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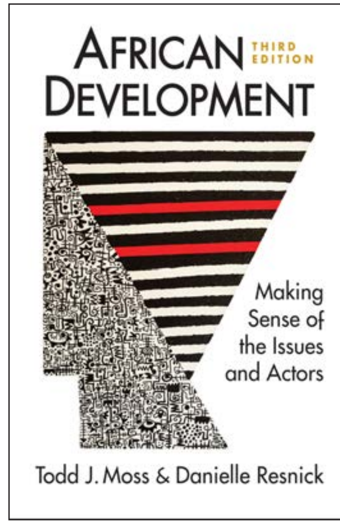
African Development: Making Sense of the Issues and Actors

THIRD EDITION



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ISBN: 978-1-62637-724-0 pb

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The Complexities of African Development

After more than half a century of independence in much of the region, the trajectories of many African countries remain more complex and uncertain than anticipated. An exuberant start to the 2000s led many Afro-optimists to laud the expansion of a middle class, a youth dividend, robust economic growth, falling poverty levels, and the acceptance of democracy as the preferred regime type. Moreover, the opportunities offered to the region are fundamentally better than even at the start of the new millennium. Investors, who previously tended to ignore Africa, thinking of it as a marginal backwater, are now scouring for ways to capitalize on new markets. Most African nations, once dependent on Western governments for cash, have a growing range of financing options from private markets in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Yet many of these positive trends are coupled with disappointing setbacks. The unexpected coup d'état in democratic Mali in 2012 heralded the onset of a new period of instability across the Sahel. While there have been successful uprisings against unpopular dictatorships in Burkina Faso and the Gambia, similar movements in Burundi and Cameroon have been met with harsh repression. Democratic backsliding in Tanzania and Zambia under new presidents raises concerns about creeping authoritarianism. At the same time, Africa continues to mostly export the same old commodities, and it remains vulnerable to the vagaries of a whirlwind global economy. The illusory comforts of formal economic growth figures are hardly better than a generation ago,

So, what explains these divergent paths and why has progress been more elusive than the optimists may have originally suggested? Rather than being contradictory, these patterns merely reflect the complexity of a continent that defies simple characterization as either Nirvana or Hades—and a development process that is never linear, always messy, and usually unclear. Acceptance of uncertainty is simply a requisite for studying and working on development in a region encompassing forty-nine countries, more than 3,000 ethnic groups, at least six different colonial legacies, more than a dozen agro-ecological and climatic zones, and natural resources ranging from diamonds and gold to bauxite and cobalt.

In fact, it is precisely because of the continent's tremendous diversity that Afro-optimists and Afro-pessimists can equally rally supporters to their point of view. This diversity and the complexities for development that it engenders are a key theme of this book. Although the portrayal of Africa as a monolith is slowly (and rightly) dying, there is still a tendency to accept that whole swaths of Africa are more or less the same. This book discusses big trends that span the region, but the real story of Africa is one of accelerating variation among countries and even between parts of different countries. Namibia and Angola are neighbors but could hardly be more dissimilar. Nigeria is the home to both the megacity of Lagos and the sleepy state of Sokoto.

On another level, Africa is a place that seems at ease living simultaneously in different worlds. Anyone who has lived or worked in Africa quickly realizes that bridging—the urban and the rural, the traditional and the modern, foreign customs and African ways—is not so much a strenuous tension as simply the norm. The middle-class family living in the suburbs of Nairobi also keeps a home in the rural Rift Valley. The businesswoman who negotiates with Chinese investors, does all her banking on a cell phone, and goes to church every Sunday may also speak with her ancestors through a traditional healer and pay homage to illiterate village elders. These different lives are not contradictions but rather an acceptance of irreconcilability.

The wild swings in views of Africa's direction and fate also reflect real and dramatic changes. For most of the past six decades, the continent has been on a roller coaster of outsized expectations and terrible disappointments. The early, heady years—starting with independence for Sudan in 1956 and Ghana in 1957, and the collapse of the French African empire in 1960—were a time of great hopes. It was widely believed that the continent would use its newly found political freedom to take off as an economic power. The ensuing experiments with forced industrialization were a disaster, and the political gains were, almost everywhere, replaced with repression, this time not by outsiders but by Africa's own political elites. The euphoria of independence gave way to despair. Africa's leaders appeared to be stealing, eating, and wasting its future. At various points over the proceeding half century, things started to look upbeat, often quickly followed by a return of anguish. However, the bigger picture is of one country after another slowly, erratically opening up, changing course, passing the baton to the next generation.

Progress has been uneven and halting. At the turn of the twenty-first century, few countries looked back with much to celebrate. Many had become even poorer.

All along Africa's postcolonial journey, a key player has been the international "development industry," the army of outsiders coming to "help." By no coincidence, just as independence was dawning, new agencies started to form—a new wing of the World Bank for poor countries in 1960, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1961, and a British colonial department becoming an overseas aid agency in 1962. These agencies—abetted by growing legions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, advocacy groups, and more—emerged to support the continent in its quest to end the blight of poverty and deprivation and assist African countries in taking their rightful place among the community of nations.

Depending on your perspective, the international development community has enabled Africa's disappointments, merely mitigated the worst effects of its crises, or really helped to put the continent back on the road to recovery. Without a doubt, some international development efforts have saved lives. Just as doubtless, other efforts have created more problems than they have solved.

But one thing is beyond dispute: development is big business and a growth industry. The current development community has access to many more data sources, tools, ideas, and energies than ever before. And attention remains focused on Africa, particularly because of both its opportunities and its bewildering array of challenges. Nowhere on the planet is the concentration of poverty greater, or are the problems so complex. This is why so much of the development community is focused on Africa—and where its efforts are going to be judged in the future. Yet the model for the development business—the world of donor and recipient, of the Western rich bequeathing alms to the African poor—is dying. Changes in the global economy, the rise of new economic powers such as India and China, the diffusion of decisionmaking, and financial strain in the West all mean that the traditional donors no longer have a monopoly on resources and ideas. Africa too is transforming; a new generation of business and political leaders are asserting themselves like never before, seizing upon these new opportunities. It is undoubtedly an exhilarating time to be entering the field of African development.

Purpose of This Book

Responding to the growing interest in Africa, more and more students are taking courses on the economics or politics of Africa, development studies, public health, and the business of emerging markets. This book aims for a simple, but hopefully not simplistic, introduction to the main themes, trends, and players in contemporary African development. It is intended for readers approaching these issues for the first time, budding activists, and new practitioners getting started in their careers. By no means is this book intended as a survey of the academic literature, a primer on economic development theory, or a how-to guide. (Indeed, by the end, we hope you will be highly suspicious of anyone promising a magic formula.) Instead, it is supposed to give the reader some basic facts, information, and words of caution before they approach development for study or work.

Working in this field is extremely rewarding, but the Hippocratic oath applies: first, do no harm. When teaching at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, we have found that a constructive way to start a course is to hold a no-question-is-too-dumb session where students could ask fundamental background questions, such as "What is really the difference between the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund?"; "Why are Africans still so poor if they get so much aid?"; or "What does the World Trade Organization actually do?" Given the cross-cutting, multidisciplinary nature of development, there are also usually great differences in baseline knowledge: some students might know about HIV/AIDS but not about trade, or they might have heard a lot about debt relief but not much on new ways that countries borrow money. This book brings that introductory session to a wider audience to discuss broad trends in a frank and accessible way, to encourage the reader to think critically about the complicated issues at hand, and to help students ask informed questions about Africa's development challenges. It offers no answers.

What Is Development?

There is no real agreement on what exactly "development" means. The narrowest economic definition is to make poor people less poor by raising their incomes. For individuals, this entails helping them to find greater opportunities to be more productive so that they can live better and longer lives. For an economy as a whole, this involves generating economic growth to raise incomes, reduce the number of people living below a defined poverty line, and expand the ranks of the middle class.

A focus on income measures and on economic growth rates has been criticized as too confined, so some have preferred to define development more broadly using welfare or quality-of-life measures, such as indicators of health (infant mortality, access to doctors, clean water) or education (average years of schooling, literacy rates). The United Nations (UN), for example, combines these into its annual Human Development Index, which includes income, school enrollment, literacy, and life expectancy to rank all the world's countries. The UN also has a new "multidimensional poverty index" that uses ten indicators (see Chapter 10). An even more expansive view that largely originates in the work of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen considers the mark of economic development and social progress to be the freedom of people to participate in and make choices about their own future. More recently, both academics and African governments have emphasized the concept of "economic transformation," whereby development includes the creation of high-productivity jobs that provide decent wages.

Different definitions of development are far from mutually exclusive, however. Although this book uses a mostly orthodox economic perspective—promoting development on the African continent is about increasing economic growth rates—it treats income as a means to a better life rather than an end in itself. This approach assumes some universal goals: more income is better than less, living longer is preferable to early death, and education is superior to ignorance. At its broadest, the development question asked here is "How can the standards of living be improved in Africa?" At the same time, it must also be recognized that such questions are not merely technical. Development is ultimately not about bricks and budgets but about social change.

Digging Holes vs. Capital Flows

One divide worth mentioning up front is, as was once caricatured by a colleague, the "digging holes vs. capital flows" notions of development. The former perspective thinks about development as organizing a series of activities such as digging wells, building schools, or teaching children how to read and grow new crops. For a "hole digger," development is about delivering more services, executing projects, managing logistics, and imparting knowledge. The "capital flows" viewpoint is that promoting development is about creating an enabling environment so that people do such things naturally. This view of the world thus scrutinizes policies, incentives, available resources, and institutions and how they interact with the global economy. By this perspective, promoting development is not so much what you do for other people as it is what you help to leave behind. The right metric for this view of development might not be "How many kids did you vaccinate yesterday?" but rather "What kind of vaccination system would be there if you left tomorrow?"

Whichever outlook one chooses—and there are pros and cons to each—the international community's role in promoting development is always going to be secondary to efforts by Africans themselves. And where external players are active, their role encompasses much more than simply aid. This book treats the international aid system as central, but only in the context of the evolving ideas about policy, political organization at the national and international levels, and global economic issues such as trade and investment.

What Is Africa?

This book is about contemporary Africa. It focuses primarily on the postcolonial period of roughly the past six decades with an emphasis on issues and debates most prominent in the early years of the twenty-first century. "Africa" is sometimes used to refer to all the countries on the mainland continent plus the six island nations of Cape Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Seychelles. In much of the literature, however—including this book—the terms "Africa" and "the continent" are instead used synonymously with what more accurately is called sub-Saharan Africa to mean the forty-nine African countries, excluding Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. Such a distinction is surely arguable, but in the development world the countries of North Africa are typically placed in the Middle East (for example, by the World Bank) because they are in many ways more a part of the cultural and political life of that region. (Confusingly, Sudan and even Djibouti and Mauritania are sometimes also considered North African.)

African Diversity

Every book on Africa opens with a caveat about its great diversity (see Table 1.1). This stance is predictable but also exists for good reason: the continent is a varied amalgamation of countries, societies, and peoples that makes generalization difficult. Many of Africa's cities are crowded, bustling hives of activity with high-rise buildings, the latest technology, and many of the same stresses and strains of modern life elsewhere on the planet. At the same time, vast stretches of the continent are sleepy, underdeveloped places that seem not to have changed for millennia.

Africa's political diversity is just as stark. Botswana and Senegal have been mostly stable democracies since independence, but Equatorial Guinea and Gabon have been perpetual dictatorships. Ghana and Nigeria have gone from military rule to open and fairly free societies, while Zimbabwe has plunged in the opposite direction. Malawi and Zambia have no modern experience with war, but the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have seen almost no peace over the past two decades. Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda have all managed to recently increase growth and reduce poverty rates, but Guinea, Niger, and Burundi have seen disappointing growth and rising poverty (see Figure 1.1).

Indeed, the most glaring trend is the rapid divergence among African countries facing opposing economic and political trajectories. A number

Table 1.1 Snapshot of Sub-Saharan Africa

Number of countries	49
Total population	1.03 billion
Life expectancy	59.9 years
Infant mortality rate	56 deaths per 1,000 live births
Literacy	52% of adult women, 69% of adult men
Urban population	38.3% of total
Median age	18.3 years
GDP	$1.5 trillion
Average GNI per capita	$1,505

Sources: World Bank, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), and UNESCO.

Notes: Most data are for 2016, except median age, life expectancy, and infant mortality, which are for 2015. Literacy data span 2005–2013.

of countries—Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Botswana, Benin, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Senegal, and South Africa, to name a few—seem to be gaining strength and national confidence and appear poised to join the global economy as full participants. But others—Eritrea, Chad, Malawi, the Central African Republic, Niger, Mauritania, Togo, and Congo-Brazzaville all come to mind—may find themselves falling further behind without drastic changes.

While Africa's diversity is indisputable, much of the continent nevertheless shares related problems and has faced similar misfortunes. (The challenge of a book on all of Africa is to try to get this balance right.) Nearly all of Africa's nations are fairly young, just a few generations since independence, and are still going through what might be called the early growing pains of nation building. Several have their very first president (or his son) still in power. After widespread establishment of one-party states, a wave of political openness swept across the continent in the 1990s, leaving few countries untouched (if many far from fundamentally changed). The attempt—and failure—of state control of the economy has also been a nearly universal post-independence experience. Almost all African countries have since undergone some attempts to free up the economy and reorient the government's activities over the past three decades. Yes, the details and results of these political and economic trends have varied tremendously, but the paths taken have mostly been roughly in the same direction. Africa may indeed be extremely diverse, but some essential and discernible trends dominate the story of contemporary Africa.

How Little We Know

Despite the vast changes that Africa has undergone, often with the involvement of outsiders, a striking conclusion is actually how little is

Figure 1.1 Map of Sub-Saharan Africa

really understood about the development process. Although the current consensus about the right way to proceed may seem fairly reasonable, so too did all the other previous strategies at the time of their popularity. Forcing poor people at gunpoint to live in collective villages (as happened during the *ujamaa* or "unity" policy in Tanzania) is unthinkable today but was once thought a practical way to promote development. The international donors in particular are prone to a continuously evolving mea culpa with hubris, what might be called the "yes, but now we have it right" syndrome.

A recurring theme in the progression of development thinking is that past strategies had mistakenly overlooked some crucial aspect but that the missing link has now been identified and so everything can be fixed this time around. Africa was initially thought to just lack infrastructure and capital. When providing those things did not work, investing in basic education and health was added. When that strategy also failed to generate growth, it was thought that bad policies must be the problem. After some policies were corrected (but many were not) and the results were still disappointing, the next answer was governance and institutions—essentially where we are today. Yet in at least three decisive areas the development "experts" admittedly still have little clue:

- *The growth process.* Economists simply cannot say what exactly causes growth and thus are unable to come up with clear remedies to generate faster growth. There are lots of ideas and many hints, but no unambiguous answers that apply universally. This ambiguity is even more pronounced now that a broad segment of the development community argues that growth needs to be "sustainable," not just from an economic standpoint but from an environmental and societal one as well.
- *Institutional change.* A lot of talk takes place about "institutions" and "capacity," but actually very little agreement exists on what these terms exactly mean, much less on how to change or build such things.
- *The politics of development.* Development economists have belatedly recognized that local politics are the reason that the paths chosen so frequently appear illogical and self-destructive. Yet much of the real politics in any country happen beneath the surface, out of view and poorly grasped by external donors or analysts. But acknowledging that politics matter is not the same as understanding the incentives and disincentives to promote development or finding ways to alter those dynamics.

Given these sizable holes in confidence, humility seems appropriate. The continent has in many ways been a laboratory of both good and bad ideas, perhaps the unavoidable outcome of its political and economic weakness. But the generally sorry record of African development so far suggests that any ideas and fads pronouncing to have found the magic bullet to resolve an inherently complex problem, such as quickly eradicating poverty in a scantily understood foreign land, should be viewed with extreme skepticism.

What We Do Know

The case for modesty does not mean that we have learned nothing about development. In fact, a massive endeavor to extract lessons from different development experiences continues, with thousands of economists, sociologists, anthropologists, public health specialists, and other assorted experts dedicated full-time to flying around the world, collecting data, interviewing people, monitoring, evaluating, consulting, and in every possible way thinking about how to make Africa less poor. The World Bank alone has more than 10,000 staff (a large portion of whom work on Africa), while the major donor agencies each employ thousands more; plus there are swarms of contractors, university researchers, and NGO workers. Even if no clear solution is available for poverty and the puzzle of slow economic growth, some unmistakable lessons are evident, especially about necessary prerequisites and things not to do. A few of the least-controversial examples of these lessons include:

- Peace and security are preconditions for development.
- High inflation is bad for the poor and for economic growth.
- Vaccinations are an effective way to save lives.
- Governments are very inefficient at doing some things, such as running factories and farms.
- States must do some things, such as protect property and deliver basic services.
- Transparency is preferable to secrecy, especially for public budgets and government contracting.

Misconceptions and Misinformation

While there is still much uncertainty and debate about development ideas, there is perhaps just as much misinformation about what international agencies actually do in the development arena. Street protestors have found the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) easy targets, painting them as puppets of a global conspiracy to keep developing countries poor and in their place. These institutions do have major faults, and numerous reasons exist to critique them and what they do. But much of the criticism heard on the streets and on the Internet (and, sadly, in many classrooms) is simply wrong. The World Bank may be a behemoth and is occasionally bumbling, but it rarely “imposes” anything on any unwilling government. (In fact, in Chapter 7 we argue that the governments usually have power over the Bank.) Similarly, the IMF can be inexplicably narrow-minded in its mission and often heavy-handed, but it does not, as is frequently claimed, set limits on health spending in

Regime vs. State

One of the looming debates in African development is the role of political regime versus state capacity. Are democracies more likely to invest in the welfare of their citizens than autocratic regimes? Or are strong states with capable bureaucracies more likely to facilitate economic growth, regardless of political regime? Supporters of the latter approach point to the successes of the East Asian Tiger economies and emphasize how strong, developmental states that do not need to worry about popular opinion can push ahead with essential growth-enhancing reforms that may involve creating some economic "losers" in the process. Ethiopia, Rwanda, and to a lesser extent Uganda have been identified as developmental states that forge ahead with sometimes controversial growth strategies without needing to seriously worry about electoral consequences. And their growth rates in recent years have been impressive. However, pro-democracy advocates point to countries like Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, and even Senegal to highlight that economic development and democracy need not be irreconcilable. These issues will be revisited in some depth in Chapters 6 and 7.

poor countries. On the flip side, the saintly reputation in some circles of nongovernmental organizations is often undeserved. Some NGOs loudly demand to be heard and claim to speak for "the people" but are themselves accountable to no one.

Behind much of the debate about development and the appropriate role of the state, international organizations, NGOs, corporations, and other players often lie deep ideological convictions, especially over whether market capitalism is a force for good or evil. Despite what is commonly asserted, there is no secret nefarious plot against the poor being hatched in a smoke-filled room in the basement of the World Bank. The methods and results of the international agencies may not always be pretty or successful, but their intentions are indeed to build a better world.

Micro or Macro?

As a response to many failed interventions by the donor community, development economists began applying methods commonly used in the hard sciences. In particular, randomized control trials (RCTs) have become incredibly popular over the past decade, with a number of development agencies adopting them as a primary tool of their evaluation departments. Borrowing methods from the pharmaceutical industry used to evaluate drug effectiveness, RCTs are like scientific experiments, carefully designed by randomly selecting treatment and control groups, which allows for precise measurements of the impact of any particular program, such as anti-malarial bednets, new seed varieties, or exposure to an anticorruption campaign. Then, analysts compare the treatment and control groups to determine the intervention's effectiveness on a host of relevant outcomes. On the one hand, the method provides a very convincing way of determining whether one action is truly responsible for an outcome. This can be very useful in helping policymakers select programs for different objectives. On the other hand, such studies can be very micro-oriented, typically focused on a small area of a particular country (western Kenya seems to be a particularly popular choice for RCTs), and thereby not always very relevant beyond the specific site of the study. (Cash transfers to women may improve female empowerment in rural Senegal but not in southern Mozambique.) Consequently, they rarely generate broad knowledge about how the development process works. RCTs, by their nature, usually ignore the role of the macroeconomy, the political system, or cultural context in shaping outcomes. More important, lots of critical things, like protecting human rights or promoting democracy, are nearly impossible to randomize. Thus, the RCT revolution has taught us that, as with most things, an acceptance of multiple approaches is needed to gain an understanding of the complexities of development.

The Various "Languages" of Development

The discourse on development also operates in different circles using different—and often unintelligible—languages. The advocacy community is typically looking for simple emotional messages and short-term answers as part of its efforts to boost public awareness, lobby politicians, and (of course) raise money. An example is the frequent calls to "double aid to halve poverty," a catchy phrase that helped to boost aid budgets but inconveniently turns out to be incorrect. Academics think largely about long-term theoretical relationships and statistical models that can find associations, for instance between the prevalence of conflict and an economy's growth rate. Aid workers, researchers, and policymakers working in the development business are a third set. This crowd is often process-obsessed and driven by internal bureaucratic dynamics, such as trying to figure out which kinds of loans are best used under which kind of circumstances. But the development business is also infused with cynics who have been working in the field for a long time and have been chastened by past experiences. All three groups talk about similar things (like the efficiency of aid, the importance of politics, and the need to do better in the future), but they all use completely different words and often have their own indecipherable lingos. Here is one hypothetical example, with all talking about basically the same thing:

Advocate: "The donors must cooperate better if we are going to lift more people out of poverty."

Academic: "The real per capita GNI growth rate and the log of ODA/GDP (lagged t-2) are robustly and positively correlated once the indices of donor proliferation and aid fragmentation developed by Acharya, de Lima, and Moore (2006) are added as independent variables."

Practitioner: "Donor coordination is being implemented in the context of the international consensus reached at Monterrey on the actions needed to promote a global partnership for development and accelerate progress toward the MDGs through the OECD's High Level Forum on Joint Progress Toward Enhanced Aid Effectiveness (Harmonization, Alignment, and Results) with monitoring by the Joint Venture on Monitoring the Paris Declaration."

Ten Tips for Sensibly Studying African Development

With all these caveats in mind, here are some tips to avoid disillusionment and despair as you plunge into the dilemmas of African development:

1. *No silver bullets.* Development is about the complex and usually messy evolution of societies and economies. Single solutions are tempting —more aid, more democracy, eradicate corruption, get prices right, deliver more bednets—but inevitably leave the true believers disheartened. Africa is the graveyard of panaceas; be wary of those peddling the latest one.

2. *Don't believe the (good and bad) hype.* Africa is the object of wild swings of extreme optimism and pessimism. Those seeking attention or raising money invariably invoke emotional appeals to crisis, usually with pictures of adorable yet sad children ("flies on the eyes" is an immediate red flag). While the continent has its share of real crises and people in need, the imperative of fundraising by some groups encourages continual publicity of "emergencies." At the same time, beware the salesmen for Africa who are blindly optimistic, claiming all is now well and dismissing any problems as mere media misrepresentation.

3. *Resist the temptation to exoticize.* Perhaps it is the accumulation of wildlife documentaries or news reports of famine and war, but many Westerners seem to think of Africa as if it were another planet. Todd's first visit to Africa (to Zimbabwe's capital Harare in 1990) was a shock not because it was so strange but rather because it seemed so normal. Yes, the people were poorer than in the United States, but the lives of Zimbabweans mostly revolved around issues similar to those back home: family, jobs, schools, going to the doctor, traffic, the cost of gasoline, and

the local sports teams. For many Africans, daily life is indeed a tenuous struggle. But Africa is just a place like any other on the planet.

4. *It's always political.* As much as outside donors and activists sometimes like to think of development as a technical exercise about delivering better seeds or fixing a mechanical problem, it is always a deeply intrusive and political act to get involved in another country's development trajectory. Indeed, changing the way government works intimately affects the distribution of power within a country. Even the most seemingly benign interventions, such as child nutrition programs, have implications for the allocation of influence and resources within a village or a family. Until recently, donors have remained shy about acknowledging this and have focused more on technical governance rather than on politics.

The World Bank, for instance, liked to use apolitical terms such as "transparency" and "accountability." Increasingly though, this recognition is gradually changing, and at least twenty-seven donors have political economy diagnostic frameworks to guide their investments in certain sectors.

5. *Development is far more than money.* Excessive attention is paid to how much money is spent, as if that were a good measure of development effort. Economist Bill Easterly once said that judging success by the size of aid flows is like reviewing films based on their budgets. It is of course true that money is required to build schools or pay civil servants. But development is often not at all about money. There is little relationship, for example, between spending on healthcare and actual health outcomes. In fact, money may frequently be secondary to bigger issues such as markets, opportunities, and incentives. If there is little reason for children to attend school (maybe because they are needed on the family farm or there are no jobs after graduation) and teacher expectations are low (perhaps their wages are paid six months late and there is no oversight, so they never bother to show up), then all the money in the world will not create a functional education system.

6. *Beware the "facts."* Development is absolutely rife with myths that get repeated often enough that they eventually are accepted as facts. One example is the urban legend that Tanzania writes 2,400 reports for donors every year. This has been cited regularly and even by the president of the World Bank once in a speech calling for less red tape. But the source of this fact is a hypothetical story from a 1996 book on aid that suggested if a country had to write quarterly reports for every project and had 600 different donor projects (a not unusual figure), then it would result in 2,400 reports. Although Tanzania undoubtedly prepares many reports for its many donors, there is no evidence whatsoever that 2,400

is the right figure. There are similar stories, such as a "fact" peddled by some campaigners that debt "kills 19,000 children per day," a figure arrived at through a convoluted series of errors and dubious assumptions.

7. *Beware the numbers.* Much of the development agenda is driven by quantitative analysis as part of the push to make the process more rigorous and "scientific." While this may be well-intentioned, the problem for Africa is that the data are almost always unreliable. Even basic information such as gross domestic product (GDP), exports, the number of children in school, or how much a country spends on hospitals is often little more than an educated guess. Sometimes formal surveys are done through a census or by an external agency, but these are fairly infrequent, and people have lots of reasons for not telling a surveyor the truth when one shows up at the door demanding all kinds of personal information. In Nigeria, no one even knows the real population. Cultural sensitivities in some parts of the country prevent an accurate count, while politicians often try to inflate the numbers since population affects the distribution of oil income to each of the country's thirty-six states.

Most of the time, models are used to make estimations, but usually with very large margins of error, making comparison, especially across countries or where differences are small, extremely difficult to do with much confidence. In Nigeria, a recent exercise found that GDP was actually 71 percent larger than everyone thought. Given the data problems, should we interpret that one country is really twice as well-off as another because its GDP figures are slightly larger? If a country's reported primary school enrollment rate jumps from 40 percent to 43 percent the next year, should we really believe that more children are in school? (Keep in mind that many budgets are based on showing "results," so there are plenty of incentives to fiddle.) Next time you read about changes in access to clean water in Niger, you should consider how that number was determined.

8. *Keep perspective on Africa's size.* Africa may loom large in certain development circles, but it is still a tiny player on the global stage. Eighteen African countries each have a total population of less than 5 million people, about the size of metropolitan Washington, D.C. Botswana features prominently in the development literature (including in this book), but it is a small country of mostly desert and swamps with barely 2 million people. African economies are even more minuscule relative to the global marketplace. Nigeria is the continent's largest economy, but it is about the same size as the US state of Michigan. South Africa may be thought of as a regional giant, but its economy is about the same size as Missouri's. The county in which we the authors live (Montgomery County, Maryland, next to Washington, D.C., with a

population of around 1 million) has a larger GDP than forty-five different African countries (only Nigeria, South Africa, Angola, and Sudan are bigger). The other forty-five economies *combined* are about the same size as metropolitan Chicago. Kenya's GDP is about the same size as Birmingham, Alabama; Ghana's is half the size of Richmond, Virginia; Zambia's is one-fifth the size of Milwaukee. These comparisons are worth recalling the next time you hear that a multinational corporation just cannot wait to pry open some untapped African market.

9. *Go deep*. Cross-country comparisons and understanding regional trends can be useful, but one must complement this approach with some in-depth country cases. Learning about the history and cultures of a country can help give context to current development efforts and different development priorities. For example, Danielle has spent at least a decade researching the informal economy in Zambian cities and the livelihoods of the urban poor. This provides unique perspective on how urbanization dynamics and their consequences may vary in Zambia compared with other countries on the continent. When choosing which countries to focus on, consider some that are understudied. There are more than 12,000 books in print about South Africa and nearly 1,000 on Ghana, but very few on Burundi, Lesotho, or Sierra Leone. Why not try Burkina Faso or Mali?

10. *Go!* Reading and learning about Africa are fine, but nothing beats going there in person. If you have the opportunity, travel around as much as possible, talk to people, see how they live, and you will probably find that much of what you expect is dead wrong. And you can trust your own eyes. On a trip to Tanzania, Todd had been reading reports on the plane about robust economic growth, but when he visited the main port in the capital, Dar es Salaam, he noticed almost no activity. Nothing was being loaded or unloaded, even though it was a Tuesday afternoon at the only port for a huge swath of the hinterland. To him, this was a hint that Tanzania's economic success story was probably less widespread than advertised. But more important than checking out the facts, going to Africa is an enriching and often inspirational experience. You may even catch the "Africa bug," a compulsive attraction to the continent that infects many of its visitors and keeps them coming back. This is certainly what happened to us.

Structure of the Book

The book is organized into three main parts—looking at the historical and political context, a set of core development questions, and finally at regional and international linkages. In each chapter, the intention is to provide some basic background information, analysis of the trends, and an explanation of the contemporary issues, actors, and institutions that

Whose Numbers Count?

While the poor status of Africa's data has been well known, economic historian Morten Jerven highlighted the scale of the problem in his book *Poor Numbers* (2013). He delves into some of the reasons for the problem based on primary fieldwork, including underfunded and understaffed statistical agencies that are often bypassed by donor organizations who collect their own data. Investing in statistical training and infrastructure is a growing area of focus now by organizations such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank, the latter of which now assesses and ranks countries' progress on improving their statistical capacity.

students may encounter as they delve deeper into the subject. We have intentionally avoided using footnotes to keep the text as readable as possible. At the end of each chapter are some suggested readings to learn more about the topics covered, but the recommendations are far from exhaustive. Full citations are listed in the bibliography.

Part 1 provides context for Africa's development, starting with its history and the effects of colonialism in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 examines the nature of political authority and gives background on some of the most influential leaders, including ten "Big Men" who shaped the region's history and ten who continue to influence contemporary events. Political trends, including the unsteady rise of democracy in recent years, are the focus of Chapter 4. Violent conflict is dealt with in Chapter 5, including a brief description of some of Africa's recent conflicts, plus some ideas on the causes and effects of civil wars, as well as efforts to prevent and end conflict.

In Part 2, Chapters 6 through 11 cover some of the most central development issues, beginning with the puzzle of Africa's economic growth and poverty trends. Chapter 7 follows with a look at the politics behind economic reform, including why some of the problems identified in Chapter 6 appear so resilient. Chapter 8 outlines the major ideas, institutions, and current controversies in the aid industry. The persistence of debt as a concern in Africa, despite decades of debt relief, is the subject of Chapter 9. Chapter 10 focuses on health and broader, noneconomic measures of development. Chapter 11 explores some of Africa's most pressing demographic challenges, including rapid urbanization and the youth bulge, and the implications of these trends for inequality.

Part 3 looks at Africa's regional connections and its relationship with the rest of the world. The African Union and the plethora of regional institutions are laid out in Chapter 12. Chapters 13 and 14 explore the main issues and debates around the movement of goods and capital, respectively, across borders. Finally, Chapter 15 concludes with a brief summary of some of the broad themes of the book.

Emergency relief, gender, the environment, and culture are all important development-related topics that might deserve their own chapters but don't have one here. This book also only briefly touches on public health and education issues, which are often the primary focus of many students approaching Africa for the first time. This approach is deliberate; public health and schooling are admirable fields and are of course central to the development story, but the purpose of this book is partly to help students with that perspective also understand some of the political, economic, and financial issues that unavoidably intrude on a more technical approach to development.

For Further Reading

Some of the best books for understanding African development include *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999* (2001) by Nicolas van de Walle, and *Africa's Stalled Development: International Causes and Cures* by David Leonard and Scott Straus (2003). Two must-reads on development that are not Africa-specific but highly relevant are William Easterly's *The Elusive Quest for Growth* (2001) and Paul Collier's *The Bottom Billion* (2007). Two highly recommended classics are Goran Hyden's *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective* (1983) and Robert Bates's *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (1981). A terrific book that argues that global development is making headway even in places without economic growth is Charles Kenny's optimistic *Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding—And How We Can Improve the World Even More* (2011).

For an overview of the history of dominant ideas about development, see Colin Leys's *The Rise and Fall of Development Economics* (1996) and Deepak Lal's *The Poverty of Development Economics* (2000). To read Amartya Sen's ideas about development, see, among many, his *Development as Freedom* (1999). For another take on the divide between development approaches, in this case between the "finance ministry" and "civil society" tendencies, see Ravi Kanbur's "Economic Policy, Distribution, and Poverty: The Nature of Disagreements" (2001). For a highly readable history of economic thought, look no further than Robert Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times, and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* (1953). Morten Jerven's book *Poor Numbers: How We Are Misled by African Develop-*

ment Statistics and What to Do About It (2013) shows how little we know regarding how African countries compare with each other or themselves over time. For those interested in learning more about randomized control trials, a key reading is Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo's *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (2012).

The best Africanist journals are *Journal of Modern African Studies* and *African Affairs*. The leading journals for development economics that are accessible to nonspecialists include *World Development; Economic Development and Cultural Change; Development Policy Review;* and the *Journal of Development Studies*. The *Journal of Economic Perspectives* also often covers development economics in a nontechnical format, as does the *World Bank Research Observer. Finance & Development* is a free quarterly magazine from the IMF that summarizes some of the best research coming out of the international institutions.

The Economist Intelligence Unit provides regular reports on every country in Africa, plus annual country profiles. Africa Confidential is an entertaining, if not always reliable, source for the inside buzz on African politicians. There are many websites for gathering African news; some of our favorites are the Mail & Guardian, Quartz Africa, and Reuters's Africa feed. AllAfrica.com aggregates news articles from more than a hundred news organizations in Africa. (Beware the proliferation of "news" sites that are little more than propaganda for governments or vehicles for the site's owner to promote an agenda.)

The most authoritative source for economic data is the World Bank, especially its World Development Indicators. Also useful are IMF country reports, especially the statistical annexes that are produced regularly on each country, as well as the African Development Bank's (AfDB) annual *African Economic Outlook* report. A growing number of central banks and statistical agencies in Africa are also producing regular information and posting it online. The African Center for Economic Transformation in Accra publishes an annual *African Transformation Report*.

When looking for information about African development, don't discount what can be learned from novels, and there are a huge number from which to choose. Some classics are Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988); Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948); V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979); and the writings of Wole Soyinka (who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986). A few more contemporary novels worth considering are Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1993), Norman Rush's *Mating* (1991), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016).

One of the more amusing books on the World Bank's relations with Africa is Michael Holman's witty satire *Last Orders at Harrods* (2005). One of us also writes diplomatic thrillers set in Africa. If that's your thing, start with Todd Moss's *The Golden Hour* (2014), about a coup in Mali.

There are many novels about South Africa and the apartheid era, including Alan Paton's classic *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948), André Brink's *A Dry White Season* (1979), and the huge bodies of work by Nobel Prize for Literature winners J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer. A sarcastic essay on stereotypes used in writing on Africa, Binyavanga Wainaina's "How to Write About Africa" (2006), is a must-read.