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[sections in brackets and italicised were added in response to Mr McKinnon's speech]

I am new to ODI and I am working in a new unit that specialises in politics and human rights.

I have recently arrived from Africa, where I have lived and worked, off and on, for 18 years.

Today I want to talk about what I have learned and seen close up:

Re. 'Building democratic and accountable states' in sub-Saharan Africa

In recent years the donor community, people like me working in the field, and the researchers at ODI, have learned some lessons about democracy, development and aid.

Let me outline three of these:

In Africa:

1. the role of outsiders to motivate change is limited, especially in comparison with domestic political forces and interests;
2. national economic development is dependent on Africans 'getting their politics right'; and
3. the democratic transitions in many aid-receiving African countries have stalled.

I will start with last one first:

[I would have to disagree with Mr McKinnon that Democracy is moving forward in Africa. In my experience] Democratic Consolidation has stalled

The democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s – e.g., in Zambia, Malawi, Uganda – which held out so much hope and which we (including me) were all so enthusiastic about – have become stuck... incomplete.

What we have now are African countries that

- display the outward signs of a modern, democratic state – hold elections, and have institutions that appear democratic and functional (e.g., presidency, parliament, parties, judiciary, media, ministries etc)
- we (outsiders) even interact with these institutions – we give funds to ministries, we work with judiciaries, we train MPs, etc.

But real power and real decision-making lie outside this formal framework.

Decisions about resources are made by informal networks, generally headed up by a president.

- In these hybrid states (a mixture of formal and informal institutions, where democracy has stalled) the President's aim and that of his advisors is to stay in power.
- Policy decisions about development and other issues are subordinate to that single, overriding goal.
- The idea of democracy – of a 'loyal opposition', tolerance of opponents, of one party following another into power through fair elections – has not taken hold.
- The aim is to stay in power!
- The reason is because [1] being in control of government gives you access to state resources, [2] which are denied those outside power or outside the network linked to the President [3] because little wealth is generated in Africa other than by/through the state.
- African leaders will say 'you will not "eat" if I am not in power' – explicitly said by politicians to constituents (schools, roads, clinics, etc).
- Therefore, how funds are used, how appointments are made, what decisions are taken... these are first and foremost dependent on whether they help the president and his network of supporters stay in power.
- Loyalty is determined not by shared ideologies, values, concerns-issues, but by personal connections (same school, married relatives, e.g., Muluzi, Malawi: shared membership in same football club two decades before)
- I recommend Patrick Chabal's book, AFRICA WORKS, to anyone who wants to understand the logic of this system of rule.

Other characteristics of states where democratic consolidation has stalled:

- Governments are not responsive to their citizens – there is little accountability or openness to the people.
- Campaigns and parties are not formed around issues – e.g., how to spend development funds, foreign policy, etc -- but are based on personalities and personal ties to those leaders. (Regions they come from, religious affiliations, tribal linkages... not issues, are important.)
- Parliaments are relatively weak and unable to initiate or reject legislation coming from the president; *(MPs are used, manipulated, even outright bought, to pursue special (party) interests and agendas – third terms; e.g., K100,000 for third term vote).*
- Political parties answer upward (to bosses) not to constituents: i.e. MPs are selected by party leaders, not by people they represent. Many parties never have party conferences and leaders and candidates are imposed on constituents.
- Generally the private media is weak (or owned by politicians/their families) though it may appear ‘vibrant’ to outsiders. Such media do not demand openness or accountability of government. They do not serve as ‘watchdogs’.
- Public media are still (after transition) captured by state/ruling party, so again, they make no demands on leadership but serve as spokesmen/propagandists.
- Human rights abuse is common (arrests without warrants, beatings, discrimination) and the rule of law (accessing justice or protection) is weak (this impacts on investment too – where can’t get contracts without bribes, or justice through the courts).
- Judicial independence under threat (and courts under-resourced, judges fired or their pensions threatened).
- Elections are rigged with help of Electoral Commissions appointed by presidents or loyal parliaments.
- Watchdog & accountability organisations are under-resourced or (staff) threatened, e.g. HR commissions, anti-corruption bureaux, ombudsman’s offices – no money blamed on poverty, so donors fund them, but still hampered in some way – e.g., no prosecutions without Attorney General’s permission, which never given (he is appointed by president).
- Police service and/or army captured (via appointments); spy organisations created for political purposes (housed in President’s office).
- Unemployed youth used to enforce the party’s will (especially used against opposition parties and leaders).

- Primary services are not provided, e.g., health care, education, agricultural assistance, etc... These not prioritized (thus donors fund them)...which legitimizes the regime!
- Corruption is rife – often as funds are diverted by president’s network to pay off supporters, rig elections, run ruling party, etc. (donors focus on corruption, as it’s their funds that are misused)
- Civil society is voiceless and its institutions (organisations) are weak, non-demanding. This lack of voice, inability to hold government accountable, is also related to lack of education, poor communications, gender discrimination, poverty and inequality, outright repression and threats.

Answering the important WHY question “Why certain countries’ political transitions have slowed, or reversed” keeps me busy.

In general, the answer is (in part) because:

- These informal systems of rule are robust –
 1. they still work for everyone, to some extent, and
 2. serve a purpose even for the poor
 3. when no other system of accessing resources (e.g., buying health care, getting kids into schools, getting a road built, etc ‘develop’ project) exists, use network connections to get these services/help...
 4. as the state services don’t function (e.g. free medicines) and people have no way to get funds to buy services -- a tight & vicious circle
- Informal system of government – these shadow states, these patronage networks become stronger if funds (such as aid funds or oil wealth) are pumped into them.
- Also their legitimacy is enhanced when they do deliver on promises, e.g., donors provide clinics, roads, food, etc.

Let’s continue to second point

National economic development is dependent on ‘getting the politics right’

You will see from what I said above, it is hard to discuss the failure of democratic consolidation without mentioning the lack of development in a country.

These two go hand-in-hand

The 'political will to reform' is, to my mind, the most important determinant of democratic and economic reform.

[THIS SECTION 2 WAS TRUNCATED DURING DELIVERY DUE TO LACK OF TIME]

Let me explain:

- There are thousands of good development reports, plans, programmes and pieces of advice sitting on the shelves of ministries throughout the third world
- Us consultants, we donors, write these documents and after a month or two in a country, we leave, assuming that the recommendations are so sensible they will be implemented... if there is money and local capacity to do so.
- Sometimes money has been an issue, but it is rarely the reason why good plans aren't followed up.

In my experience, the reason is because there is no 'will' to turn these plans into programmes and then implement them.

- As I said earlier, sometimes there are real reasons not to implement them, for they stand in opposition to the vested interests of leaders or members of government, who then hinder the implementation of good policies. (e.g., accounting systems, civil service reform – ghost workers, police reform, media reform, electoral reform...)
- Sometimes good plans are not pursued because some other political agenda knocks them off the list of priorities.

[THIS EXAMPLE NOT GIVEN DUE TO LACK OF TIME] Let me give you an example.

- In Malawi at the moment, there are some 5 million people receiving food aid.
- This is, in part, because the rains failed in some areas of the country after the new year 2005 and crops were poor.
- But this famine, and long term, persistent hunger, is the result of environmental and population problems that need strong leadership, which has been lacking for at least a decade.

- Also, food is a highly politicised issue. So is the subsidization of fertiliser, which impacts crop size.
- Also appointments to the cabinet, including the minister of agriculture, have been made to repay political loyalty, not to build a pro-development cabinet or to get agriculture policy sorted out.
- So, while Malawi has good environmental, agricultural and food-security policies and plenty of plans about irrigation, farm inputs, seeds and fertilizer, sustainable farming, etc sitting on its shelves – they are not implemented.

The ‘political will’ to develop agriculture or to implement food security policies was not prioritized.

In Malawi, the ‘developmental state’ does not exist.

A developmental state, as an ‘ideal type’ is one with certain characteristics, such as

- A sound civil service that is able to design and implement programmes without political interference
- A capacity to absorb and use new ideas
- Tolerance, meritocracy, social mobility, and high-levels of education are valued and promoted.
- A pro-development policy is created, prioritized and consistently pursued.

Development is unlikely to happen where the state has not prioritized it. For instance, a state which is motivated by private self-interests rather than national well-being is unlikely to appoint a civil service according to merit. Instead its members and their work will reflect the interests of the informal political network in power.

And there is no real incessant demand for services, rights, development etc. because the masses are relatively powerless and voiceless.

Summarize: States that haven’t the political will to reform, are not going to change.

Therefore, you will hear aid workers talk about local ‘ownership’ of reforms.

Finally, the role of outsiders:

The role of outsiders in promoting change is limited, especially in comparison with domestic political forces and interests.

- We must accept that we, as outsiders – donors, aid workers, policy makers – can have little impact. Conditionality is effective only in very limited situations.
- Aid will not achieve miracles... even if we double it (e.g., Make Poverty History)... without the receiving countries ‘getting their politics right’ and demonstrating ‘the political will to reform’.
- In fact, as noted earlier, aid can help entrench autocratic regimes and give them legitimacy.
- **As aid workers and donors there are some things we can do right, though:**
- Here is my list:
 1. understand the political context of a country, the informal as well as the formal institutions. How are decisions made, in whose interests? Keep track of networks, who is in them, what they want, how they change, who is making decisions.
 2. support process that promote change – e.g., think political when giving aid ... e.g.,
 - Aid to tertiary education (not just primary school) and other projects that explicitly help people learn to coordinate and organise opposition to vested interests.
 - Forms of aid that helps the masses transform into the type of civil society that is associated with democracy – demanding services, demanding reforms, demanding openness, demanding accountability and demanding their human rights.
 - support processes that promote government accountability to the people (NOT DONORS) – e.g. an independent private media, civil society organisations that monitor government spending, etc. As my colleague Paolo de Renzio said, there is ‘a need to do more work on domestic accountability mechanisms, to make [aid] conditionalities redundant’.
 - Support programmes that aim to reduce or end government control of the public media and of information flows.

- Look for ways to help the public understand where power resides and how it's being used... i.e., these informal power systems and structures and how they undermine development and democracy.
- Support initiatives that promote 'transitional justice' or at least, 'history projects'.
- Help people understand why change is not happening, how the old systems worked.
- Help people and civil activists look backwards, because still, after the transitions, many old systems, processes, laws, structures of repression, as well as (pre-transitional) leaders & networks remain in power.
- Help them understand why these systems are so robust and hard to change.
- In Africa, involve the African Union – build up regional systems, incl. Nepad peer review.... Because Africans must become accountable to Africans. (e.g., Zimbabwe and AU Human & people's rights Commission).

To conclude: when designing programmes, 'think politically'.

Thank you.