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AFRICA

Assessing Development Strategies and Africa's Food and Nutrition Security

Franz Heidhues, Achi Atsain, Hezron Nyangito, Martine Padilla, Gérard Ghersi, and Jean-Charles Le Vallée

Numerous strategies, policies, and programs intended to assist Africa's development have been conceived and implemented by international bodies, regional and subregional groups, and national institutions. On average, a typical developing country in Africa is assisted by about 30 aid institutions in the implementation of these strategies, yet Africa is still far from achieving food and nutrition security.

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EVALUATING STRATEGIES

Adequate access to food that is necessary for food security must be complemented with provision of health services, education, sanitary environments, and safe water sources, among other resources, to achieve nutrition security. A comprehensive developmental approach is thus required to ensure that all groups in a population achieve both food and nutrition security. The successful implementation of such a development strategy requires clear formulation of the strategy, a conducive policy and institutional environment, a widely shared consensus about the strategy and the measures required to implement it, the human capacity for implementation, and sufficient financial resources for agencies to execute the strategy. Finally, agencies and stakeholders need to have adequate incentives to take the planned action.

To evaluate a development strategy in detail, it is necessary to address the following questions:

- Have key issues been clearly identified, properly analyzed, and located within their political, economic, and sociocultural contexts?
- Are objectives clearly defined, internally consistent, and formulated realistically, and have possible conflicts between the objectives been identified and trade-offs between them been addressed?
- Are policies and programs for achieving these objectives appropriate to, congruent with, and supportive of the strategy?
- Is the capacity to implement the strategy available —that is, are there sufficient financial resources, the necessary human capacity, the requisite institutional framework, and adequate infrastructure?
- Has the time required for implementation been estimated realistically, taking into account the demands of institution building, education, and training?
- Have all stakeholders been included in the process of strategy development, and, in particular, have they been involved in identifying priorities, in defining objectives, and in planning and implementing the strategy?
- Have the lessons of past experiences of development strategy implementation been taken into account?

IMPORTANT STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS

Most African countries became independent in the 1960s. The relatively positive socioeconomic performances of African countries during the postindependence boom years were followed by downturns, which have continued in some countries to the present date.

Two fundamentally different approaches to furthering Africa's development emerged in the late 1970s and the early 1980s and were pursued simultaneously; all subsequent initiatives emerged from these two positions.

The first position was that held by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and was used to formulate the strategies that made up the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Regional Food Plan for Africa (AFPLAN). This position perceived Africa's colonial heritage and continued dependence on Western donors as the main hindrances to future development. Thus the LPA emphasized disassociation from Western donors and concentration on internally focused development, with each country orienting production toward its own markets. Development aid was seen as rightful compensation for colonial injustices. Programs formulated subsequently, such as the African Priority Program for Economic Recovery (1986–90), followed a similar line, while also recognizing internal institutional and policy deficiencies.

The second position was based on the neoliberal understanding of economic development and was typically held by donors and international institutions (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]). This position took concrete form in the structural adjustment programs (SAPs), with their emphasis on macroeconomic stability; elimination of market distortions, subsidies, and price controls; liberalization of trade and exchange transactions; reduction of government and elimination of parastatal activities; and encouragement of the private sector.

When the weaknesses of the SAP approach—such as the resulting social disruption; worsening income distribution, unemployment, and anti-poor biases inherent in public sector retrenchment; and its short-term orientation—became increasingly apparent in the 1990s, the World Bank extended the SAP framework to include a "social dimension." This led the World Bank to conceptualize a more holistic approach, the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), which is still employed today. The CDF tries to involve all stakeholders in the development process and to integrate economic, social,

political, cultural, and environmental needs. This new approach focuses on poverty reduction and emphasizes each country's ownership and the involvement of its national, regional, and local governments, civil society, and private sector. Transparency, accountability, and the monitoring and evaluation of performance of societal institutions are also emphasized. This strategy has been integrated into the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) process for each individual country—a participatory process whereby countries outline a strategy, including specific policies for reducing poverty, restoring macroeconomic equilibrium, and establishing a framework conducive to pro-poor growth. PRSPs also link the CDF to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

An initiative known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was started by African leaders in 1999 and builds on the CDF by combining African initiatives and program ownership with neoliberal concepts. NEPAD supports liberalization and globalization but emphasizes that these processes need to be fair and must take place simultaneously with the leveling of the international trade playing field. NEPAD calls on African leaders and governments to improve governance, eliminate corruption, facilitate the creation of democratic structures and processes, encourage a free press, and establish an independent, fair, and reliable judicial system. It also reemphasizes that agriculture and rural development are crucial to poverty reduction and food and nutrition security. NEPAD enjoys strong support from the international donor community.

These two contrasting positions on development have affected most African socioeconomic development programs. The second position has had a particularly significant impact in recent years. SAPs and PRSPs have shaped regional approaches and country policies and their implementation throughout Africa. A significant number of African countries have carried out successful programs of macroeconomic stabilization and structural reform. Reforms and retrenchment of the public sector have been carried out in numerous countries, although often at the cost of increasing unemployment—and thus vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity—and a decline in public services, even in essential areas such as health, education, and research and extension services. International trade has been liberalized in many countries, and parastatal marketing boards no longer enjoy market monopolies. A major issue in most African countries remains the failure of the weak private sector to take up the functions once performed by government marketing monopolies. A further key problem is the unevenness of the playing field in international trade, with the E.U., Japan, and the United States continuing to protect their markets against imports from developing countries, including those in Africa.

CONCLUSIONS

Although development programs have certainly experienced some success, progress toward food and nutrition security has not been consistent throughout Africa. Since the root causes of poverty and hunger vary from country to country, highly context-specific policies and strategies are required. Recommendations for African governments and other agencies with respect to hunger alleviation should therefore be based on the particular features of the subregion or country in question.

Many countries have formulated poverty reduction policies with an increased emphasis on agricultural development. More progress is needed in key areas, however, such as in reducing social and economic discrimination against women, particularly in improving their access to land, credit, and input and output markets, and in fostering the education of girls. Similarly, in areas such as employment creation, natural resource protection, and governance reform, some countries have initiated encouraging measures, but much more progress is needed. The most successful reformers have been countries without war or civil unrest and with reform processes characterized by strong political leadership and a commitment to reforms with wide domestic participation and ownership. It is clear that peace and security are prerequisites for development and thus for poverty reduction. In countries that have been plagued by conflict and war, development has been pushed back years, if not decades.

Political will and the commitment to reform within a framework of good governance are crucial features of successful reform and development. Experience has also shown that reform processes are most successful with the wide involvement and participation of people at all levels of society and across different organizations and social groups. For poverty reduction in particular, civil society and private sector groups representing the poor need to be included in the consultation, decision-making, and implementation processes.

Capacity building must be a high priority. The very recent and still patchy experience of African countries with PRSP implementation demonstrates that capacity building requires more attention and more resources.

Greater capacity and competence are required at all levels of African administration.

Agriculture should be returned to the top of the development agenda, given the critical role it plays in African livelihoods. The priority given to agriculture and water in NEPAD and the Maputo 2003 Declaration of the Heads of States of the African Union is encouraging in this respect. It is essential for the World Bank and bilateral donors to follow the lead of African states and support agricultural development. Prioritizing agriculture cannot be achieved without making additional resources available to these programs. Countries need to act on the Maputo Declaration's target of allocating 10 percent of each country's budget to agriculture.

Governments and donors face a joint challenge to achieve greater cohesion in their approaches to the various strategies promoted by, and the requirements of, the international community. For example, monitoring poverty reduction in a given country is important within the PRSP process, but care should be taken not to overburden that country's capacity and institutions. Too often, donors have instituted reporting and monitoring requirements that place their internal institutional needs ahead of the needs of the recipient country. Donors should agree on a coordinated and unified monitoring and evaluation system that serves primarily to improve policy implementation in recipient countries.

Adequate attention should be devoted to micro-level activities. The project approach, which emphasized the funding of specific development activities, dominated the development scene in Africa until the 1980s, but its limitations in nonconducive policy environments soon became obvious. Deficiencies in project environments resulted in a 180-degree shift in approach toward lending for policy programs, as opposed to extending loans for projects. This shift forced the private sectors of the target countries to take up micro-level activities. Improving policy environments and strengthening institutional frameworks are necessary aims and remain a high priority, but development only occurs if investment, innovation, and action are carried out on farms, in households, and in villages. This means that development strategists should reaffirm the value of the project approach.

Finally, the design and implementation of good policies are dependent on clear, relevant, and consistent policy objectives, financial resource availability, and human and institutional capacity. Even under such ideal circumstances, these processes often involve risks to the political and social stability of target countries. The speed of reform and the implementation of policies and programs should be appropriate to each country's political and social absorptive capacity.

For further reading: C. Eicher, "Flashback: Fifty Years of Donor Aid to African Agriculture," presented at the International Policy Conference "Successes in African Agriculture: Building the Future," Pretoria, South Africa, 1–3 December 2003; F. Owusu, "Pragmatism and the Gradual Shift from Dependency to Neoliberalism: The World Bank, African Leaders and Development Policy in Africa," *World Development* 31 (2003): 1655–1672.

Note: This brief is drawn from the larger report by Franz Heidhues (heidhues@uni-hohenheim.de), Achi Atsain, Hezron Nyangito, Martine Padilla, Gérard Ghersi, and Jean-Charles Le Vallée, *Development Strategies and Food and Nutrition Security in Africa: An Assessment*, 2020 Discussion Paper 38 (Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, 2004).

Franz Heidhues is professor at the University of Hohenheim, Center for Tropical Agriculture, in Stuttgart, Germany; Achi Atsain is professor of economics and econometrics at the University of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and senior research fellow at the Ivorian Center for Economic and Social Research; Hezron Omare Nyangito is a principal policy analyst and head of the Productive Sector Division at the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA); Martine Padilla is a development economist and policy analyst at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute in Montpellier, France; Gérard Ghersi is director of the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies at the Institute of Montpellier; and Jean-Charles Le Vallée is an agricultural economist, agronomist, ecologist, and nutritionist.

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
2033 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-1002 USA
Telephone: +1-202-862-5600
Fax: +1-202-467-4439
Email: ifpri@cgiar.org

www.ifpri.org

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