Combating poverty by re-empowering the state:

the role of the UN on strengthening state authority

and legitimacy in African countries

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Abstract

Despite unprecedented economic and technological progress over the past decades, 320 million African people are still struggling for their daily survival. Although much has been done to lift Africa out of its poverty trap, it remains the poorest region in the world with the least favorable prospects for the future. The consequences of this dire situation do not only affect the lives of those living on the continent, but produce repercussions extending far beyond its borders. It is therefore imperative that action be taken.

Combating poverty, however, constitutes a highly complicated, multidimensional challenge which requires action in many key areas. Considering the magnitude of the problem, many experts agree that the state is the only entity capable of confronting this challenge. Historically, the state has played a vital role in providing social stability and fostering development.

Yet in those African countries where action is most needed, a strong and effective state apparatus is often lacking. Due to indigenous causes, colonialization and the emergence of neo-patrimonialist governments, state institutions in Africa are generally very weak and inefficient. Corruption and clientelism pervade society, and many African leaders do not perceive the creation of modern state institutions as being in their interest.

In order for a state to function effectively and establish itself permanently, physical and moral authority are indispensable. Physical authority is needed to create a stable and secure internal state environment in which economic activity can flourish and human development can take place. Without absolute control over its territory, the state will not be able to implement any strategy towards the alleviation of poverty. Moral authority is essential as public trust and commitment are necessary preconditions for a state's future survival and development. When the state is not recognized as the primary, legitimate source of power projection and policy making, structural constraints such as ethnic violence, disease and poverty will start eroding it from below.

This essay therefore argues for active UN involvement in strengthening the authority and legitimacy of African states. In order to foster the creation of secure and stable internal state environments, the UN will need to either consider deploying a peace-keeping force or strengthen internal forces fighting for change. The UN can contribute to enhancing the legitimacy of African states by imposing sanctions targeted at the economic and political security of governing elites, so that the latter will lose their stake in the current situation. If all Member States seriously commit themselves to implementing such measures, the UN will be able to exert a significant amount of pressure on those elites misusing their power. While patience and flexibility will be required, this process will ultimately empower individual Africans to secure their own livelihoods and lift their countries out of poverty.

1. Introduction

Despite unprecedented economic and technological advances over the past decades, 1.2 billion people still have to make a living on less than one dollar a day. Of these "bottom billion", as Collier calls them[1], 320 million reside in Africa[2]. Africa is not only the poorest and most deprived continent in the world, it is also the one with extremely poor prospects for the future[3]. Though it has received billions of dollars in foreign aid over the last fifty years, poverty in Africa is still on the rise[4]. Yet as Mule notes[5], poverty is not just a statistic. It is about human dignity, development, and despair. Each day, people are dying of malnourishment. Each day, opportunities are missed. Each day, hope is fading away.

The consequences of Africa's dire situation, however, not only affect local lives and communities, but produce repercussions extending far beyond the continent's borders. Thousands of illegal African immigrants daily flock to other parts of the world, mounting enormous pressure on foreign economies and societies. Furthermore, local deforestation, soil exhaustion and rapid natural resource depletion negatively contribute to the process of global climate change, thereby producing far-reaching consequences that will affect the entire world.

Combating poverty thus constitutes a tremendously urgent, yet daunting challenge. It requires a thorough, multidimensional approach targeting key factors that inhibit countries from escaping the poverty trap and embarking on the road toward development. Considering the magnitude of the problem, many scholars point to the state as the main entity capable of confronting the challenges ahead. 'As a coercion-wielding organization that exercises supremacy over other organizations, e.g. households, kinship groups and communities within a given territory, it [the state] has more than any other agency been able to shape history'[6].

Yet in many African countries, a strong and legitimate state apparatus is absent. Out of the remnants of colonial administrations, ill-equipped authoritarian governments emerged that privatized the state for their personal gain. Corruption and clientelism has become the order of the day[7]. As a consequence, public goods are practically non-existent, conflict pervades throughout society and state legitimacy has been lost.

To combat poverty and its dreadful effects, this essay argues for an active UN involvement in strengthening the authority and legitimacy of African states. Authority is needed to create secure and stable internal environments which will provide the state and individual Africans with the opportunity to take the first steps toward development. In order to stay on the path of development, however, state legitimacy needs to be enhanced. Public trust and commitment are necessary preconditions for a nation's successful future. The challenge for the UN is thus two-fold: fostering the creation of stable internal state environments and persuading African governments to adopt policies that are directed toward the benefit of their citizens instead of their own private enrichment. Change will need to come

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[1] Collier, P. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.3.

[2] Adejumobi, S. "Governance and Poverty Reduction in Africa: A Critique of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers [PRSPs]" (paper presented at the Inter-Regional Conference on Social Policy and Welfare Regimes in Comparative Perspectives, Austin, USA, April 20-22, 2006, p.7).

[3] Mbaku, J.M. "Institutions and Poverty Alleviation in Africa". Journal of African and Asian Studies 6, 2007, p. 108.

[4] UNECA. "Economic Report on Africa 2005: Meeting the Challenges of Unemployment and Poverty in Africa". United Nations 2007, p. 93.

[5] Mule, H.M. "Institutions and their Impact in Addressing Rural Poverty in Africa". International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD] 2001, p.1.

[6] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008, p.6.

[7] Keller, E.J. "Structure, Agency and Political Liberalization in Africa". Journal of African Political Science, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1996, p. 208.

from within Africa. With the full commitment of its 192 Member States, the United Nations can play a decisive role in realizing that change.

The first part of this essay will explain why the role of the state is crucial in combating poverty. The next section will analyze why states in Africa differ to such a great extent from those in other parts of the world. The last part will focus on the role of the United Nations in strengthening African states and thereby empowering its populations to lift their countries out of poverty.

1.   WHY THE STATE MATTERS

§2.1 Social Stability

From Chaos to Order

As North and Thomas note, since nomadic lifestyles gave way to agricultural settlements, there were two ways for man to acquire goods and services. He could produce them himself, or steal them from someone else. As agricultural settlements were often raided by bandits, producers of goods responded by investing in military defense. However, since military build-up affected the security of all villagers, those who chose to not contribute were able to free-ride on the investments of others. The most effective solution proved to be the formation of governmental authorities to whom such collective action problems could be delegated[8]. In the absence of such an overarching authority, chaos and anarchy would prevail[9].

During the 17th and 18th century, the state came to be, as Weber states, an organization that successfully claimed the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory[10]. As such, it acquired the ability to advance the welfare of its citizens and manage society in line with its mandated power[11].

Authority and Legitimacy

Two key concepts appear critical to the emergence of the modern state (and contemporary state-building): authority and legitimacy. Authority is generally defined as the power or right to give orders, enforce rules and deliver judgment[12]. Legitimacy can be described as the quality or state of being in accordance with law or established rules, standards and principles[13].

Without sufficient physical authority, order cannot be established. People would have to fend for themselves as others would still be able to freely take their possessions and, in the worst case, their life. Without legitimacy, the future survival and development of the state would become volatile as its inhabitants neither render legitimate its existence nor its commands and actions. In order to fully and permanently establish itself, the state thus first needs to secure a monopoly of violence over its territory,

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[8] North, D.C. and Thomas, R.P. *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp.6-7.

[9] Hobbes, T. *Leviathan Or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiaticall and Civil*. New York: Simon and Schuster Inc, 1962, p.108.

[10] Weber, M. '"Politics as a Vocation". In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by Gerth, H.H. and Mills, C.W., p.78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.

[11] Mengisteab, K. "New Approaches to State-Building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism". African Studies Review Vol. 40, No. 3, 1997, p.112.

[12] Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 'Authority'. 2009.

[13] Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 'Legitimate'. 2009.

whereafter it has to dedicate itself to the provision of public goods that promote the well-being of its society and thereby forestall structural erosion from below (regionalism, poverty, ethnicism) by obtaining moral authority in the eyes of its citizens (See Figure 1.).
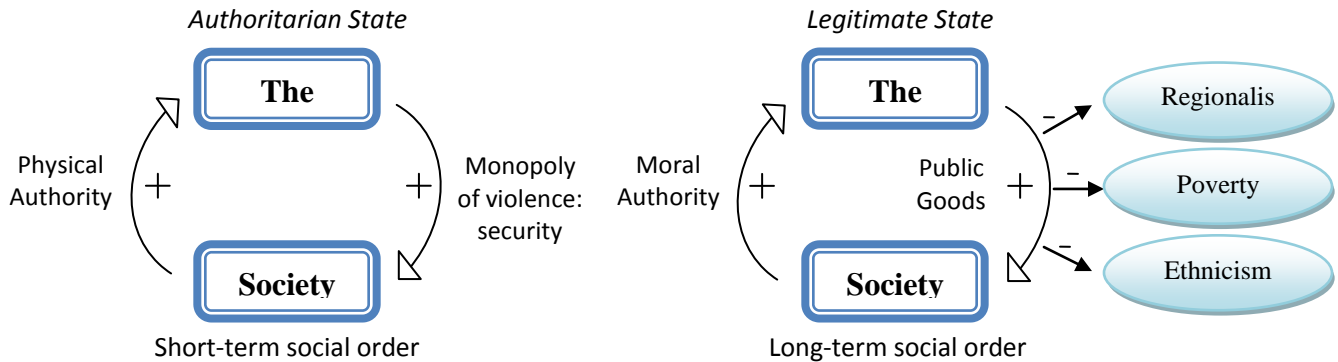
§2.2 Economic Growth and Development

The State and Development

Next to providing social order and stability, the state is generally acknowledged as the principal catalyst for bringing about change and development within its borders. As Migdal states, 'Even in the most remote corners of those societies with the newest states, the personnel, agencies and resources of the state have reshaped political and social landscapes'[14]. Most experts agree that a strong state with effective control over its territory is a prerequisite for successful development and poverty reduction[15].

Historical evidence also demonstrates that the intense involvement of the state is crucial in determining development outcomes. As Wertheim notes, the Dutch "Golden Age" in the 17th century was brought about by strong state regulation regarding the import of raw materials and the exportation of manufactured goods[16]. In Great Britain, the provision of collective goods such as infrastructure, capital and legal systems by the state enabled durable industrialization[17]. In Japan, state efforts to capture the agricultural surplus and channel it back to society by investing in railroads, large family-owned merchant companies and generic heavy industries critical for military security proved indispensable for the country's industrial development[18]. In other relatively late industrializers such as Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam and China, the state also played a vital role in promoting industrialization by implementing policies that included e.g. land reform, targeting of investments and credits toward selected industries and supporting the establishment of marketing and research facilities[19].

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[14] Migdal, J.S. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988,p.xiii.

[15] Ibid., p.34.

[16] Wertheim, W.F. "The State and the Dialectics of Emancipation". Development and Change 23/3, 1992, pp.257-281.

[17] Schwartz, H.M. *States versus Markets: The Emergence of a Global Economy*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2000, p.87.

[18] Ibid., p.96-97.

[19] Mengisteab, K. "New Approaches to State-Building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism". African Studies Review Vol. 40, No. 3, 1997, p.114.

The Importance of Institutions

In order for a state to successfully develop, the existence of an appropriate institutional framework appears to be crucial[20]. Institutions are 'the rules of the game in a society, or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction'[21]. These rules guide people's behavior and choices in the public sphere[22]. They can be either formal, such as constitutions, laws, property rights and regulations, or informal, e.g. customs, traditions and taboos[23]. In poor countries, where formal institutions are less developed because the state is either incapable or unwilling to do so, people rely primarily on informal rules to regulate their daily lives and on informal institutions (e.g. personal networks) to get support when needed[24]. Institutions thus both signify the rules by which a society functions, and the actual organizational structure that puts those rules into practice. Institutions are important because they structure incentives in human behavior; they cause individuals to behave in a certain way. When people expect shame, loss of opportunity or punishment to result from certain actions, they are facing an incentive to not engage in such activities. Incentives are being created both by formal and informal institutions[25].

History has proven that formal institutions are indispensable for economic development. In Europe, the establishment of rational-legal state institutions was the primary condition for development. The authority of ruling regimes came to be tied to legal rationality, legal legitimacy and bureaucracy[26]. South Korea, whose economic base is characterized by patrimonialism, would not have been able to develop without regulatory institutions overseeing conduct in goods, services, labor, assets and financial markets. Neither would Taiwan[27]. As North and Thomas state, 'efficient economic organization is the key to growth'[28].

In the development process, namely, the demand for formal institutions increases as transactions become more and more complex; too complex for informal institutions to handle. In this respect, private property rights are of special importance. According to Rodrik, North and Thomas and North and Weingast, the establishment of secure and stable property rights was crucial to the start of modern economic growth[29][30][31]. Without having adequate control over their property, entrepreneurs and organizations face a high risk that they will not be able collect the fruits of their investments. Thus, the

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[20] Fosu et al. "Institutions, Governance and Economic Development in Africa: An Overview". Journal of African Economics Vol. 15, 2006, p.2.

[21] North, D.C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.3-5.

[22] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008, p.3.

[23] Jütting, J. "Institutions and Development: A Critical Review". OECD Development Centre, Working Paper No. 210, 2003, p.11.

[24] Ibid., p.11.

[25] Palmer, T.G. "The Role of Institutions and Law in Economic Development". The CATO Institute 2004, p.2-3.

[26] NationMaster Encyclopedia. "Legal Authority". 2009.

[27] Rodrik, D. "Institutions for High-Quality Growth: What They Are and How to Acquire Them". Harvard University, 1999, p.7.

[28] North, D.C. and Thomas, R.P. *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p.1.

[29] Rodrik, D. "Institutions for High-Quality Growth: What They Are and How to Acquire Them". Harvard University, 1999, p.5.

[30] North, D.C. and Thomas, R.P. *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

[31] North, D.C. and Weingast, B. "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth Century England". Journal of Economic History, 1989, pp.803-832.

incentive to accumulate and innovate in such an unpredictable environment is very low. As a result, productivity is minimal and economic growth stagnates [32]. While informal institutions should not be discredited, the existence of effective formal rules appear absolutely critical to successful development[33].

2. WHY AFRICA IS DIFFERENT

§3.1 State-building in Europe

From Violence to Patrimonialism to Rational-Legal States

In Europe, the state initially looked more like a protection racket than some great project for the social good[34]. State-formation methods were predatory and did not add much social value[35]. Kings were warriors, and the road to establishing state authority was characterized by nothing short of structural violence. In other parts of the world, violence also played a major role in creating states[36][37]. In the 19th century, a group of young Japanese samurai from Choshu and Satsuma toppled the Tokugawa shogunate and ushered in the Meiji period, a time of rapid modernization and Westernization which transformed Japan from a feudal into a modern state[38]. In China after the communist revolution and in the United States after independence from Britain, powerful military elites led the country[39]. As Namier notes, "states are not created or destroyed, and frontiers redrawn or obliterated, by arguments and majority votes; nations are freed, united, or broken by blood and iron, and not by a generous application of liberty"[40]. Once physical authority was established, however, the state's long-term survival required a stable internal supply of resources, which in turn required a certain degree of legitimacy.

At first, as Weber states, all European state institutions were patrimonial[41]. Patrimonialism refers to "a form of political domination in which authority rests on the personal and bureaucratic power exercised by a royal household, where that power is formally arbitrary and under the direct control of the ruler". Political and economic rights were merged, as political power implied control over all resources[42].

Eventually, however, patrimonialism gave way to rational-legal states in Europe. To survive in the midst of fierce inter-state competition, European powers had to create efficient standing armies and adopt innovative military technology. In order to extract sufficient financial resources to fund these efforts, states had to develop fiscal systems and bureaucracies. Yet without the consent of their citizens, states would not have been able to raise the necessary taxes. Thus they had to make concessions, such

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[32] Shirley, M. "Institutions and Development". The Ronald Coase Institute, 2003, p.3.

[33] Jütting, J. "Institutions and Development: A Critical Review". OECD Development Centre, Working Paper No. 210, 2003, p.30.

[34] Tilly, C. *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990-1992*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1992.

[35] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008, p.6.

[36] Bates et al. "Institutions and Development". Center for International Development, Harvard University, Working Paper No. 107, 2004, p.24.

[37] Schwartz, H.M. *States versus Markets: The Emergence of a Global Economy*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2000, p.21.

[38] Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. "Meji Restoration". 2009.

[39] Bates et al. "Institutions and Development". Center for International Development, Harvard University, Working Paper No. 107, 2004, p.24.

[40] Schwarz, B. "The Diversity Myth: America's Leading Export". The Atlantic Monthly, May 1995, p.60.

[41] Weber, M. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: The Free Press, 1947.

[42] Hahn, D.R. "Political Liberalization, Social Pacts, and Rural Politics in Brazil". John Carroll University, 1995.

as establishing representative institutions which gave the public a say in the governing of their daily lives, and creating a legal framework which curbed the power of the absolutist state[43]. By guaranteeing the interests of their populace through the formation of rational-legal institutions, the existence and activities of the state apparatus gained legitimacy.

Out of this transformation, the modern Western state emerged as "a well-defined organization with a legitimate and continuous monopoly of violence over a defined territory"[44]. Generations passed, however, before the difficult process of adaptation and experimentation driven by external competition and aggression resulted in the acquirement of full state authority and legitimacy[45]. Modern institutions such as those protecting property rights, supporting strong market economies, and fostering democratic and social arrangements did not develop overnight. Today, most Western states, including Japan, can be categorized as rational-legal states[46]. Yet the road toward the creation of these states was long and bumpy, and the process by which these states were established should not be underestimated.

§3.2 State-Failing in Africa

Weak Indigenous State Institutions

While most nations today largely fit Weber's profile of a modern state, the majority of states on the African continent still find themselves in the early phases of state-building. Heads of African states are generally those able to most effectively employ the use of force. Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and Angola are all examples of countries whose governments are run by commanders of the dominant military forces[47]. Yet in some countries, e.g. Somalia, Sudan and Chad, the state-building process is not only falling behind, it is falling apart.

Experts point to several critical factors explaining the weakness of state institutions on the African continent. Historically, population density in Africa has been low, causing little incidence of inter-state warfare and little concentration on the definition of territorial boundaries. In contrast with their European counterparts, African rulers hence did not need to create large military structures in order to survive, which in turn precluded the establishment of effective state institutions[48]. Second, when European powers colonized most of the African continent they were not forced to develop any serious state capacity either as the 'scramble for Africa' proceeded quite peacefully. In fact, it was the weakness of indigenous institutions that allowed the colonizers to succeed in the first place[49]. In those colonies where governmental institutions were established to a certain degree, typically in the so-called "settler colonies" (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia), most of the work was reversed after independence[50]. Third, namely, when independence was gained, the emergence of neo-patrimonialist regimes prevented the development of strong state institutions.

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[43] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, p. 102.

[44] Schwartz, H.M. *States versus Markets: The Emergence of a Global Economy*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2000, p.12.

[45] Shirley, M. "Institutions and Development". The Ronald Coase Institute, 2003, p.21.

[46] NationMaster Encyclopedia. "State". 2009.

[47] Bates et al. "Institutions and Development". Center for International Development, Harvard University, Working Paper No. 107, 2004, p.32.

[48] Fosu et al. "Institutions, Governance and Economic Development in Africa: An Overview". Journal of African Economics Vol. 15, 2006, p.7.

[49] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008, p.9.

[50] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, p. 103.

After independence, most African leaders were anxious to obtain personal control over the state and lead their countries toward modernization. Yet during the colonial period, Africans had had to subject themselves formally to 'a new and different authority which drew its legitimacy from overseas capitals'[51]. Consequently, the origin of the state was exogenous as opposed to having evolved out of the relationships of groups and individuals in society[52]. This caused the state to inherently suffer from a great deficit of legitimacy. Since the availability of political and economic resources to enhance the state's legitimacy was limited, its new leaders tried to secure their political future by focusing on the consolidation of their power, authority and hegemony.

Out of this the neo-patrimonialist state evolved in which one individual dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws. A network of relationships of loyalty and dependence permeates the formal state mechanism, forging so-called patron-client relations. State resources are used to prop up the regime and maintain the system of patronage. In these situations, corruption is rampant and public services are unreliable and inefficient[53]. As von Soest remarks, in such a situation 'the separation between the public and the private realm, which stands at the basis of the modern conception of the state, is abrogated'[54].

Failing States

Thus, just as in early Europe, in most African countries politics and economics have come under the strict control of the state[55]. The ruling elite, holding unconditional power, is shielded from public accountability and, like its predecessors, neither finds it in its interest to develop rational state institutions. The availability of international aid and natural resources such as oil and precious metals, which generate large rents for those in power, renders redundant any effort toward the rationalization of the state[56]. Whereas European kings, by the nature of their competitive environments, had a great stake in fostering the creation of rational-legal states, many African leaders did not and still do not face any incentive to modernize the remnants of their colonial governments.

The consequences of this have proved catastrophic. Countries are lacking even the most basic provisions such as minimum standards of health care, basic education and adequate infrastructure. This governmental mismanagement has resulted in structural internal conflict, underdevelopment, infectious disease epidemics and chronic poverty. Instead of lending a "helping hand" to its citizenries, governments employed what Schleifer and Vishny call a "grabbing hand" by extracting economic rents from their populations[57].

When states fail to advance the public social interest, however, the effects will not only be felt by its population; structural constraints such as ethnic violence, inequality and persistent poverty will also

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[51] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008, p.9.

[52] Englebert, P. "The Contemporary African State: Neither African Nor State". Third World Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1997, p.767.

[53] Bratton, M. and van de Walle, N. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.62.

[54] von Soest, C. "How does Neopatrimonialism Affect the African State? The Case of Tax Collection in Zambia". German Institute of Global and Area Studies [GIGA], Working Paper No. 32, 2006, p.7.

[55] Keller, E.J. "Structure, Agency and Political Liberalization in Africa". Journal of African Political Science, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1996, p. 208.

[56] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, p. 103.

[57] Schleifer, A. and Vishny, R.W. *The Grabbing Hand: Government Pathologies and Their Cures*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

start undermining political stability and erode the state from below[58]. As a consequence, it loses its ability to successfully implement policies (i.e. loses authority) and its already volatile degree of legitimacy is reduced to nothing. The state, in effect, has failed to legitimate its existence.

Case in Point: Sudan

  Sudan is an example of such a state. With its 2.5 million square km, Sudan is the largest country in Africa (see Figure 2). While the country possesses rich natural endowments, including oil reserves, and while at present it is economically booming owing to increases in oil production, high oil prices and large inflows of foreign direct investment, it lacks basic infrastructure; access to essential health care is at best 49 percent, life expectancy at birth lies around 50 years, people face a high risk of major infectious diseases and the average literacy rate is only 50 percent[59][60]. Moreover, poverty is widespread, with an estimated 60-75% of the population in the North and 90% in the South living below the official poverty line[61] of less than one U.S. dollar a day[62] According to Reeves, a Sudan researcher and analyst, the country is a 'profoundly failed state by any standards other than the economy of Khartoum and the immediate region'[63].
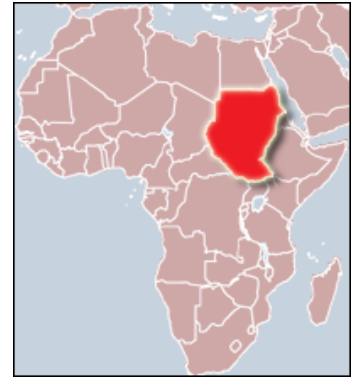
  Since its independence from Britain in 1956, military regimes favoring Islamic-oriented governments have dominated Sudanese national politics. The British placed the country's civil service and administration in Northern hands, thereby failing to ensure equity for both the North and the South in state affairs[64]. As a result of the Northern economic, political and social domination of the largely non-Muslim, non-Arab South, two long civil wars erupted (1955-1972 and 1983-2005) that caused enormous suffering[65]. In 2004, according to Reuters, up to 30 armed groups existed within Sudanese borders[66]. The North-South conflict 'ended' in 2005 with a peace agreement between the Southern rebels and the Khartoum government, which transferred roughly half of Sudan's oil wealth to the South and granted it virtual autonomy and the right to secede after six years[67]. Yet while the deal defused the immediate crisis, many obstacles continue to threaten the agreement's successful implementation, such as border disputes over the oil-rich Abyei region. Furthermore, the dreadful situation in Darfur and rebellion in Eastern Sudan continue to undermine the country's stability.

  Both the rebels from the South, the East and those in Darfur state that their fighting is directed against the oppression and marginalization from Khartoum[68][69]. Former U.S. Ambassador Rossin stated that 'the pattern of rapacious elite governance that has characterized Sudan for decades' needs to change if genuine state failure is to be prevented. Ashworth, a Sudan expert, notes that the country is already a

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[58] Keller, E.J. "Structure, Agency and Political Liberalization in Africa". Journal of African Political Science, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1996, p.209.

[59] CIA. "Sudan". The World Factbook 2008.

[60] Reuters AlertNet. "Sudan". Reuters Foundation, 2004.

[61] The poverty line is the minimum level of income deemed necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living in a given country (About Inc, 2008).

[62] UNDP. "Achieving the MDGs and Reducing Human Poverty". United Nations Development Programme, 2009.

[63] Reuters AlertNet. "Analysis: Sudan a Failed State?". Reuters Foundation, 2007.

[64] Global Security. "Sudan – First Civil War". Global Security, 2009.

[65] CIA. "Sudan". The World Factbook 2008.

[66] Reuters AlertNet. "Sudan". Reuters Foundation, 2004.

[67] InfoPlease. "Sudan". High Beam Research, 2005.

[68] Human Rights Watch. "Darfur Destroyed". Human Rights Watch Publications, 2004.

[69] CIDA. "Sudan". Canadian International Development Agency, 2008.

morally failed state that needs 'a change in the basic power structure which keeps an unrepresentative minority in power'[70].

The situation in Sudan illustrates the importance of, first, a strong state able to exercise physical authority over its territory and secondly, the necessity of legitimacy. The North proved unable to suppress Southern military units and prevent them from obtaining weapons and supplies from abroad. Civil strife continued due to political, economic and social marginalization of different parts of the country by the Northern government. As long as power and wealth are not shared more equitably, which implies a genuine commitment from the central government to use its state resources for the good of all its citizens, rebellion from below will continue to destabilize the situation in Sudan.

3.   THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

§4.1 First MDG: Reduce Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Millennium Declaration

In September 2000, 189 world leaders signed onto the Millennium Declaration and agreed to commit themselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] by 2015. The MDGs are eight goals that address the world's main development challenges[71]. The 'greatest global challenge facing the world today' is encapsulated in the first goal: reducing extreme poverty and hunger by half, particularly in Africa'[72]. As the Declaration states:

> *"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want".[73]*

Good Governance

The Millennium Declaration stresses that creating an environment that is conducive to development and the elimination of poverty, depends *inter alia* on good governance within each country[74]. Good governance, according to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], exists when the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not) is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law[75].

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[70] Reuters AlertNet. "Analysis: Sudan a Failed State?". Reuters Foundation, 2007.

[71] UNDP. "About the Millennium Development Goals". United Nations Development Programme, 2009.

[72] UN General Assembly. "World leaders pledge to reinvigorate 'Global Partnership of Equals' to end poverty, hunger, underdevelopment in Africa". General Assembly, United Nations, GA 107/48, 2008.

[73] "United Nations Millennium Declaration". Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, General Assembly Resolution 55/2, 2000.

[74] "United Nations Millennium Declaration". Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, General Assembly Resolution 55/2, 2000.

[75] UNESCAP. "What is Good Governance?". United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.

Many experts argue that good governance is *the* key to solving problems such as chronic poverty[76][77][78]. In order to successfully lift African countries out of their poverty trap, serious investments are needed in many critical areas such as agriculture, health, education, and research and development[79]. Poverty is a highly complicated, multidimensional problem, and needs to be tackled from every angle. Individual Africans in poverty-stricken countries neither have the ability nor the power to do so, as many of them are barely succeeding in staying alive. Thus, action will need to come from a higher level. Yet, as UNESCAP itself indicates, good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Hence, it states, all we can do to ensure sustainable human development, is to take actions aimed at the realization of this ideal[80]. I argue that the crucial action in this respect is enhancing first, the authority and second, the legitimacy of African states.

§4.2 Enhancing Authority and Legitimacy of African States

Authority

  As history has shown, the first step on the road toward a durable, effective state is securing a monopoly of violence on a certain territory. Without a stable and secure internal environment, chaos and anarchy prevail. The world has witnessed this recently in Somalia, whose transitional government was, and continues to be, unable to control neither the streets in the capital nor much of the rest of the country, where clan chaos continues to disrupt daily life[81]. In such circumstances, it is physically impossible to implement any strategies directed at economic growth and poverty alleviation.

  Thus, any effort by the United Nations to empower the state in order to combat poverty needs to be targeted first at creating a secure internal environment. In 'failed states', such as Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe, the deployment of a peace-keeping force will most likely be necessary to establish security. As the Mission Statement of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations [UNDPO] states, such peacekeeping operations may be required to 'lead states or territories through a transition to stable government, based on democratic principles, good governance and economic development'. Each peacekeeping operation, according to the UNDPO, shares the common aims of alleviating human suffering and creating conditions and building institutions for self-sustaining peace[82]. Creating physically conducive internal state environments for the purpose of combating poverty thus falls well under the official UN mandate.

  In those countries where internal circumstances have not yet deteriorated to the point of total state failure, a peacekeeping operation may not be necessary. Across Africa, as Collier states, there are internal struggles to raise the standards of governance in respect of both honesty and efficiency. Yet often, those striving for change are fighting unequal battles against those who have the money and the

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[76] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, pp.100-140.

[77] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008.

[78] Mengisteab, K. "New Approaches to State-Building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism". African Studies Review Vol. 40, No. 3, 1997.

[79] Sachs et al. "Ending Africa's Poverty Trap". Columbia University and UN Millennium Project, 2004.

[80] UNESCAP. "What is Good Governance?". United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.

[81] Foreign Policy. "The Failed States Index 2008". Foreign Policy, 2008.

[82] UNDPO. "Mission Statement". UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2008.

guns[83]. With effective external support, such internal forces can be strengthened and unequal battles can be won. To whom and by what means this support should be delivered will have to be determined by a pool of experts for each individual country. It is beyond the scope of this paper, however, to discuss these matters in detail.

The main issue is that in order for any actor to implement any strategy toward the alleviation of poverty, the first precondition is a safe internal state environment. Combating poverty, as many experts acknowledge today, is as much a political as an economic issue[84]. It is widely recognized that the organizational capacity of African states in combination with weak authority in is a major obstacle to successful development and poverty reduction [85]. Appropriate policies are required to foster development. Yet when the internal state environment does not allow for actions to be taken at any level toward economic growth and poverty reduction, no progress will be made.

Legitimacy

In order for a country to effectively and permanently develop, however, an adequate degree of legitimacy is needed. In states where absolute authority has been achieved, either fully or to some extent, those in power will still need to remain cautious as the danger of mutiny from below is ever-present. Only a legitimate state will be able to secure lasting stability and survival. Legitimacy is obtained by using state power for the public good: ultimately the original reason why states were established. By acting in the public interest, the state will obtain moral authority in the eyes of its citizens and thereby forestall structural threats to its existence. As such, it will be able to implement efficient policies that foster economic growth, enhance the quality of life for its population and thereby reduce the level of poverty in its territory.

In the long run, by providing public goods and formal institutions that foster development, such as access to well-regulated markets, secure property rights, universal health care and education, the norms and beliefs (informal institutions) that people hold will change. As Nobel prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi remarked in 2005, 'the poor must have the sense that they themselves can shape their own future'[86]. If their reality is characterized by hunger, violence and despair, their hopes and expectations for future change will remain low. If, however, they are lifted out of their desperate daily struggle for survival and are given opportunities to develop themselves, revolutionary changes will be underway.

Poverty reduction and increased legitimacy are thus two processes that run parallel to each other and are mutually reinforcing. If a state enjoys legitimacy, its citizens are largely content with its practices, which means the majority of the population is not suffering from severe poverty. If poverty were rampant, the state would be subject to all sorts of structural constraints such as ethnic violence, underdevelopment and disease, rendering it weak and ineffective. When poverty is reduced, legitimacy will increase. When legitimacy increases, state capability will enhance and further development will be made possible. The first step on the development track, however, will need to be taken by the state. No other entity will be able to implement the multidimensional strategy needed to produce effective growth and overall development.

Yet the privileged few currently residing at the top levels of many African governments are comfortable where they are. As mentioned before, state revenues are often used for personal benefit

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[83] Collier, P. "Assisting Africa to Achieve Decisive Change". Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford University, 2006, p.19.

[84] Hyden, G. "Governance and Poverty Reduction in Africa". Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Vol. 104, No.43, 2007, p.1.

[85] Lubeck, P.M. "The Crisis of African Development: Conflicting Interpretations and Resolutions". Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 18, 1992, p.534.

[86] Aung San Suu Kyi. "Freedom, Development and Human Worth". Journal of Democracy 6.2, 1995, pp.11-19.

and to maintain the regime of the chief executive and his inner circle. The state administration's main goal is to preserve the system of patronage so as to secure political order[87]. As Collier points out, due to the large resource rents accrued by the government elite, the latter has an intrinsic conflict of interest with the wider society: it is tempted to capture the rents for itself instead of investing it in the public good[88].

The crucial issue here is thus how to induce elites to effectively devote state resources to advancing the social interest of their populations. The regime's stake in the current state of affairs is usually of such a magnitude that the benefits from change would be much less, thus precluding any interest in serious public investments. Hence, it is imperative that elites are given a stake in devoting themselves to the good of their populations. As Hyden argues, historical experience from around the world tells us that the necessary political capability to bring about change relies on the presence of a group of actors with a stake in the system[89].

The UN, as a legitimate international organization backed by 192 Member States, is able to exert a considerable amount of pressure on the elites of badly governed countries. Such pressure can be applied through imposing sanctions targeting the economic and political security of governments. In today's globalized world, external relations are of crucial importance. If all Member States fully commit themselves to 'freeing the entire human race from want' and seriously enforce those sanctions, the few privileged elites at the top state level will be personally affected. If no external actor is willing or capable to buy or exploit their oil, diamonds or other natural resources unless serious efforts are made toward enhancing the welfare of their populations, elites will lose their stake in the current situation. If the UN succeeds to use its full capacity, therefore, it is well capable of inducing regimes to behave in a way conducive to the development of their economies and people.

Case in Point: Botswana

A good example of a country that to a large degree succeeded in legitimating its state institutions is Botswana. As a landlocked country, covered for 84% by the Kalahari desert and lacking physical infrastructure and the presence of educated people, the prospects for Botswana at the time of its independence from Great Britain in 1966 appeared gloomy. Yet since its independence, real GDP growth has averaged 7% per year, transforming it into one of the most successful economies in the world[90]. Botswana has witnessed large increases in human and social development, and has been an open and free democracy despite the hegemony of the Botswana Democratic Party [BDP][91].

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[87] Bratton, M. and van de Walle, N. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.62.

[88] Collier, P. "Assisting Africa to Achieve Decisive Change". Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford University, 2006, p.13.

[89] Hyden, G. "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". The Africa Power and Politics Programme [APPP], Discussion Paper No.2, 2008, p.3.

[90] Rheault, M. "Stability, Good Governance Boost Confidence in Botswana". Gallup News Service, 2007.

[91] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, p.103.

According to Rheault (2007), diamond wealth, political stability and sound macro-economic policies have provided the foundations for Botswana's success story. Robinson and Parsons point to good governance as an explanation for Botswana's success [92]. Botswana's government is characterized by very low levels of patrimonialism and corruption, and the state apparatus has efficiently implemented economic plans and policies. For instance, revenues from the diamond industry were maximized and exploited by reinvesting the benefits in socially efficient ways[93]. According to a 2006 Gallop poll (see Figure 3), respondents expressed a relatively high level of confidence toward their country's social and political institutions.

Figure 3. Source: Gallup News Service, 2006

Facing dominance from the West in the 19th century, Botswana's local leaders attempted to modernize autonomously so as to prevent Western settlers from taking over their lands and peoples. In order to do so, they had to employ sufficient amounts of their indigenous elites to maintain the consensus of their population. This process of so-called defensive modernization led to the development of a political structure that limited the power of individual leaders and integrated other groups than the dominant Tswana into the state structure[94]. In particular, the tribal tradition called *'kgotla'* has been influential. As former president Mogae (1998-2008) stated: 'We realized that some of the modern democratic institutions are versions of our *kgotla* system'[95]. The *kgotla* were public forums at which the village chief would consult with local villagers who have the right to express their views and concerns[96].

This integrative nature of traditional Tswana political institutions, according to Robinson and Parsons, reduced the likelihood that other groups would aggressively challenge the power of the newly founded state at independence[97]. Furthermore, the institutions derived from the pre-colonial *kgotla* created effective constraints on elite power by holding them, to a certain degree, politically accountable[98]. As opposed to other newly independent African countries, the ruling elite in Botswana played an important role in the creation of the new state structure[99].

Another critical factor behind Botswana's successful development, according to Robinson and Parsons, was the vested interest of Tswana elites to develop rational state institutions and private

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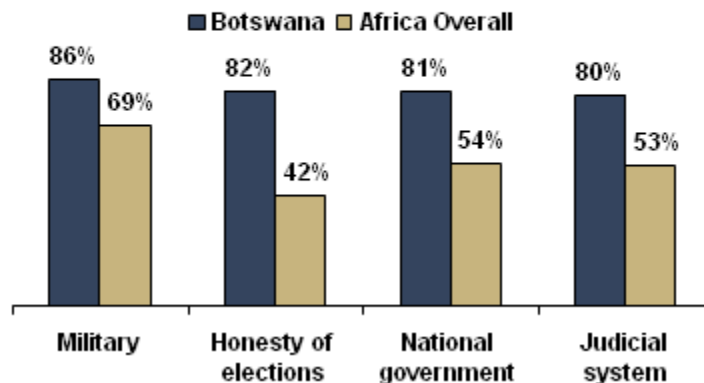
[92] Rheault, M. "Stability, Good Governance Boost Confidence in Botswana". Gallup News Service, 2007.

[93] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, p.103-106.

[94] Ibid., pp.117-120.

[95] The World Bank Group. "Building Good Governance from Local Traditions: Botswana's Former President on Diamonds and the Fight against Corruption". The World Bank Group, 2008.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, p.135.

[98] Acemoglu et al. "An African Success Story: Botswana". MIT Department of Economics, Working Paper No. 01-37, 2001, p.10.

[99] Robinson, J.A. and Parsons, Q.N. "State Formation and Governance in Botswana". Journal of African Economies, Vol.15, 2006, p.136.

property rights. The political elites that came to control the state after independence, were mainly large cattle owners closely involved in the country's main economic activity: ranching. This provided them with a strong incentive to promote modern state institutions and invest in public goods such as infrastructure[100]. Furthermore, as Tangri (2006:42-43) points out, the continuity of Botswana's pre-colonial institutions, its hereditary system and the broad elite coalition that was formed within the ruling BDP party, ensured that those in power felt safe. Consequently, it was in their interest to develop effective means of administration in order to maximize long-term profits[101].

The case of Botswana demonstrates the vital importance of government elites that have a stake in developing their country. When it is in the state officials' interest to invest in the further development of economic activity on their territory, state resources are less likely to disappear in their own pockets. In Botswana, the existence of some sort of system of political accountability further discouraged elites from misallocating state resources. The crucial factor nevertheless appears to be the vested interest of its elite in expanding the country's main industrial activity.

4. CONCLUSION

While the world today is more prosperous than it has ever been before, an unacceptably high number of people still live under conditions that people in the West can hardly imagine. Being the poorest region in the world with the least prospects for future improvement, Africa presently constitutes the main challenge to the international development community.

Combating poverty, however, constitutes a highly complicated, multidimensional challenge which requires action in many key areas. Considering the magnitude of the problem, many experts agree that the state is the only entity capable of confronting this challenge. Historically, the state has played a vital role in providing social stability and fostering development.

In those African states where action is most needed, however, a strong and effective state apparatus is often lacking. Due to indigenous factors, colonialization and the emergence of neo-patrimonialist governments, the state-building process in Africa has generally lagged behind and in some cases has even fallen apart. Many African leaders do not perceive the creation of modern state institutions as in their interest.

In order for a state to function effectively and establish itself permanently, physical and moral authority are indispensable. Physical authority is needed to create a stable and secure internal state environment in which economic activity can flourish and human development can take place. Without absolute control over its territory, the state will not be able to implement any strategy towards the alleviation of poverty. Moral authority or legitimacy is essential as public trust and commitment are necessary preconditions for a state's future survival and development. When the state is not recognized as the primary, legitimate source of power projection and policy making, structural constraints such as ethnic violence, disease and poverty will start eroding it from below.

Therefore, efforts of the United Nations to address the challenge of poverty in Africa should be directed toward strengthening the authority and legitimacy of African states. In order to foster the creation of secure and stable internal state environments, the UN will need to either consider deploying a peace-keeping force or strengthen internal forces fighting for change. The UN can contribute to enhancing the legitimacy of African states by imposing sanctions targeted at the economic and political security of governing elites, so that the latter will lose their stake in the current situation. If all Member

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[100] Ibid., p.135.
[101] Tangri, K. '"Good Governance" in Botswana: What shaped the design of Botswana's institutions and how did they affect the country's economic growth since independence?'. Universität Konstanz, 2006.

States seriously commit themselves to implementing such measures, the UN will be able to exert a significant amount of pressure on those elites misusing their power.

Creating a strong and efficient state is not an easy process. In Europe, it took many centuries before the state in its modern form emerged. Change should thus not be expected to happen overnight, especially not in Africa, where socio-economic conditions greatly complicate the situation. Yet the first step towards development and poverty reduction *will* need to be taken at the state-level. In this respect, re-empowering the state through increasing its authority and legitimacy is imperative. While patience and flexibility will be required, this process will ultimately empower individual Africans to secure their own livelihoods and lift their countries out of poverty.

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