rule of law. But in these hybrid states judicial independence is under threat as courts are deliberately under-resourced, judges' wages and pensions are at risk, individual justices are threatened with dismissal or worse, and tame judges are appointed to key positions. Similarly, people in public prosecutors' and attorney generals' offices, as well as in law commissions and ombudsmen's offices, are also threatened. When they submit, they lose their independence. But if they try to stay autonomous, the laws empowering them might well be changed and/or their funding cut by government.

'Watchdog' and accountability organisations face the same sorts of challenges. For instance, human rights commissions and transitional justice committees are often under-resourced, their staff threatened and/or hobbled by politicised legislation. Anti-corruption commissions are also a prime target of such assaults, though regimes will often blame their poor functioning on national poverty; so donors step in and fund these agencies and train their members. But this strengthening is often wasted because some other means of undermining their operations will be devised; for example, the president will appoint a tame commissioner, or get a law passed to ensure that no prosecutions are forthcoming without the permission of his attorney general. If all else fails he will just sit on a file and ensure the case never comes to court. It is now well-recognised that the anti-corruption commissions started up in SSA since the transition have rarely functioned as designed (Fritz, 2006). Indeed, it would be illogical for their governments to have allowed them to do so.

3. In South Africa for instance, restrictions were lifted on crossing the floor to help the ANC gain more seats (News24), while in Malawi the ruling party has (generally) opposed the practice to maintain control of parliament.

Corruption with impunity is therefore the norm. It comes in various forms; at the top it is manifested as siphoning off government resources, using political influence to win and award favours, accepting bribes, rigging elections, etc. Civil servants will award themselves contracts (for example, for supplying stationery, computers, vehicles to their ministries) and run private businesses using public resources. Privatised parastatals, released public land, and new internet and communication opportunities are often dominated by people close to power (ARTICLE 19, 1998). At the lowliest levels teachers take money to provide students with answers to examinations, repair men accept bribes to connect phone lines, while police accept backhanders from drivers caught in their traffic nets. Corruption has been democratised from the top down.

When the police or army is captured by presidential appointment of their commander, it means that the force can be used not simply for state security purposes but to fight political battles. Thus, police are seen raiding independent newspaper offices and beating up journalists, and armies are used to clear out opposition supporters from villages and urban areas. A national intelligence agency, often based in the president's office, will be used to counter political threats by placing spies in newspaper and NGO offices, for example.

Also of use to politicians to enforce a party's and president's will, are jobless youth (generally young men – the so-called 'youth bulge' (Esty et al., 1995)) who are in ample supply in SSA due to high birth and under/unemployment rates. We frequently see street merchants acting this role, as they are often poor youth recently immigrated to town. They will form gangs, who on orders will break up opposition rallies, burn down opposition leaders' and activists' homes, intimidate independent-newspaper sellers, attack journalists and destroy their equipment, beat up outspoken trade unionists, etc. They are a force that can be directed – hauled around by truck – and targeted at specific groups (ethnicities, religions, parties). It is not just ruling parties that use such groups, for opposition politicians can have their own set of thugs undertaking similar assignments. When they get into power they will have easier access to state resources (ministry vehicles, state funds, etc.) to make their gangs stronger, while those politicians leaving power must find funds to keep their youth on the payroll.

As noted earlier, civil society in such states is notoriously weak. On the ground this means that 'briefcase NGOs' (those with urban leadership but with little following in the rural areas) have arisen to absorb a great deal of donor money, which is available because international aid agencies are desperate to have non-state actors represented at meetings and to believe they are 'strengthening' civil society. Some of this money has been completely wasted while some has been used to create networks and represent the interests of the poor and voiceless (Foresti et al., forthcoming; O'Neil et al., forthcoming). Meanwhile, people in the hinterland, who equated the democracy promised them in the early 1990s with improved livelihoods and services, are disappointed as these have largely failed to materialise. As a result, such people will criticise democracy, and speak longingly of the 'old days'. Many have become disillusioned with politics and politicians, and apathetic about their capacity to make changes through the ballot (Tsoka, 2002; Cammack, 2001). In such circumstances – where NGOs have weak ties to the countryside and rural people are disconnected and disheartened – it is difficult to get civil society to play its 'historic' role, demanding the

government to open up, provide services, protect rights and be responsible and accountable.

Election time is when such problems are most apparent, partly because incidents of abuse are more frequent since it is vitally important to politicians in such states to win elections. Also independent observers and monitors are thicker on the ground than in normal times and so abusive practices, frequently unnoticed (or even covered up) by the international community, are more likely to be reported. We see, then, big men and parties calling in their favours, buying more support (handing out food, cash and fertiliser, touring the country making new promises, etc.), intimidating those who waver and attacking opponents (with police and youth gangs). Especially state-owned, but also politician-owned newspapers, TV and radio stations will be used to promote the ruling-party candidates and to slander (with impunity) the opposition. Meanwhile, the opposition will behave similarly, though it generally does not have the same impact because it lacks the resources the ruling party has. It is at this point that electoral commissions, often directly or indirectly picked by a president, will do what they can to convince the donors that elections are fair while at the same time ensuring that the president's men win. For example, courts may rule that the electoral 'playing field' is not level, but the politicised commission will state that it lacks the resources to implement changes (ARTICLE 19, 2000).

The end result of these sorts of power relations is weak demand by citizens for governments to be responsible, hobbled watchdog organisations, corruption with impunity, unfair elections, violence and intimidation, and chaotic and fluid party politics. Taken together, they mean that national economic growth and the delivery of public services are not prioritised. It is not surprising that health care, education, agricultural extension, roads, water, sanitation, and other key services have continued to deteriorate (or at least, failed to improve) in many parts of Africa after the third-wave transition. Meanwhile, some donors advocate doubling funds as the solution to poor service provision and widespread poverty (Warrener et al., 2005).

3 What can donors do?

In fact, the shelves of ministries in most African states sag under the weight of good analyses and policy documents, many written by consultants, some negotiated with recipient governments, and even a few reflecting the views of civic participants. In many respects it is not that politicians do not know what needs to be done to deliver basic services and improve livelihoods. Similarly, many development practitioners resident in Africa will tell you it is not a lack of money that keeps aid programmes from being properly implemented. They complain instead of local capacity weaknesses⁴ and, not surprisingly, of a lack of 'political will' to reform. We have seen above that this is because reform can be directly threatening to these regimes (and therefore illogical to

4. The problem of capacity is not addressed here, though it would be argued that capacity development is not something that can be delivered against the will: i.e., learning must be desired to be absorbed. Thus improved capacity is dependent on a society's openness to innovation, and its desire to change and improve (Chang, 2002). Certainly there are inhibitors to capacity development, like HIV/AIDS and low levels of literacy, but these will be tackled where a government has the will to improve national performance.

implement, though easy to promise), and secondly, because reform processes are sidelined by more urgent party-political matters.

But how to create 'political will' within such states, where the logic runs counter to development and where staying in power takes so much time and effort that little is left over for politicians to attend to state business? That is the most crucial question facing the development industry today. It is made more urgent by the fact that donors pumping funds into under-resourced services does not just keep them running, but also legitimises these governments and helps keep them in power. Further, aid going to states through budget support and other modalities can be diverted in very many ways, all increasing the control of the elite and making these neopatrimonial regimes more robust. First, then, donors must accept that they can make matters worse.

As realists, donors should also accept that they, like any other foreigner, can do little to enforce change. While they might give millions to an underdeveloped country, this will work out to be only a few dollars, pounds, yen or euros per person – not enough to fund transformation. While donors might gain a 'seat at the table' through their provision of budget support, they are not privy to those meetings where high-level decisions are really made. Donors' policies vacillate, undermining both their credibility and their success. But, assuming that donors do know how to develop a country, they lack the legitimacy, staff or power to enforce difficult-to-accept changes. History indicates that it takes decades, sometimes centuries, for a country to develop; what donor has the capacity, resources or will to stick to the job that long? Thus, donors should focus on understanding and supporting the historical forces that can eventually lead even a poor performer to development.

To counter the logic of the socio-economic and political systems found in hybrid states and to foster their development, donors should consider tackling the deep structural and systematic problems outlined above. Some suggestions are made here about ways to do that.

Donors might want to begin by thinking about the attributes that are shared by various developmental states and societies:⁵

- *State control and legitimacy.* State authority and systems are strong, consolidated and viewed as legitimate, such that political stability is maintained, both upper and lower classes are taxable, labour is regulated and disciplined, and the permanently poor are protected. A strong and realistic sense of nation and nationalism exists. Domestic and foreign capital is attracted and tamed to promote national development goals.

5. A developmental state is a 'state whose political and bureaucratic elites have generally achieved relative autonomy from socio-political forces in the society and have used this in order to promote a programme of rapid economic growth with more or less rigour and ruthlessness. [It] is typically driven by an urgent need to promote economic growth or to industrialize, in order to "catch up" or to protect or promote itself ... in a world or regional context of threat or competition, or to win legitimacy by delivering steady improvements in the material and social well-being of its citizens ... [A developmental state is] generally able to generate an average annual rate of growth in the GNP per capita of 4 per cent ... One of the key characteristics of this state type is its determination and ability to stimulate, direct, shape and cooperate with the domestic private sector and arrange or supervise mutually acceptable deals with foreign interests' (Leftwich, 2000: 167-8). Also see Fritz and Rocha Menocal (2006) for further discussion of the developmental state.

- *Public service.* A powerful, competent and insulated economic bureaucracy exists that is stable and has the authority to create, direct and manage the broad shape of economic and social development. The probity, competence, professionalism and autonomy of the bureaucracy are nurtured, and it is not subjected to tests of political loyalty. Other effective institutions – systems, structures and processes – as well as informal and formal networks exist to promote and implement economic policy.
- *Government legitimacy.* Government has legitimacy and support and is not required to redistribute public goods or to change or block development policies or processes in order to retain support and power.
- *State and non-state actors.* The state is relatively independent of special interests though it remains ‘embedded in a dense web of ties with non-state and other state actors ... who collectively help to define, re-define and implement developmental objectives’ (Leftwich, 2000: 162).
- *Policy priority.* Economic development is the consistent and top priority of government policy, and policy is transformed into ‘rules of the game’ that promote productive entrepreneurship (Baumol, 1990).
- *National behaviour and attitudes.* Social and technical innovations are generated domestically, or adopted from overseas, then adapted and used to solve problems and create functional institutions and systems.⁶ Tolerance, meritocracy, social mobility and high levels of education are valued and promoted.
- *Elite.* There exists a determined developmental leadership that is either relatively uncorrupt or performs corrupt acts that are not predatory but promote national productivity. The elite, as a whole and as individuals, is vested in promoting national economic policies and activities that may also increase its own assets.

This is a condensed list of attributes, where each sentence leads to a myriad of required reforms. Nevertheless, when designing an aid programme, donors might consider whether their interventions will promote any one or more of these developmental characteristics.

It is widely accepted now that recipient governments should be driven by the needs and desires of their people, not by donors. But when the public will is meekly expressed – for example, in countries where civil society is oppressed, weak or disorganised – proactive foreigners do try to step in, aiming both to strengthen civil society through their aid and to hold the aid-recipient state accountable to a set of international norms on governance, especially on corruption. From this latter result three common features: the threat or imposition of aid conditionalities, the tendency for governments to write development plans they never intend to implement in order to placate donors, and thirdly, the appearance of states being accountable to foreign funders rather than to their citizens. Where donors do step into the gap and try to design and implement policy, it is not likely to result in success but rather in inconsistencies in development policy as

6. Countries developing now have the ‘advantages of economic backwardness’, i.e., they are able to benefit from the innovations of developed nations (Wong, 2004).

donors' staff change, as competition between donor agencies is played out, and as trends in development thinking come and go (Booth et al., 2006).

Thus, in cases where states are non-developmental for the reasons outlined above, outsiders need to accept that they can have little positive impact. Aid in such situations cannot achieve very much, even if it is doubled, because capacity constraints and policy weaknesses can only be addressed when states 'get their politics right' – when leaders genuinely develop the political will to reform and deliberately adopt policies that foster the developmental-state attributes listed above.

In the meantime, though, aid agencies can do some things to promote incremental and positive change:

- (i) Start by understanding the political context of a country, the informal as well as the formal processes. This can be done by using a political-economy analysis, much like the one the Swedes have developed ('power analysis') or DFID uses ('Drivers of Change' I and II). The key questions to answer are how decisions about resources are made, and in whose interests. Since policy is made outside the formal institutions (parliament, judiciary, elections, etc.) in many of the least developed states, it is important to keep track of the 'networks' of power.⁷ Who are the president's cronies, why do they support him, and what does he owe them (and their followers) in return? What 'logic' is driving decision-making? What methods are used to raise resources to pay followers and win elections? In what way is the elite vested in the economy? How is tradition used to legitimise their power? Who are the most vocal champions of reform and how will their behaviour differ if they achieve power (i.e., will there just be the replacement of one self-seeking patronage network with another)? How are public appointments made, and is the government bureaucracy insulated from political influence? These and other questions must be answered before designing an aid programme, especially one that channels significant funds through the Ministry of Finance (as budget support) or into ministries (for example, via SWAps).
- (ii) In what are considered 'fragile states' – basically, those where governance is so poor that violent conflict and insecurity are becoming the norm – specially designed interventions are needed. Various assessment frameworks have been written to determine the immediate and root causes of poor governance and state fragility (Cammack et al., 2006). Once these are known, development programmes must be designed to address them. For instance, in Eastern Sudan an integrated development and peace-building strategy was specially designed to tie the region's Poverty Reduction Strategy to the strengthening of civil society institutions and political parties (Pantuliano and O'Callaghan, 2006). Special post-conflict needs assessments have also been developed for states emerging from violent conflict (UN/World Bank, 2007). At the same time, OECD-DAC has spearheaded a process aimed at improving the delivery of services in fragile states (for example, OECD-DAC, 2006).

7. The best way to do this is to hire a local political-economy analyst who knows the national scene well, and who can map the informal power relations and keep them up to date for foreign staff.

- (iii) Outsiders should support a process that explicitly fosters positive social change. For instance, it has been suggested that donor agencies do not just fund primary education, which has direct livelihood benefits, but that they promote higher education, and adult literacy projects, in order to help people learn to co-ordinate and organise themselves – a specifically political goal (Ellis, 2005). Once in a while agencies will be more explicit than that. USAID’s programme to support Middle Eastern and North African NGOs to ‘increase the role of all citizens, especially women and youth’ to improve governance, democratic practices and institutions, and economic growth and to ‘cultivate critical, creative, and independent thought and civic and social responsibility’ is one such example (US Department of State, 2005). Donors should also address the institutional weaknesses outlined above – in parliaments, judiciaries, corruption commissions, etc. – not in the same way it has been done in the past, but with an eye to the real political logic governing the membership and operation of each institution and the national context in which it has to work.

Generally, then, donors need to help the poor and voiceless transform themselves into the type of civil society that is associated with democracy in modern states – demanding services, state accountability and their human rights. This may frighten donors, and it certainly will be a threat to entrenched, poorly performing regimes. But this is what ‘strengthening’ civil society is all about, not just supporting ‘briefcase NGOs’ with few rural linkages and little agenda beyond being self-sustaining. And it means moving beyond the idea that NGOs are to be strengthened solely to deliver services. The key is to support change in a way that both empowers the poor, and *concomitantly* promotes institutional reforms that enable the state to respond to increased public demand, so that people do not have to take to the streets to achieve their aims!

Support for processes that promote government accountability to the people is essential too. This means, for example, finding a way to strengthen the independent media – which donors often have a problem doing because this can appear so overtly political and because media are seen as businesses rather than civic-minded enterprises. Similarly, supporting aid programmes that explicitly aim to reduce or end government control of the public media and of information flows should be devised. Aid to information ministries should be halted, or at least made dependent on evidence that the process of liberating the media and of promoting freedom of expression is moving forward.

- (iv) Aid programmes should also support civil society organisations that monitor and report on government spending and activities, including budgets,⁸ and that promote *real* participation in decision-making – not ‘consultations’ with the public that rubber-stamp decisions made elsewhere, or ignore public demands that do not fit into donors’ preconceived frameworks (Gould, 2005). Designing ways to involve civil society in donor-government consultations about development planning and implementation (such as Consultative Group meetings) would be a start.

8. For instance, the Malawi Economic Justice Network has people at central and district levels co-ordinating their oversight of sector funds flowing from ministries to decentralised service providers (Cammack et al., forthcoming).

- (v) As noted above, in these poorly performing countries the public expresses little pent-up demand for reform or services. One way to begin to break down paternalistic systems and particularistic thinking is to share with the public the knowledge gained through political-economy analyses about the way neopatrimonial states function, starting with the intelligentsia, civil servants, NGOs and the media. Indeed, if a process can be devised whereby the elite come to this awareness themselves, so much the better. One suggestion has been a widely disseminated, Africa-wide study on neopatrimonial systems carried out by African analysts. In any event, donors should look for ways to help local people understand their own national informal power systems and structures and how they undermine their development and democracy. For instance, they should know what makes a state developmental (or not); how the logic of their leaders is self-serving, particularist and short-sighted rather than nationally developmental; how corruption undermines the nation, not just individuals; why elections matter; the importance of nation-building, etc. They need to know how their own political-economy systems work and why change is not happening. They probably need help to understand why these non-developmental systems are so robust and difficult to change. Explaining in simple language how much aid is being put into the country and how it is meant to be used would be a good first step. Helping civil society organisations monitor and report to the people on these issues would be even better.
- (vi) Much of what is wrong with these non-developmental states results from their democratic transitions being only superficial. That is why the need for change of deep structures is highlighted here. But it is also important to continue to promote institutional change, especially the abolition of those repressive institutions and laws that have remained on the books, which allow new rulers to govern as the pre-transitional despots did. For instance, powers of censorship, detention, and appointment to key positions give these new regimes the ability to crush opponents with near-impunity. Equally bad, many of the same people have remained in power because, outside Eastern Europe, few countries have enacted laws to bar the return of rights-abusers to public office. Thus, we find people who were once close to tyrants and who made their money through their corrupt deals, still making decisions and in positions of authority.⁹ Donors need to take their lead from local rights activists (rather than governments) and support transitional justice processes and institutions that would make a clean sweep of institutions and individuals and send a signal about future abuse. For instance, not only truth commissions and compensation tribunals but also ‘history projects’¹⁰ should be supported and their

9. One victim of abuse explained that the person who arrested him in the old regime is the Minister of Home Affairs in the new one. Another complained that, while he walked barefoot, his abuser was riding around in a government Mercedes Benz (Cammack, 2006).

10. Based at a university using student researchers to collect first-hand accounts from victims and other actors, data can be collated and reports written for wide public dissemination.

findings disseminated in public debates and meetings, newspapers, TV and radio programmes and school curricula.¹¹

- (vii) A final recommendation is for donors to help increase Africans' awareness of their own continental governance and aid superstructure, and the emerging regulatory environment. This is consistent with the overall need to get African governments to answer to their citizens. Specifically, this means supporting the strengthening of systems (for example, the NEPAD peer review mechanism, and the African Commission for Human and People's Rights) and making their ethics and work more widely known. Other initiatives are as important, for example the 'Equator Principles'; the 'Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative'; 'OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises' and its related guidelines regarding 'conflict resources' and corruption; the UN's Global Compact; and the Kimberley Certification Regime for Conflict Diamonds. While fostering demands for compliance with these regimes, this will also have the indirect benefit of helping to transform public opinion about (and promoting a public reaction to) abusive practices by companies, new donors, and regimes on the continent.¹²

4 Conclusion

While it is necessary, it is no longer sufficient for us to say we must 'think politically' while designing our aid programmes. We must now begin to act politically – to confront directly the political logic that undermines economic development and democratic consolidation in these particularly stubborn, poorly performing and fragile African states. We do not yet have all the tools needed to do this, but the research leading to their development is under way: for example, action research, sector-level political-economy studies, anthropological research on corruption and legitimacy, analysis of what a 'good patron looks like', and ethnographic studies of the impact of clientelism and political patronage at the village level. Fieldwork in the next few years will improve our understanding of informal political processes and deep social structures that are anti-democratic and anti-developmental, with the aim of turning this information into initiatives and interventions to help development champions and progressive donors take on the challenge posed by these hard-to-reform hybrid states.

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11. 'Shaming' public figures – if prosecution is not possible – by airing their past behaviour in sessions that are reported by the media, might go some way to ensuring they are not re-elected. Donors must be prepared for some 'shaming' themselves, for their collaboration with autocratic governments in the past.

12. It is widely believed in Africa, for instance, that Chinese motives and behaviours vis-à-vis Africans are more enlightened and beneficial than those of Westerners, and that the Zimbabwe débâcle is a nationalist struggle against Western imperialists rather than a battle by a neopatrimonial regime to stay in power. A better understanding by ordinary Africans of international human rights standards, international politics, and African political economy would undoubtedly change such attitudes.

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