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## *Developmental States and African Agriculture: an Editorial Preface*

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This *Bulletin* issue is based on the premise that policy discussions about the current 'crisis' in African agriculture will not prove useful unless they take into account the political and organisational factors which shape the capacity of states to define and deliver policies. We wish to investigate the hypothesis that many of Africa's economic failures have political foundations, and that the economic crisis is fed by and feeds a political crisis in the developmental role of African states. We focus on agriculture because the human problems it poses are the most urgent and since it lies at the roots of both crises.

The argument that the poor performance of African agriculture over the past decade has political roots is shared by commentators of varying analytical hues. The World Bank's Berg Report highlighted the negative effects of excessive state intervention, Robert Bates has identified the political calculus which underlies self-defeating agricultural policies, and neo-Marxists have argued that the peasantry is being dominated and exploited by a state 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie'. The nine papers in this issue have been assembled to assess the validity of these explanations and contribute to our understanding of the politics of African agriculture by clarifying the terms of inquiry and reporting the results of detailed empirical research. The papers fall into two categories: those dealing with broad analytical issues (Bienefeld, Bates, Mars and Brett) and those presenting detailed case studies of state involvement in agriculture (Morrison, Swainson, Wolf and Pottier), with a concluding article by Gephart which sets out an agenda for future research from the perspective of the United States SSRC. In this preface, I intend to draw out some of the themes which run through the contributions and assess their implications for both research and policy.

In their various ways, the papers demonstrate the inherently political nature of agricultural policy making and delivery, the fact that policies are shaped by flows of power and clashes of interest within the state itself and in society at large. The same point is

palpable in Morrison's description of the impact of electoral politics and 'bureaucratic swell' on the performance of the Botswana Meat Commission, Swainson's analysis of the success of the smallholder tea scheme in Kenya, or Gephart's account of the continued official popularity of developmentally irrational large-scale agricultural projects.

In their broad analyses, Mars and Brett paint a picture of across-the-board bureaucratic and political failure in official attempts to develop agriculture. The case studies depict a more complex and ambiguous situation. Both Morrison and Swainson describe relatively successful parastatals — the Botswana Meat Commission (BMC) and the Kenya Tea Development Authority (KTDA) — and Morrison argues that our preoccupation with finding overarching explanations for generalised failure has precluded detailed analysis of the conditions for success. In specific situations, moreover, the political factors involved in particular interventions are too complex to be captured in a single elegant theory. Morrison argues that the political forces involved in the BMC do not fit well with the Bates model of agricultural politics. Political factors also have contradictory effects. Wolf shows how Kenyan government policies operated both to sustain and to undermine the vegetable cooperative which it established; in Pottier's fascinating study of northern Zambia we find local Party officials advising peasants to take the free market route, while the traditional chief and the peasants themselves preferred to retain the option of participating in the officially-sponsored maize scheme. The case studies continue to suggest, moreover, that even where political factors are important in determining agricultural outcomes, they must be situated within complex and shifting causal chains which include economic, technical, ecological and social factors, both domestic and international.

These important qualifications aside, the conclusion which emerges from these papers, and from the discussions which gave rise to them, is that the impact

of government policies on agricultural performance has in general been highly problematic, where not disastrous. In terms of conclusions, therefore, there is substantial agreement with the prevailing conventional wisdom. But we are also arguing the need for a basic rethinking and clarification of the factors involved in producing failure, and seeking to redefine the terms of debate. In the first two papers there is a debate over the explanatory merits of Robert Bates' analysis of the politics of agricultural policy. Though Bates' work may be faulted, as Bienefeld suggests, for the restrictiveness of its assumptions and its exclusion of certain central factors (notably the international), he has advanced our understanding by sensitising us to some of the central political determinants of agricultural failure and the importance of internal as opposed to external factors in the development policy equation. The two authors agree, in their different ways, on 'the need to go further' in analysis and research. Bienefeld argues that narrowly political analysis of the Bates type should be integrated into a wider political-economy framework which incorporates historical, economic and social, domestic and international factors. Bates emphasises the need for precise research which traces the interaction of internal and external politico-economic forces, investigating the variations in government response to international market pressures and the room for policy manoeuvre in specific situations. In my view, this debate points to a need for analytical synthesis, as opposed to increasingly arid polemics (internal vs external factors, for example) or exercises in over-simplified abstraction (such as the cruder forms of public choice theory or Marxist class analysis).

In their contributions, Mars and Brett invite us to reflect on the nature of state institutions themselves and their relationship with their clientele. Mars locates the failure of African states within the wider framework of the failure of complex organisations generally — in the First, Second or Third Worlds. He argues the need to focus on the precise relationships which make up 'the inner world of the state' and to recognise the contributions made by organisation theory to an understanding of administrative performance and rehabilitation. Brett challenges three basic assumptions which have underlain thinking about the relationship between state and peasants, and puts forward a theory of state action which rejects the Weberian conception of bureaucracy as instrument and emphasises the need to see state officials as class actors who use bureaucratic organisations to further their own interests through the appropriation of monopoly rents.

In addition to these strong emphases on the need to clarify our understanding of political processes and administrative institutions, the papers contain two

other analytical sub-themes which call for further work. First, in addition to increasing our knowledge of the structure and behaviour of states, we need to do the same for markets. This implies a recognition that, just as the state is a complex network of economic relationships, the market is a complex matrix of socio-political relationships. Each contains highly variable processes which may produce very divergent outcomes in different economic, cultural and social contexts. Accordingly, the range of policy alternatives they offer varies greatly across contexts and issues and the maxim 'more market less state' makes a crude intellectual tool. While we are rightly shedding some of our earlier illusions about the omnipotence of states, we should hardly replace them with equally untenable illusions about the putative power of markets. Second, under the scrutiny of the research microscope (and indeed in the light of everyday experience), the traditional antitheses of 'state-market', 'public-private' are clearly unsatisfactory. As the literature on corporatism points out, public policy involves a complex intertwining of the public and private, with certain hybrid institutions playing a crucial bridging role (Swainson's study of the KTDA is interesting on this point).

What are the policy implications of these analyses? Do they point towards any policy 'solutions' to Africa's current agricultural malaise? True, this *Bulletin* is heavy on analysis and description, light on 'solutions'. This is partly because it is important to get our ideas as well as our facts straight before plunging into the treacherous quagmire of policy analysis: it is partly because we have identified policy problems as rooted in political and institutional factors, which make them that much more intractable, for domestic as well as external policy actors.

I am viewing these issues as a specialist on East Asian, not African development. While it is important to eschew the simple-minded search for transferable 'lessons', the East Asian experience does prove instructive in viewing the African context. As recent research at this Institute has demonstrated, the success of East Asian NICs has relied heavily on strong states, on their capacity to intervene effectively and implement 'sound' policies, a capacity which in turn is rooted in certain basic givens — a strong sense of cultural cohesion and national identity, social and political discipline, a long bureaucratic tradition — factors which are weak or non-existent in many African contexts. This experience suggests that successful national development requires a strong state and unified polity which not only can define and implement the strategic 'national rationality' to which Bienefeld refers, but also provide a stable framework for the growth and functioning of market forces (Swainson makes this point in her study of the

KTDA). From an East Asian perspective, the problem of African states is not that they are overweening but over-weak and vulnerable. This weakness is based partly on the deficiencies of their bureaucratic apparatus, as Mars and Brett demonstrate. This must also be set against a context of deeper political weakness stemming from the failure to develop strong political organisations capable of accomplishing the characteristic tasks of political development: the capacity to mobilise popular commitment and support, work out and maintain stable rules of the political game, unify contending political forces, define and implement coherent policy programmes, enforce the will of political leaderships on recalcitrant bureaucracies, and integrate their national constituencies across regions and between centre and periphery. At its root, this implies the establishment of enduring political communities; a task that took centuries in Western Europe. If we step back and widen out historical perspective, indeed, what appears as political failure may, in some cases at least, be transformed into success, both politically and economically.

There is a clear need for more research on African political institutions, on electoral systems, political parties, political leadership, interest groups and associations. These forces provide the context within which political coalitions favourable or inimical to development (and specifically to agricultural development) can be forged and sustained. The crucial importance of a developmentally positive political coalition, which we call a 'development coalition', shows up clearly in our case studies of the KTDA and the BMC. The latter is particularly illuminating in that it documents the rise and fall of an initially successful coalition and its replacement by another which was less effective, but more indigenous. External forces, including bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, are an important component of these political coalitions, for better for worse, consciously or unconsciously.

We need to go much further in investigating the precise contours of these coalitions and the conditions which lead to their formation, sustainability and developmental impact. It is important to ask two basic questions: first, what constitutes the kind of development coalitions favourable to agricultural development and, second, how can these emerge or be brought about? This also raises a locust swarm of questions about the terms for evaluating developmental 'success' and economic 'efficiency'. The early BMC was both 'successful' and 'efficient' but it contained strong elements of neocolonialism and racist labour organisation. In the case of pineapples in Kenya, Swainson argues, an economically effective coalition between the Kenyan state and multinational capital strangled a scheme for smallholder production.

A shift of power towards 'farming interests' may in fact benefit a small group of large farmers whose interests may be prejudicial to the mass of smallholders. If power is to be shifted to smallholders, however, how is this to be achieved without radical political change — and how likely is the latter in any case? How much leverage to effect such political changes lies within the power of external agencies, and what are the moral and political as well as technical constraints on the exercise of such power?

The search for solutions to Africa's economic ills thus rests on a sober recognition that the room for policy manoeuvre is slim and is getting slimmer, as pressures on African governments increase and the resources available to them decrease. The search for the 'lessons' from success stories may be treacherous: as Morrison points out in the case of the BMC, the formula for past success may become the formula for future decline; a factor such as 'managerial autonomy' which seems to aid the effectiveness of parastatal A, may prove highly problematic in the case of parastatal B. Given the diversity of national predicaments and the extent to which basic political and institutional factors lie at the roots of current crises, if policy remedies are available they will be complex, and the solutions painfully slow.

There are possibilities for amelioration in several arenas: within the state sector itself, for example, there are opportunities available for the improvement of public policy performance through institutional changes drawn from sources as diverse as Western organisational theory and Eastern economic reforms. In relations between polity and economy, state and market, there are potential ways in which states might be able to improve their capacity to 'manage markets'.

At its roots, this requires a more realistic appraisal of the potential benefits of markets and the limitations of state planning in situations of extreme scarcity, the search for a more balanced and complementary relationship between state action and market processes (Pottier's analysis of the attitudes of Zambian peasants is interesting on this point) and systematic attention to the potentially crucial role of intermediary institutions (such as trade or industrial associations, citizens and community organisations, peasant associations, supply and marketing co-operatives, etc.) which serve as essential linkages between state and population and mechanisms through which social forces can mobilise power against corrupt or ineffectual bureaucracies and self-serving politicians.

There is a long way to go towards understanding the complex ways in which political and institutional factors shape policy agendas, determine policy outcomes and condition the feasibility of policy

reforms. On the academic side, both Bates and Gephart present us with formidable research agendas, though the research context is far from easy. On the practical side, if research on political and institutional factors is to prove a useful component of the policy process, its results need to be taken more seriously; the hegemony of the economist as the arbiter of 'realism' should be challenged and the organisation of policy advice needs to be changed (for example, through the inclusion of political scientists on team missions). This can contribute not only to a greater awareness on the part of external agencies about the political

dimensions of policy processes within African societies but also greater self-awareness of their own political role and impact.

The urgency of these issues calls for a great deal of work at both theoretical and empirical levels. In the process, it may be possible to establish a dialogue between political scientists and economists, analysts and practitioners, which will lead to a richer and more realistic analysis of policy problems — a political economy worthy of the name.