

Review

Reviewed Work(s): African Development Dilemma. The Big Debate by Samuel M. Muriithi

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exception of Goran Hyden, express similar sentiments about foreign donors in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Most troubling and least empirically and realistically grounded, are Hyden's arguments that structural adjustment is the "price that Africa is paying for excess . . .," "an inevitable process . . . to get African countries to take greater responsibility for their own affairs . . ." and "provide[s] a sense of relief, maybe even freedom . . ."

Service Provision Under Stress in East Africa provides a captivating and critical analysis of service provision in East Africa. Each chapter provides an in-depth look at central issues governments, non-governments, and ordinary folks in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda are facing as they attempt to provide and access needed services. The calls of contributors to clarify exactly what privatization means in the era of SAPs is timely. It accomplishes its goal of explaining interorganizational relations between the state, foreign donors, NGOs, and POs.

A section on gender would have been most useful in furthering our understanding of the differential impacts of privatization on women and men as different service provision and service recipient populations. I recommend this book most highly to academicians, policy makers, development field workers, and students of service provision and organizational behavior.

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Samuel M. Muriithi. *African Development Dilemma. The Big Debate.*

Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997. 128 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$47.50. Cloth. \$24.50. Paper.

The theme of Muriithi's book is both timely and provocative. Over the last three decades, African countries have experienced only marginal success in their effort to increase the living standards of their population. As a reaction to colonial rule, early African leaders showed an intense commitment to national independence. However, the colonial legacy inspired very few ideas regarding appropriate policies to achieve sustainable economic growth. The development ideology, often oriented toward catching up with the West, failed to provide a framework for effective economic transformation. While the modernization approach to development failed to reproduce Western economic success in Africa, state interventionism focused more on increasing the wealth of the state rather than the welfare of the people. Thus, the essence of the African development dilemma is that conventional development ideologies have failed to inspire strategies that work effectively in the African context.

Muriithi takes a multidimensional approach to examine the causes and consequences of African underdevelopment. The author distinguishes

between internal factors attributable to African people and external factors attributable to the Western influence. The book emphasizes the strengths of the pre-colonial African society and economies which were disrupted by colonization. The author highlights various aspects of the failure of the *mission civilisatrice* of the colonial administrations and takes a critical look at stereotypes about African people and culture, which still are a lasting legacy of colonialism. Muriithi also examines the impact of various factors that have contributed to underdevelopment in Africa, including fragility of the ecosystem, environmental degradation partly due to poor agricultural technology, inadequate domestic policies, and exploitation by multinational corporations.

Overall, the book paints a bleak picture of the African continent. The author offers little discussion of possible solutions to the problems. The book sounds unduly pessimistic at times, suggesting that Africans have accepted poverty “as a virtue [sic] that no man can change,” and that they can only wait for a “miracle from God to transform their lives” (73). Also, like many other writers, the author fails to acknowledge the diversity that characterizes African countries with regard to endowment in natural resources, political stability, stability of the macroeconomic environment, and potentials for economic growth. The continent includes countries with income levels ranging from \$80 in 1995 (Mozambique) to over \$6600 (Seychelles). Countries devastated by civil wars like Mozambique, Angola, Burundi, and Rwanda coexist with fairly stable democracies like Botswana, Senegal, and Tanzania.

One fundamental flaw of the book is the lack of an institutional approach to the problems of African underdevelopment. Today, most analysts believe that political structures and practices, the administrative system, and the social institutions of a country significantly affect the design and effectiveness of development policies. Drought, desertification, population growth, and other problems that Muriithi so convincingly describes in the book probably are not as important as institutional breakdown as causes of the devastation of the economic system in Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and Zaire, to name only a few examples.

Another important element that is missing in Muriithi’s analysis is the role of international financial institutions and the donor community in general. International lending institutions are key players in the design and implementation of development policies in Africa.

For a book on economic development, empirical evidence is strikingly scarce. Tables and graphs would have been a valuable addition. Also, the text contains more than a few errors. Despite these weaknesses, Muriithi should nevertheless be commended for engaging a discussion of such an important topic.

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