

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Sadig Rasheed and Eshetu Chole, 1994

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE AFRICAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISIS

For many years now, the economic news coming out of Africa has been one of unrelieved gloom. The 1980s have repeatedly and emphatically been described as a lost development decade, and the 1990s have not made a more auspicious beginning. In fact, while economic growth rates averaged to merely 2 per cent per annum during the 1980s, the regional GDP grew at an even lower average annual rate of only 1.3 per cent, causing per capita incomes to fall by 1.8 per cent annually during the first four years of the present decade.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, the situation has not always been so desperate. The immediate post-independence period which was characterised by political euphoria and great economic expectations had registered some solid achievements to its credit. Economic performance was largely respectable, as demonstrated by growth in per capita income, saving, investment and export earnings. There were also significant achievements in the social field, especially in health and education.

However, the fruits of independence had already begun to turn sour by about the mid-1970s and the situation deteriorated in dramatic progression thereafter. In the harsh verdict of the *Lagos Plan of Action*, adopted in 1980, "Africa is unable to point to any significant growth rate, or satisfactory index of general well-being, in the past twenty years".<sup>2</sup> Such has been the depth of the economic malaise to the extent that today the average African is worse off than he/she was at independence a generation ago. It is sobering to note that the region has the unenviable distinction of being the only region in the world to suffer from such a sorry economic performance for such an extended period of time.

This picture is reinforced by almost every index of economic performance: low and falling saving and investment rates, sharply declining food security (on several occasions translated into severe famines) and a corresponding growth of dependence on food aid and imports; falling export volumes and prices; a rapidly rising and unmanageable debt burden; growing budgetary deficits; and arrested industrialisation.

But these depressing economic facts revealing as they are tell only a partial story, because they are inadequate to convey the breadth and depth of the human tragedy in Africa. All too often the African landscape has been plagued by a pervasive widespread and grinding poverty; recurrent famines; widespread civil conflicts with their inevitable record of death, disablement and displacement; rising unemployment; and reversals in social progress, as reflected in declining school enrolment, deteriorating educational levels and inadequate health care. For many countries what is currently at issue is not economic and social development, but sheer survival.

In the political sphere too, in spite of some promising recent developments which ushered in democratic change and political liberalisation, Africa has all too often been victimised by misgovernment of monumental proportions; the suppression of rudimentary freedoms; vicious and destructive conflicts with all their attendant consequences; widespread political instability; and corruption of a gigantic scale in the public service.<sup>3</sup> As these lines are being written, the colossal human tragedies unfolding in Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Angola and a number of other countries make a mockery of more than thirty years of flag independence.

The factors that account for the African predicament are many and inter-locking, and some are of internal origin while others are externally generated. They include misguided policies, rapid population growth, environmental degradation, civil strife, and an unfavourable international economic environment, on top of the underlying basic structural problems inherent in the state of underdevelopment.

Responses to the crisis have varied from country to country, but it would be fair to state that what have been generally attempted have been policies of adjustment, sometimes initiated by governments themselves, but more often with the firm insistence of the international financial institutions, notably the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, adjustment programmes have seldom delivered on their promises. Even worse, the available evidence suggests that they may have accentuated

the deterioration in the human condition. Even countries with a decade or more of adjustment behind them have very little to show for it in terms of human development.<sup>4</sup>

There have also been collective attempts to grapple with the African crisis, again with little consequence. The pioneering initiative in this regard was the *Lagos Plan of Action (LPA)*, which put the accent on strategies of self-reliance, food self-sufficiency, industrialisation and regional integration. But the LPA was short on achievement. This was followed in 1985 by the launching of *Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-90 (APPER)* followed by the *United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD)*, which was subsequently adopted by the UN general Assembly.<sup>5</sup> This document was lauded at the time of its launching as "a unique compact between Africa and the international community". But, as the final review of the programme revealed, the results were unsatisfactory and the Programme's targets, obligations and orientation remained dead letters. Per capita incomes decreased over the *UN-PAAERD* period and even more telling "social conditions worsened considerably, with deterioration in the areas of education, health, nutrition, employment and incomes, with especially serious effects on children, youth and women".<sup>6</sup>

In view of this, the General Assembly of the United Nations further adopted the *New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF)* to "serve as a catalyst, giving political impulse and strength to the other activities going on within and outside of Africa".<sup>7</sup> The priority objectives of the *New Agenda* are "accelerated transformation, integration, diversification and growth of the African economies, in order to strengthen them within the world economy, reduce their vulnerability to external shocks and increase their dynamism, internalise the process of development and enhance self-reliance".<sup>8</sup> More germane to the concern of this paper is that the *Agenda* "also accords special attention to human development and increased progress towards the achievement of human-oriented goals by the year 2000 in the areas of life expectancy, integration of women in development, child and maternal mortality, nutrition, health, water and sanitation, basic education and shelter".<sup>9</sup>

The significance of the *Agenda* lies in its recognition of the extreme gravity of the African situation and in its affirmation that the concerted efforts of the international community would be indispensable in dealing with the crisis. Yet, as the experience with *UN-PAAERD* clearly demonstrated, lofty expressions are one thing, while implementation is an altogether different matter. Moreover, as important as international assistance is, the fundamental fact remains that the ultimate responsibility for reversing Africa's economic and social decline resides with the African peoples and their leaders. This is why the commitment to change must begin at home.

It is in this spirit that the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) launched an alternative framework for African development in 1989 in the form of the *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP)*.<sup>10</sup> Starting from a critique of standard Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as being excessively concerned with

adjustment to the neglect of long-term development issues, AAF-SAP argues for adjustment with transformation. This is based on the view that it cannot be assumed that the classical instruments of control of money supply, credit squeeze, exchange rate and interest rate adjustments, trade liberalisation, etc., which may be valid in well-structured economies, could bring about positive results in African economies characterised by weak and disarticulate structures. While recognising the need to curb inflation and to address fiscal and external imbalances and other shocks through the selective use of these instruments, AAF-SAF recommended that adjustment programmes should simultaneously address both short- to medium-term as well as the structural transformation problems of the African economies.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, three basic policy directions that are designed to attain the combined aims of economic growth, improved living standards, and reduced external dependence were outlined as follows:

- strengthening and diversifying Africa's productive capacity and investment;
- equalising and enhancing the efficiency of factor income allocation; and
- adjusting patterns of expenditure to ensure that basic human needs are met. <sup>12</sup>

Central to AAF-SAP, therefore, is "the human dimension the recognition that it is only through the motivation and the empowerment of people as well as the ensuring of the equitable distribution of income that development can take place on a sustainable basis".<sup>13</sup> The centrality of human development in collective regional stances received even more explicit and forceful assertion in three seminal documents, *The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development* <sup>14</sup>; *The Khartoum Declaration: Towards a Human Focused Approach to Socio-Economic Recovery and Development in Africa*<sup>15</sup>; and the *African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa*.<sup>16</sup> UNDP's five Human Development Reports <sup>17</sup>came to lend more forceful arguments to the centrality of human development and human-focused development strategies.

Even as this broader and human-focused framework for dealing with immediate and long-term policy and development issues was being advocated, it also became clear by the end of the 1980s that new perspectives brought about by changing circumstances should be fully reflected in the implementation of Africa's long-standing strategies and plans for its development. <sup>18</sup>Responses to five distinct challenges are required in future policy directions in the region.

First, it is being increasingly recognised that development requires more than sound economic management. A stable and secure political environment is no less important. The causes of political conflict and instability in many countries are often complex and intractable. Be that as it may, the current wave of democratic reforms in the region augurs well for the future although democratic structures of governance remain fragile. Nonetheless, the consolidation of democratic processes and increased harmony within and between African states remains a precondition for progress.

Second, over and beyond issues of governance and economic management, it has also become clear that the world economy is driven more and more by innovations in science, technology and information management. As the phenomenon of globalization intensifies, it integrates advances in information dissemination with innovations in international finance, production and distribution. While Africa remains enthralled by the demands of sheer survival, its diverse economic agents must increase their efficiency, effectiveness and productivity so as to become competitive within the global system as soon as practicably possible. "It is a call to master new production techniques to convert Africa's resource endowments and other potential strengths into new comparative advantages, to adopt new approaches in organising and managing human, financial and material resources and to seek and expand new markets with new aggressiveness".<sup>19</sup>

Third, the challenge of sustainable development demands of Africans that they make careful, well-informed trade-offs that maximise the rate of economic growth, with the most impact on poverty alleviation and minimal negative impacts on the environment. This requires not only increased awareness but also sound analytical capacities in African public, private and voluntary sectors to make these trade-offs.

Fourth, the pandemic of HIV/AIDS casts a dark shadow over human capital accumulation, workforce stability and productivity in the region. This, to be sure, is a world-wide tribulation, but the spread of the disease in Africa has been accelerated by inauspicious economic conditions including the under funding of health programmes and the spread of prostitution associated with chronic unemployment. Africa's human resources remain its main agents of future growth and prosperity. A new resolve to reduce the devastating impact of the disease must be a leading priority.

And fifth, it has become clear that the answer to socio-economic revitalisation does not lie with governments alone, nor with private entrepreneurs and voluntary organisations alone. Past strategies that emphasised only one set of actors must be replaced with one that emphasises the role that everybody has and potentially can play and the interdependence of these roles. New strategies, approaches, institutions and processes of development management will therefore be needed to achieve this kind of co-operation and co-ordination across sectors. Indeed, management and institutional capacity at all levels and in all sectors has become a vital requirement for sustained and sustainable development in the region.<sup>20</sup>

It is thus evident that in the years to come, African countries must adopt such broad-based approaches, strategies and policies of development, at the core of which human development must predominate. With undue emphasis still being placed on economic reforms and SAPs, both the goals of achieving sustainable human development and long-term transformation of the structures of the African economies still remain an elusive goals.

## PROFILE AND TRENDS OF HUMAN DEPRIVATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The best composite measure of the state of human development is perhaps UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), which is widely utilised in its various Human Development Reports. The most striking observation about Africa that emerges out of the HDI ranking is the continent's extremely low level of human development (see Table 1 and Annex 1). According to the *Human Development Report 1994* [21](#)(HDR94) there is not a single African country in the category of countries with high human development. There are only eleven countries in the medium category, including South Africa (Algeria, Botswana, Egypt, Gabon, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, Seychelles, Swaziland and South Africa). Five of them (Mauritius, Seychelles, Botswana, Gabon and Swaziland) have a combined population of 4.6 million. When Libya and Tunisia are added, the figure rises to 17.9 million. All the remaining 41 countries are in the low human development category. This, however, does not tell the entire story. There are 55 countries in this category, which means Africa accounts for 79 per cent per cent of the category. Even more telling is that of the 30 countries with the lowest human development indices, 25 (or 83 per cent) are African. [22](#) In other words, Africa is the continent with the poorest showing in human development.

This general picture is reinforced by a review of some major indicators of human development and human deprivation. The average life expectancy for Sub-Saharan Africa is 51.1 years, the lowest for all regions. The situation with respect to health, food and nutrition is also equally bad. The percentages of the population having access to health services, safe water and sanitation are 59, 45 and 31, respectively; and average calorie supply per capita is only 92 per cent of requirements. In the sphere of education, only 49 per cent of adults can read and write while the enrolment ratio for all levels is 35 per cent, suggesting a very low level of human capital formation. At US\$1250, real GDP per capita is the lowest of all regions; and GNP per capita (\$540) is extremely low, compared to an average of \$880 for all developing countries and \$4,160 for the world as a whole. [23](#) Fifty four per cent of the people in Sub-Saharan Africa live in absolute poverty[24](#).

Critical as the general situation is, it is even worse for children and women. The mortality rates for infants (under twelve months) and children (under five years) are, at 101 and 160, respectively, the highest of all regions. The percentages of children who are underweight, wasted and stunted are 31,13 and 44, respectively. Only 40 per cent of births are attended by trained medical personnel and only 49 per cent of one-year-olds are fully immunised. [25](#)

The situation of African women is much worse than that of men. Thus, the literacy rate of women is only 60 per cent of that of men and the corresponding figure for mean years of schooling is 40 per cent. Similarly, the gaps in school enrolment are also wide, the figures being 85 per cent, 67 per cent and 35 per cent for primary, secondary and tertiary level education, respectively.[26](#)While the life expectancy of women is higher than that of men, other indicators of health are biased against women. Maternal mortality rate is 700 per 100,000 live births, and only 64 per cent of women get prenatal care. And women constitute only 33.9 per cent of the labour force.[27](#)

Interestingly, this critical human situation is complicated by obvious imbalances in resource allocation. The share of military expenditure in the GDP, which was 0.7 per cent in 1960, had risen to 3 per cent by 1991. As a percentage of health/education expenditure, military expenditure has risen from 27 per cent in 1977 to 43 per cent in 1991. These trends are contrary to what is observed in the developing countries as a group and also in industrial countries. In developing countries military expenditure as a percentage of GDP dropped from 4.2 per cent in 1960 to 3.5 per cent in 1990-1991 and as a percentage of combined education and health expenditure from 143 per cent to 600 per cent for the same periods. For the industrial countries, these figures showed a decline from 6.3 per cent to 3.4 per cent and from 97 per cent to 33 per cent respectively.<sup>28</sup>

The overall trends in human development have been positive in some respects. Thus, life expectancy has increased from 40 to 51 years and infant mortality declined from 165 to 101 per 1000 births between 1960 and 1991. Likewise, there has been an increase in adult literacy from 28 to 51 per cent and in primary school enrolment between 1970 and 1990. And there has been an increase in the percentage of the population having access to safe water between 1975 and 1991. But these developments have not been of a magnitude enough to make an appreciable dent in Africa's formidable array of social problems.

In fact, in certain instances, the situation has grown much worse. For example, in many countries per capita expenditure on health and education has been declining. There have also been reversals in school enrolment ratios and increases in school dropout rates relative to the appreciable gains made in the 1960s and 1970s. As demonstrated in subsequent sections, the continent's food insecurity has worsened. Environmental degradation has proceeded unabated and many countries are racked by internal conflicts of one sort or another. The impact of these developments is more adverse on children, women and vulnerable groups. Such trends cry out to be reversed. What is particularly disturbing is that poverty has been increasing at alarming rates and is projected to increase further. Indeed, it is estimated that Africa will be the only region where poverty will increase by the turn of the century, when Africa's share in global poverty is expected to double from 16 per cent in the mid-1980s to 32 per cent by then.

**Table 1**  
**Human Development Index for African Countries**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	Life expectancy at birth (Years) 1992	Adult literacy rate (%) 1992	Mean years of schooling 1992	Real GDP per capita (PPPS) 1991	Human Development index (HDI) 1992	GNP per Capita Rank minus HDI Rank
<b>Medium Human Development</b>						

Mauritius	69.6	79.9	4.1	7178	0.778	5
Libyan Arab Jam.	62.4	66.5	3.5	7000	0.703	-38
Tunisia	67.1	68.1	2.1	4690	0.690	4
Seychelles	71.1	77.0	4.6	3683	0.685	-44
Botswana	60.3	75.0	2.5	4690	0.670	-29
South Africa	62.2	80.0	3.9	3885	0.650	-33
Algeria	65.6	60.6	2.8	2870	0.553	-37
Egypt	60.9	50.0	3.0	3600	0.551	12
Morroco	62.5	52.5	3.0	3340	0.549	-10
Gabon	52.9	62.5	2.6	3498	0.525	-72
Swaziland	57.3	71.0	3.8	2506	0.8513	-21
<b>Low Human Development</b>						
Lesotho	59.8	78.0	3.5	1500	0.489	4
Zimbabwe	56.1	68.6	3.1	2160	0.474	-3
Cape Verde	67.3	66.5	2.2	1360	0.474	-10
Congo	51.7	58.5	2.1	2,800	0.461	-23
Cameroon	55.3	56.5	1.6	2,400	0.447	-13
Kenya	58.6	70.5	2.3	1,350	0.434	21
Namibia	58.0	40.0	1.7	2,381	0.425	-43
Sao Tomé & Príncipe	67.0	60.0	2.3	600	0.409	10
Madagascar	54.9	81.4	2.2	710	0.396	31
Ghana	55.4	63.1	3.5	930	0.382	-1
Côte d'Ivoire	51.6	55.8	1.9	1510	0.370	-19
Zambia	45.5	74.8	2.7	1010	0.352	-4
Nigeria	51.9	52.0	1.2	1,360	0.348	6
Zaire	51.6	74.0	1.6	469	0.341	20
Comoros	55.4	55.0	1.0	700	0.331	-10
Senegal	48.7	40.0	0.9	1,680	0.322	-29
Liberia	54.7	42.5	2.1	850	0.317	-14
Togo	54.7	45.5	1.6	738	0.311	-9
U. Rep. of Tanzania	51.2	55.0	2.0	570	0.306	22
Equatorial Guinea	47.3	51.5	0.8	700	0.276	4
Sudan	51.2	28.2	0.8	1,162	0.276	-14
Burundi	48.2	52.0	0.4	640	0.276	6
Rwanda	46.5	52.1	1.1	680	0.274	-1
Uganda	42.6	50.5	1.1	1,036	0.272	14
Angola	45.6	42.5	1.5	1,000	0.271	-35
Benin	46.1	25.0	0.7	1,500	0.261	-14
Malawi	44.6	45.0	1.7	800	0.260	-1



Mauritania	47.4	35.0	0.4	962	0.254	-31
Mozambique	46.5	33.5	1.6	921	0.252	14
Central African Rep.	47.2	40.2	1.1	641	0.249	-25
Ethiopia	46.4	50.0	1.1	370	0.249	10
Djibouti	48.3	19.0	0.4	1,000	0.226	-38
Guinea-Bissau	42.9	39.0	0.4	747	0.224	3
Somalia	46.4	27.0	0.3	759	0.217	7
Gambia	44.4	30.0	0.6	763	0.215	-22
Mali	45.4	35.9	0.4	480	0.214	-12
Chad	46.9	32.5	0.3	447	0.212	-7
Niger	45.9	31.2	0.2	542	0.209	-21
Sierra Leone	42.4	23.7	0.9	1,020	0.209	-7
Burkina Faso	47.9	19.9	0.2	666	0.203	-19
Guinea	43.9	26.9	0.9	500	0.191	-44

*Source:* Compiled from UNDP, Human Development Report 1994, New York: Oxford University Press, Table 1, pp. 129-131.

1. *ECA, Economic Report on Africa 1994, Addis Ababa, April 1994, p. 1.*

2. *Organization of African Unity, Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa 1980-2000, Addis Ababa, 1981, p. 5.*

3. *See Sadig Rasheed and Dele Olowu (eds.); Ethics and Accountability in African Public Services, Nairobi: ICIPE Science Press, 1993.*

4. *See, for example, I.A. El Badawi, D. Ghura and G. Uwujaren, World Bank Adjustment Lending and Economic Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s, World Bank, Policy Research Working Papers, WPS 1000, October 1992, p. 5.; ECA, The Khartoum Declaration: Towards a Human-Focused Approach to Socio-Economic Recovery and Development in Africa; G.A. Cornia, R. Jolly, and F. Stewart, Adjustment with a Human Face, Oxford University Press, October 1991; Adedeji, Rasheed, Morisson, The Human Dimension of Africa's Persistent Economic Crisis, Hans Zell, London, 1990; Giovanni Andrea Cornia, Rolph Van der Hoeven and Thandika Mkandawire, Africa's Recovery in the 1990s: From Stagnation and Adjustment to Human Development, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.*

5. *United Nations, United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD), New York, 1986.* 6. *United Nations, Final Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UNPAAERD), New York, 1991, P. 3.*

7. *United Nations, The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), New York, 1992, p. 4.*

8. *Ibid., p. 8.*

9. *Ibid., p. 8.*

10. *Economic Commission for Africa, African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation, Addis Ababa, 1989.*
11. *Ibid., i-iii.*
12. *Ibid., pp. 30-31.*
13. *Ibid., p. iii.*
14. *ECA, African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, Addis Ababa, 1990.*
15. *ECA, The Khartoum Declaration, op. cit.*
16. *ECA, Africa Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa, Addis Ababa, 1994.*
17. *UNDP, Human Development Report, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, New York: Oxford University Press.*
18. *conomic Commission for Africa, Strategic Objectives for Africa's Economic Development in the 1990s, Addis Ababa: E/ECA/CM.19/4, 1993.*
19. *Ibid., p. 16.*
20. *Economic Commission for Africa, Strategic Agenda for Development Management in Africa in the 1990s, Addis Ababa: E/ECA/CM.19/11, 1993.*
21. *UNDP, Human Development Report 1994, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.*
22. *Statements based on Human Development Indicators, table 2, Ibid, pp. 132-133.*
23. *See Ibid, Human Development Indicators, table 2, pp. 132-133.*
24. *Ibid., table 18, p. 165.*
25. *Ibid., Human Development Indicators, table 11, p. 151.*
26. *Ibid, Human Development Indicators, table 9, p. 147.*
27. *Ibid., Human Development Indicators, table 11, p. 151.*
28. *See Ibid., Human Development Indicators, table 21, p. 171.*