Environment, Agriculture and Cross-border Migrations

This book is a product of the CODESRIA 13th General Assembly, 2011

Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century

Environment, Agriculture and Cross-border Migrations

Edited by

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PO. Box: 3304 Dakar, 18524, Senegal
Website: www.codesria.org
ISBN: 978-2-86978-604-2

Typesetting: Alpha Ousmane Dia
Cover Design: Ibrahima Fofana

Distributed in Africa by CODESRIA
Distributed elsewhere by African Books Collective, Oxford, UK
Website: www.africanbookscollective.com

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CODESRIA would like to express its gratitude to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Open Society Foundations (OSFs), TrustAfrica, UNESCO, UN Women, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and the Government of Senegal for supporting its research, training and publication programmes.

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Introduction

The book is a collection of selected chapters, all, except one, of which were presented during the 2011 General Assembly of CODESRIA held in Rabat, Morocco, on the theme 'Africa and the challenges of the twenty-first century'. The chapters have been brought together under three sub-headings: (environment, agriculture and cross-border migrations). The nine chapters cover the environmental question itself, environmental communication and governance, farmers' perceptions of and adaptation to climate change, the effects of hydroelectric dams on surrounding communities within the context of climate change, challenges for agricultural development especially in the context of land grabbing which has become a central issue in Africa's development, social protection for farmers and cross-border migrations. The challenge of bringing several contributors together to is making sense of the interconnectedness of the issues, the background of which is the continent's development.

The working hypothesis we have adopted is that Africa's development challenges can be attributed to its context or its human and natural ecology. One of Africa's leading social scientists, Peter Ekeh (1986) argued that one way of looking at Africa's development was to connect it to its environment and its historical moment which constituted its cybernetic component or the relationship between developing units and its environment. This conception is one of the parameters through which a pragmatic understanding of development can be understood. The environment and historical moment of development is the world time of development or the global imperatives that control or constrain development. Even before proclamations of globalisation as a recognition of the interconnectedness of the world system, Ekeh had seen the increasing internationalisation of the world as an essential characteristic or environment of Africa's development. The Cold War days in which his analysis was proposed had presented an ideologically bipolarised planet in which development was hemmed in between the competing models. Its social, cultural and political environment had been shaped by the dynamics of the polarisation. The natural environment seemed to portend and provide abundance of climatic stability in global relations of inequality and exploitation between rich and poor nations (whether capitalist or really existing socialist). The natural ecology of development was marked by three contrasting developments: the progressive depletion of resources within a

competitive economy which did not envisage an end to the earth's limited natural base, increasing pollution that commenced with the Industrial Revolution but which had seemingly been ignored, and the fluctuation of the climate in some parts of the south between apparent stability/ abundance and natural disasters. It was during this period that Africa's agriculture entered the global scene as a supplier of cash crops for the western countries (in the main) alongside a predominantly residual peasant survival economy. It was then that one could witness what was presented as development models based on this type of agriculture existing side by side with food disasters consequent on natural calamities (droughts, floods, insect pests, and desertification). This was happening at a time when the global division of labour had assigned Africa to that unfortunate situation. Several attempts by African countries to think about their agricultures differently, as Ntangsi points out in his contribution, did not lead to much transformation. On the contrary, over time there was real regression such that after the end of the so-called Third Development Decade (the 1980s) Africa was largely dependent on food imports and, unfortunately, on food aid .

Global development has, however, changed with the end of that epoch, which itself was substituted ideologically by the proclaimed globalisation, the political and hegemonic dream of achieving a final phase of liberal economic orthodoxy captioned as neo-liberalism by its critics (Bourdieu 1998). That dream, less linear in its fortunes than conceived, has ushered in several transitions, some expected and organised or planned, while others have surfaced as offshoots of the longer term developments or as the chaotic outcomes of the dominant western development paradigm. This world time or epoch can be termed as a long and uncertain transition. Although initially witnessing the final emergence of the United States (US) as the lone superpower and the installation of a new *pax Americana*, others dreamt of a multi-polar world where the influence of the western powers would be mitigated. These two romantic dreams have not come to pass. Instead a new phenomenon is replacing the old cleavage between a developing/underdeveloped third world finding its uneasy way between East and West. This is a phenomenon of the emerging countries/economies cum nations which have forged a development clear of the dominant position of the US and the declining position of Western Europe. While it is the dream of some African countries, and provides fertile ground for new forms of cooperation, as is expressed in the current interest of Brazil, China and India in Africa, there is a new form of external intervention in the agriculture of the continent, namely land grabbing. Other newly rich countries are involved as Okuro (in this volume) has demonstrated for Kenya, as are white Zimbabwean farmers in Nigeria (Nnabuko and Uche, also in this volume). The intervention of this mode of farming promises higher productivity, high incomes, and new technologies but also implies marginalisation of poor farmers and other negative outcomes. The question is what this type of agriculture truly holds for Africa.

African countries are not just passive recipients of the fallouts of these new international developments through a new mode of agriculture, which is dependent on capital from the new financial giants. African countries seem to be dazzled by the prospects of the model but also wish to be part of the process either by taking part in an alternative to the G8 (as with South Africa's position within the BRICS), engaging in differing cooperation links (witness the regular China-Africa or India-Africa summits) or embarking on copying the model (better still, road) taken by the emerging countries. Ambitions range from specific targets such as attaining two-digit growth rates to broad or rather vague ones, such as being emerging nations by 2020 (Côte d'Ivoire), 2030 (Kenya) or 2035 (Cameroon). Is this mere mimicry or realistic aspiration? Whatever the case may be, the critical issue now is: how will it affect agriculture and social services? It is within such a perspective that the contributions of Ntangsi and Amutabi should be read.

The turn of the century also witnessed a major twist in the environmental question which has now become a social and political concern in the West (Latour 2004), but which had been largely framed as an exclusively natural process. Climatic change with enduring global effects was here to stay. The challenge of climate change has made itself felt through science and policy analysis to the extent that it has become a global concern since we share one interconnected world. As a major disruption in trends, climate change is a challenge at all levels, but more specifically to farmers. It confronts the practices of farmers and their farming systems which either adapt to or are simply dependent on the environment. Climate change issues have also departed from the domain of nature proper and become part of history, not only of natural history (of the fundamental sciences) but as part of human history or an offshoot of such a history (Maalouf 2009:277–89).

Climate change exacerbates existing risks to farmers, such as water stress, diseases and food security' (Paul et al. 2009:36). Climate change is characterised by 'increased temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, more droughts, floods and recurrent extreme weather conditions' (ibid.:37). The El Niño effect, tsunamis and yearly tropical tornadoes are some of the visible indicators of what these changes are likely to produce. Natural catastrophes that defy prediction are likely to result from this situation. That may be why the call is to limit the effects of anthropogenic activities. Climate change is part of several disorders that have coincided with the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century (Maalouf 2009). Its very anthropogenic nature makes it a historic event, that is, an event which is within time and space, and is situated within the human realm. A number of chapters in this book tackle a wide range of issues related to these natural processes with the human interface: the environmental question itself (Sane), communication and governance (Cheo), farmers' perceptions (Acquah, Nunoo and Darfor) and dam projects in their social and natural environments (Vubo and Kometa), and from different approaches – reflections, empirical analysis, policy analysis.

The present world time of development is marked by increasing migration (consequent on globalisation) and the emergence of new areas of strategic interest. One such region that is attracting attention and gaining in importance is the Gulf of Guinea where the two developments can be observed. This area is strategic for its mineral resources (especially big oil reserves) but unfolding questions of security are occasioned by all kinds of sources of conflicts and manifestations of violence. It is an area of intense migrations that will change the face of the region that stands astride a vast portion of West and Central Africa and that brings two or even three regional cooperation groupings into contact (ECCAS, CEMAC, ECOWAS). The 2013 meeting on maritime security was an opportunity to examine the common ground that brings the states of the Gulf of Guinea together to start thinking in a single direction and explore ways of working together. One could also envisage a rapprochement towards the creation of a greater cooperation community bringing the states and people together. Migration will constitute an essential component in local issues of conviviality well beyond the diplomacy and regional bureaucratic structures of such a scheme. That will constitute a challenge to the dogma of sub-regional integration and the belief in its potentials for development, as well as to the survival of the scheme itself. The crucial issue is whether one can envisage a regional integration scheme without citizens. That is what the contribution by Vubo and Ndi attempts to examine.

This environment of development, which may be also the object of development, is a changing one; it is in transformation and transforming other realities. It is difficult to say what the future holds. The following chapters chart a way forward on how to come to terms with the predicament of a new era for Africa and the whole planet.

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