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## UNPACKING AFRICA AS A DYNAMIC CONTINENT: INSIGHTS FROM CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN GHANA

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### Abstract

Since the last formal vestiges of colonial rule disappeared in 1994, the democratically elected governments on the African continent have been experimenting with developmental strategies and policies. These experiments come at the backdrop that Africa's output per head is notoriously among the lowest in the world and has, on the average, expanded slowly and haltingly since 1960, albeit, with some critical changes, and

variations over place, space and time. The structural adjustment programme (SAP) in the 1980s, for example, marked a watershed: a fundamental shift from administrative to market means of resource allocation. This opinion piece, appearing in this Special Issue of the Oguaa Journal of Social Sciences on the theme "Developmental issues in contemporary Ghana", provides an overview of Africa's development trajectories as presented by the collection of articles, using Ghana as a test-tube.

### Introduction: Africa as a dynamic continent

Characterising Africa as a dynamic continent is an understatement. Some authors have described the continent in different ways: as a child in need of development (Zitelmann, 2019); a rising economic power (Adegoke, 2019), an imminent threat, a tinderbox of terrorism, poverty, forced migration, and disease (Simone, 2014; Pieterse, Parnell, & Haysom, 2018). The truth about Africa is, as always, more nuanced. Irrespective of whatever lens one wears, one thing is certain about Africa: the continent's recent transformation has been phenomenal (AfDB, OECD, UNDP, 2016; UN-DESA, 2018). Africa is continuously shaping its destiny, but whether the change is perceived as an "opportunity" or a "threat" depends on who holds the trumpet (Pieterse, Parnell, & Haysom, 2018; Grant, Oteng-Ababio & Sivilien, 2019).

Recent studies on African development have unsurprisingly explored a wide range of Africa's contemporary prospects and problems (Cobbinah, & Niminga-Beka, 2017; Pieterse, Parnell, & Haysom, 2018; Grant, Oteng-Ababio & Sivilien, 2019). These studies have sought to understand the continent's development issues in their social, political, cultural, and historical contexts. Some recent studies have highlighted the continent's crave for 'satellite cities,' which has captured the urban imaginations of city planners, property developers, and policymakers, and which, in turn, has attracted a lot of academic and research interests. In recent years, emblematic names like Techno City, Eco City, and Hope City, have become a common slogan, and they embody a new property

investment frontier and an optimistic belief in economic growth driven by a rising middle-class (Leynseele & Bontje, 2019; Grant, Oteng-Ababio & Sivilien, 2019).

It will thus be shortsighted to ignore Africa's recent progress, but acknowledging such improvement does not absolve the responsibility to continue working toward more significant positive and inclusive outcomes (Fuseini, & Kemp, 2015). There are certain pieces of evidence of Africa suffering severe returns necessitating new beginnings. At the very least, the continent appears to have been ushered into a law-like and an apparent cyclical pattern of Africa's development. For example, Africa's economies have oscillated between forms of state control and free-fall models. Further, its politics have swung back and forth between militarization and democratization. More importantly, in this era of globalisation, the continent's cultural life is hanging between African cultural beliefs and philosophies and conceptions of the Western world (Simone, 2014; Pieterse, Parnell, & Haysom, 2018).

According to Ezemonye et al. (2018), Africa's development issues can arguably be characterized by two distinct features: the economic crisis in an era of globalization, and the political weakness caused by centuries of bad governance and marginalization. The debate appears protracted and perhaps with no end in sight. This Special Issue of Oguaa Journal of Social Sciences explores some of the various manifestations and dimensions of Africa's development issues using Ghana as a lens. The discussions are set within the background of

Africa's peculiar features which include but not limited to the following:

- Undoubtedly, Africa is endowed with abundant human and natural resources, but in terms of development, the continent remains the least developed and most indebted. Despite its natural resource endowment, the continent has long been at the heart of many violent conflicts that compromise its hopes for prosperity. Africa's resources, ranging from forests to water, oil, and mineral reserves, have been the subject of continuous research, fierce debates, brutal conflicts, novels, and movies (UN-DESA, 2018).
- In Africa, many resource-rich countries lack transparency in resource allocation and revenue management, hence breeding corruption that cripples governments' capacity to deliver essential infrastructure services. For instance, Equatorial Guinea has the highest per capita income in Africa. Yet, its life expectancy and infant mortality are below the sub-Saharan African average, while almost half of its population lack access to potable water, and immunisation rates for children are among the world's lowest. Similarly, Angola's development indicators are among the worst worldwide, yet \$2.4bn in oil revenues illegally disappeared from its Central Bank without explanation from 1997 to 2002 (AllAfrica, 2017).
- Statistically, about 30 of 47 countries, considered least developed, are in Africa, while 50 percent of its population is considered among the world's poorest, earning less than a dollar a day. Africa is also the most conflict-ridden, war-torn, and politically unstable continent, and suffers from internally displaced people and depends more on food imports. Further, though the continent constitutes 12 percent of the global population, it contributes less than 1 percent of the world's trade and services; and suffers from deplorable environmental disasters from oil and mineral exploration and deforestation (World Bank, 2019b).

The above narrative gives credence to the almost law-like, re-current Africa developmental roadmap. Africa today suffers conspicuously from the absence of good governance, whether democracy exists or not. Indeed, political corruption, personalization of state power, widespread diseases, persistent policy failure in education, economy and infrastructural development, and the over-dependence on Western (and now, Asian) funding and expertise has become a lot for many a government on the continent (Robinson, & Parnell, 2011; Simone, 2014; Rogerson, 2016). These issues

differ from those decades ago, but recent [(inter) nationally] intellectual and policy intervening environment have change the dynamics, caused mutations and transformations of a qualitative character worth interrogating.

Understanding Africa's recent development trajectories and transformations provides the central task the collections in this special issue seek to address. Significantly, the process leading to the making of this volume was not a guided one. It emerged from an international conference that explored contemporary developmental issues in Ghana. Nonetheless, the contributions mimic the dismalness in most African situations, best exemplified by a reported commentary by a Ugandan Minister for Foreign Affairs on bad roads in his country not being entirely bad as thought: "For us, a bad road is a cause for complaining. But for people in affluent societies who have never experienced getting stuck on a bad road, pushing a car from a ditch can be part of tourism experience" (Shaban, 2020: i).

#### **Africa's paradoxical development agenda**

Arguably, Africa is a continent of contradictions. This Special Issue reports on several development interventions in the 21st century. On the eve of its 'independence revolution,' Africa was a continent of hope and high expectations, but just three decades since, the optimism was replaced by dimality (Ezemonye et al., 2018). The continent is today beset with ethnopolitical squabbles, civil wars, religious and insurgent movements, extreme poverty, and diseases (World Bank, 2019a). With the ascent of re-democratization in the 1990s and a 'new' pan-Africanism feeling, Africa appears set to claim its vaunted destiny (Robinson & Parnell, 2011; Ezemonye et al., 2018; Cobinna et al., 2019).

Resource-wise, Africa's opportunities are vast, but the challenges are also persistent. The World Bank (2019a) describes Africa as the home to the world's largest free trade area with a 1.2 billion-person market. Hence, it can create an entirely new pathway by just harnessing its resources and people. The World Bank (2019a) projected Africa's growth rate to rise modestly by 2.6 percent in 2019 from 2.5 percent in 2018. However, such figures mask intra-country differences, as in the case of Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Rwanda, which were among the fastest-growing economies in the world in 2019 (World Bank, 2019a).

For all intent and purpose, understanding Africa's paradoxical issues (growth without development) is likely to dominate the next

academic and policy discourse. Economically, the continent remains saddled with increasing domestic macro-economic instability, including poorly managed debt, inflation, and deficits; political and regulatory uncertainty; and fragility. Even many governments with sustained economic growth continue to display extreme levels of inequality and poverty (Stalon, 2015). Today, Africa is one of the biggest producers of petroleum. It also has enormous hydropower capacity, yet 621 million of its population have no access to electricity while the risk of a child dying before completing five years of age is still the highest in the world — 81 per 1,000 live birth (Stalon, 2015; Pappis et al., 2019).

Politically, Africa has since 2015 experienced about 27 leadership changes, with countries like Mauritius, Botswana, Cape Verde, Namibia, and Ghana ranking relatively high as stable, democratic countries (Stalon, 2015). However, such good news does not mask the heart-breaking episodes. The cases of Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo are telling, so are countless situations where political elections are marred by corruption and fraud (Gyampo, 2011). A former Prime Minister of Zimbabwe (2009 - 2013) once described the 'African development dilemma' as "a phase that Africa should accept - mistaken policies, mistaken positions - but it's a phase all the same" (BBC News, 2019: ii, as stated in Ezemonye, Ogbomida, & Ajieh, 2018). In Senegal, a 49-meter bronze African Renaissance monument, valued at £17m, was dubbed a presidential vanity project and waste of money, though the President thinks otherwise, "[...] Africa has arrived in the 21st century standing tall and more ready than ever to take its destiny into its hands" (Ezemonye, Ogbomida, & Ajieh, 2018). Be that as it may, such tendencies only perpetuate van de Walle's observation of African countries:

*With a handful of exceptions, the post-colonial state in Africa has been largely anti-developmental. Parasitic, rent-seeking, and inept, it has been simultaneously very coercive and extremely weak, forced to prey on the economy and civil society - with devastating effect - just to survive. The bureaucracy's effectiveness has typically been undermined by a patrimonial logic, in which state assets are routinely plundered for the political advantage of the regime, and state-society relations have been characterized by clientelism rather than citizenship. The state, powerless to elicit respect or loyalty from the populace, has typically used threats and coercion to achieve minimally - usually*

*passive - acquiescence* (van de Walle 1995: 132-133, as stated in Ezemonye, Ogbomida, & Ajieh, 2018).

We need to appreciate Africa's problem from its historical antecedent. It is a truism that, what the colonial state was, the same became of the post-colonial state (Juan, 2002). The recurrence of the African development challenges in its varied forms in almost cyclical movements has become persistent. In the words of Mills (1995: 155), to "understand a slow-moving society, trapped for centuries in a cycle of poverty and tradition and disease and ignorance, [...] requires that we study the historical background, and the persistent historical mechanisms of its terrible entrapment in its history". In this direction, Santayana rightly warns that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana, 1906: 284). Simply put, the logic of return within a cyclical framework is not a return informed by knowledge of the past, but by a lack of it (Ezemonye, Ogbomida, & Ajieh, 2018).

These are some reasons why any study which seeks to unpack the exceptional cases of Africa's development issues is welcomed. This Special Issue is more than justified not only by its collections, which highlight some of the most exceptional interventions in Ghana, but more importantly, by the passionate sincerity with which the authors set forth their studies. Theoretically, the authors implicitly portend that Ghana's historical development trajectories are equal to any in the continent, and this should condition the attitude of Ghanaian academics, and avoid wishfully squandering research grants in diversionary, and sometimes exaggerated attacks (Grant, Oteng-Ababio & Sivilien, 2019; ).

In my view, using and building on our traditional economic development paradigm is critical for any policy framework. Empirically, the process can be empowering, albeit this must be contextually grounded and diagnostically sophisticated. It also means avoiding policy trajectories which conflate with neoliberal discourse, while seeking to erode social protection is essential. Thus, escaping policy prescriptions that do not address social justice and pursue all-inclusiveness is equally imperative.

### **Ghana's recent development issues in focus**

As earlier noted, the rapid growth of cities has occasioned a reconfiguration of their social and economic map imposed through their colonial past (Frankema, 2015). In the process, cities are unlocking new opportunities for their residents,

shifting the intra-urban balance of power, and recalibrating their contribution to development issues (Robinson & Parnell, 2011; Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019a). Ghanaian cities are pioneers in this process. With a 2018 population of 29.77 million (out of which 56 percent is urban), Ghana's gross income per capita has increased from US\$340 in 2000 to US\$2,130 in 2018, and in 2017, grew at 8 percent – the second-fastest rate in Africa and forecasted to remain above 6 percent in 2019 (World Bank, 2019b; Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019b).

Ghana remains one of Africa's "early urbanisers". The country has experienced urbanisation trends and advanced transition in fertility rates, leading to a slowdown in its population growth from 2.9 percent in 1990 to 2.2 percent in 2018 and thus improved dependency ratios (Vuylsteke, 2015; Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019b). In its developmental drive, the country's economic status today (middle-income liberal democracy) has enabled higher levels of economic productivity, reduced the per capita cost of service provision, and generated new sites for social integration (Paller, 2019). As rightly noted by Ghana Urbanisation Think Tank (GUTT) (2019), the growing number of people in cities has certainly overwhelmed local capacities to provide and manage all-inclusive services, and infrastructure as the data below depicts:

- The proportion of urban residents with access to piped water declined in major urban centers between 2000 and 2010, with Accra experiencing the most acute decline, from 91 percent to 69 percent of all households (World Bank, 2015; Ghana Urbanisation Think Tank [GUTT], 2019).
- Traffic congestion and the associated public health and productivity costs have increased (Jain, Sharma, & Subramanian, 2012)
- Urban sprawl has driven up the cost of service delivery and undermined agglomeration effects (Fuseini & Kemp, 2015)
- Rising inequality has seen a growing proportion of the population living and working beyond the reach of "formal" policy instruments (Cobbinah & Nimminga-Beka, 2017).
- Unchecked urban development in hazard-prone areas has increased the population exposed to flooding and high temperatures exacerbated by climate change (Cobbinah et al., 2018).

Based on the above, the country's new development prospects and challenges are worth interrogating. The fact that increased urbanisation can potentially improve lives and open up new

development pathways is not in doubt (Cartwright et al., 2018; Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019a). Indeed, this optimism was evident in 2012 when Ghana developed a National Urban Policy (NUP). The policy aimed to "promote a sustainable, spatially integrated and orderly development of urban settlements with adequate housing, infrastructure and services, efficient institutions, and a sound living and working environment for all people to support the rapid socio-economic development of Ghana" (MLGRD, 2012; Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019b; Ghana Urbanisation Think Tank (GUTT), 2019.).

Though the NUP has many successes, other structural challenges have made the country's ability to harness the full benefits of urbanisation a challenging task (Inkoom, Amponsah, & Adabor, 2019). It stands to reason that how Ghana designs and implements policies for its transitioning of settlements from predominantly rural to urban will influence its prospects and role in the community of nations, and these are the focus of the articles in this special edition.

### **Contributions to this special issue**

This special issue consists of papers that explore different facets of Ghana's development interventions. The authors adopt critical and relational approaches to address the diverse experiences and imaginaries of selected interventions. The papers address issues ranging from water resources management in the face of rapid physical, social, and economic transformation to the role of the informal sector in environmental management. Others examine the increasing youth unemployment and public sector wage reforms, the issue of social capital and its influence on development, and the factors influencing household energy choices and uses.

This introductory commentary, (written by myself - the Guest Editor), introduces Africa as a continent of contradictions. It gave an overview of Africa's development trajectories and set the research agenda for moving ahead in developmental interventions in Ghana. By exploring the merits of selected strategies, the papers in this edition reflect on the effectiveness or transferability of these interventions in diverse and challenging territorial and institutional contexts. In so doing, the articles explore the extent to which Ghana's development needs are met, and the intra-city similarities and differences (Inkoom, Amponsah, & Adabor, 2019).

This Special Issue has a set of six papers. The contribution of Nana Amma Anokye focuses on stakeholders in the water industry and their

participation in water management, using the Densu Basin as a laboratory. The paper applies the extended ladder of participation theory and contends that the degrading water resources in the study area are partly due to the exclusion of the local stakeholders in its management. Anokye underscores inclusive participation as a vital pathway for ensuring good governance and sustainable water management and opines that governments and other non-governmental agencies' role in this agenda-setting is paramount and imperative.

The contribution of Owusu Boampong, Akua Opokua Britwum, and Angela Dziedzom Akorsu examines the role of informal service operators in the solid waste management (SWM) industry in Accra, Ghana's economic hub and the national capital. The article draws on qualitative data with informal waste collectors, private waste companies, and city officials to highlight the impossibility of escaping from the services of the informal sector in the quest for a sustainable SWM system. To the authors, lack of recognition of that industry only masks its employment option and denies a substantial number of poor urban residents access to affordable and efficient SWM services.

The paper by Benjamin Yaw Tachie and Harriet M. D. Potakey centers on public sector wage reforms using the equity principles. Tachie and Potakey produce a chronology of committees and commissions once commissioned in the quest to reverse disparities, distortions, and anomalies inherent in public sector pay and wage structure in Ghana. They cite the Single Spine Pay Policy, introduced in 2010, ostensibly to bring finality to the anomalies in the country's pay structure. Yet, the sector remains saddled with increasing strike actions, protests, petitions, legal actions, and uncountable cases at the Labour Commission.

The contribution by Frederick Koomson and F. Enu-Kwesi highlights one of the missing links in Ghana's development discourse - social capital. Using primarily desk studies, Koomson and Enu-Kwesi argue that social capital has attracted considerable attention among social scientists and development economists because of its positive outcomes on development. They maintain that while micro-level social capital predominates in Ghana's development agenda, its success largely depends on macro-level approaches, which encapsulate an enabling socio-economic environment.

The next contribution, by Angela D. Akorsu, Akua O. Britwum, and Owusu Boampong,

joins recent policy debates on service privatisation as a panacea to increasing state indebtedness, and the apparent inefficiencies in the public sector. Borrowing from the institutional theory, the authors argue that the way policymakers frame employment rights signals the extent labour rights are protected in privatised employment spaces. They urged trade unions to be conscious of this at the policy formulation level since they are an essential antidote to unrestrained exploitative tendencies of capital.

The final paper comes from Emmanuel Adjei-Danso, Yamoah Tenkorang, and Patrick Osei-Kufuor, who analyse factors influencing household energy choices. Employing a cross-sectional design, the authors undertake a comparative data analysis of 405 household energy choices in Kumasi, the Ashanti regional capital. Their results show that factors like affordability and accessibility are exogenous determinants of energy choice and concur with the energy ladder hypothesis that a household income is a significant determinant of its energy choice.

### **Concluding remarks**

From the preceding narratives, it is apparent that each of the articles re-echoes the complexities of development issues with varied outcomes in the sub-region. We can also infer that investments are mainly induced by economic and geopolitical shifts of resources and power. Such inference is in sync with what Pieterse, Parnell, & Haysom (2018) admonish that scholars in development studies must embrace the new generational scholarship, which inspires different repertoire of ideas (also see Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019a & b). This scholarship does not promote a new urban normativity, surging new global hegemons, or resurgent older models. Instead, it inspires critique in studies whose overriding challenge is to develop creative responses to the multiplication of sites of inspiration, authorizing concepts, and new subjects of theorization (Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019b).

The option is neither about resorting to a specious choice of blandly 'a one-size-fit-all' version of inherited conceptualization nor a too-easily derided 'cacophony' of arguments where each case speaks only its truth (Grant, Oteng-Ababio & Sivilien, 2019). I concur that to create new geographies of urban development theories, with useful insights in a scholarly manner, and crosscut by generational and analytical diversity, is to set the creation of new practices and cultures of theorizing (Pieterse, Parnell, & Haysom, 2018; Cobbinah, et al., 2018; Oteng-Ababio, & Grant, 2019a).

But there is still hope for Ghana. All the papers emit hope and demonstrate how the rise of broadband and mobile technologies, for example, has led to a loosening of state control across institutions and allowed scholars to thrive independent of political support and connections (Zitelmann, 2019; Oteng-Ababio et al., 2020) Many of this newly emerged class of self-confident scholars have studied overseas—typically in Europe or the USA, but increasingly in Africa as well. Many have worked for, and with, international corporations before returning home with tons of experiences. Unnoticed is how Africa is being infested with a class of scholars who are driving and shaping the academic upswing across the continent.

Admittedly, the provocations of this Special Issue have revitalized comparative imaginations.

However, some of the recommendations proffered in some of the articles, including ‘the massive boom in the economy’ being bandied about, are based on models that fall short of reality. I submit that attempting to replicate Asian success stories in Ghana without considering the differences between the two geographies would be rather simplistic. All said and done, I wish to admit that this publication has taken a much longer time than I ever anticipated. The delay was due, in part, to inevitable changes that I had to make at different times on the list of contributors, and of course, other personal challenges that I profoundly regret. Now, I am happy to share in the authors’ pride and joy that this Special Issue is finally out. I am very grateful and cherished the opportunity.

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