Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and African Developmental States

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In the inspirational wake of the East Asian tigers, lies a renewed sense of optimism regarding the possibility of contemporary development models that promote rapid growth that is both equitable and sustainable. Even in Africa, a continent known for longstanding trends of economic stagnation and increasing inequality, this hope has permeated development discourse in the recognition of certain African countries as the latest variant of "Developmental States" (Shaw, 2005; Fritz, 2007; Mkandawire, 2001). Shaw even goes so far as to speculate: "might the 'African renaissance' supersede that in Asia a decade later?" (p. 64)

In this discursive era of mounting buoyancy, Uganda has been highlighted as one of the many "success stories" (Mbabazi, 2002, p. 42). It is also the prototype and source of the World Bank's new participatory approach to development (ODI, 2003, p. 22) that has coincided with this era of growth and that is now linked to the best economic performers in sub-Saharan Africa (Harrison, 2001, p. 661-2). Due to their economic success, this new World Bank approach – embodied in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) framework – has been expanded to a large share of low-income countries (ODI, 2003, p. 3).

In light of the promise and prevalence of this new framework, but in the spirit of Pieterse's (1998) belief that "blind faith in models and grand theories [has been] left behind" (p. 355), the following paper will critically analyse whether the PRSP initiative has been effective in supporting the World Bank's "single most important theme" of putting "committed developing country governments and their people, at the center of their development process" (As cited in Abrahamsen, 2004, p. 1455).

Wolfensohn, a former World Bank president, provides a suitable departure point for defining this new participatory approach in highlighting the concept of agency. He has stated that borrowing countries must be "'in the driver's seat—exercising choice and setting their own objectives for themselves'" (As cited, p. 1454). Sen (1999) reinforces the importance of agency through his conception of "freedom" as being essential to development on both an effectiveness and evaluative level. Essentially, he demonstrates that agency is at the heart of both the *means* of effectively executing development strategies and the *end* goal of a fully developed and independent state.

Therefore with the importance of agency as a main theme and Uganda as a case study, this paper will demonstrate that the World Bank's participatory development policies of greater partnership at the state level and greater non-governmental organization (NGO) involvement at the local level (Williams, 2008) have not fostered agency within the means nor the end goal of development. Although the World Bank claims to have put developing states in the "driver's seat", there is no true agency in their development strategies and policies since the map and route have been pre-selected (Cammack, 2004, p. 198). Meanwhile, greater involvement of increasingly transnationalized NGOs can further undermine end development goals as it rules out agency in the long run as well.

The first section of this paper will explore the theories of empowerment and participatory development, as well as their importance within World Bank discourse and policies. In providing the foundations for the rest of the paper, it will also review the Ugandan experience in applying the PRSP framework. The second section will discuss how greater partnership at the state level has served to embed neoliberal attitudes and frameworks rather than provide freedom of policy choice. The third section will then build on this contradiction by examining the role of transnational NGOs in policy process and public services provision as a means of authoritarian governance rather than as a method to increase agency at the local level.

Foundations of Theory and Ugandan Application

As Thomas (2000) underscores, empowerment is one of the main pillars of "alternative" or participatory development. He defines empowerment as a process through which marginalized actors (individuals or governments in this case) seize direct control over their lives and are therefore enabled as agents of their own development. Participatory development therefore requires a transformation of institutions and redistribution of power at both the local and broader national and global level (p. 35). Although, as previously shown, Sen's (1999) reasoning demonstrates the important significance of empowering or creating agency throughout the selection and execution of development policy, this participatory development approach did not become prominent in application until the mid 1990s (Pender, 2001).

In 1994, the World Bank provided the catalyst for this shift as its reports on Africa could no longer "disguise the fact that […] its record and role were increasingly being questioned" (p. 401). After a decade of implementing the World Bank's previous policy framework of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), Stiglitz (2002), a former World Bank chief economist noted that "the growth record of the so-called post-reform era look[ed] no better, and in some countries much worse" (p. 86). As the idea of increased participation had become well established in development discourse at this point (ODI, 2003, p. viii), it became incorporated as a main tenet of the World Bank's superseding framework[*]. After concluding that the failure of the SAPs was as a direct result of poor implementation by borrowing governments (Pender, 2001, p. 401), the World Bank announced that measures to foster "good governance" within developing countries would serve to resolve these previous failures. Its new policies therefore pushed for increasing state and civil society ownership through greater government partnership and NGO consultation (Williams, 2008). As Wolfensohn came to power in the World Bank in 1995, he clarified the importance of this approach by echoing Sen's (1999) theory in that "participation matters – not only as a means of improving development effectiveness as we know from our recent studies, but as the key to long-term sustainability" (Cammack, 2004, p. 201).

In comparison to the forced implementation of macroeconomic policies through the conditionalities of its previous SAP framework, the World Bank suggests that its new participatory approach now gives a borrowing government "full 'ownership' of policies it chooses to pursue" (Pender, 2001, p. 397). More specifically, the PRSP initiative is a process whereby a borrowing national government, in partnership with the World Bank and other donors as well as in consultation with civil society, creates a document that analyzes its level of poverty and defines a national strategy to reduce it. As a result, this initiative is now inextricably linked to the debt relief and concessional lending both in the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (ODI, 2003, p. 3).

The structure of the PRSP process emerged through an innovative and consultative group of the Ugandan government and a network of donor governments that strongly believed that the inability to restructure multilateral debt was significantly undermining Uganda's developmental goals (Callaghy, 2001, p. 130). As a result, they lobbied major creditors such as the World Bank for more generous relief. More importantly however, the group reinforced the importance of consultation and partnership in managing the development process. Their creation of Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action plan (PEAP), which later became the template for the PRSP, was innovative in that it allowed Uganda to manage the development funds "itself in consultation with donor countries, the IMF, and the World Bank" (p. 134). Unlike its previous development strategies, the Ugandan government also created greater ties with the NGO community as a means to lobby and gain legitimacy within the donor community. These participative strategies successfully culminated in 1998 with Uganda becoming the first country to receive multilateral debt relief (p. 135), which played a large role in decreasing the Ugandan total debt/GDP ratio from 58.3% in 1999 to only 2.1% in 2009 (World Bank, 2011). During the same time period, Uganda also experienced relatively high and stable growth with an average annual GDP growth rate of roughly 7% and a GDP per capita growth rate of roughly 3.5% (World databank, 2011). A 2010 UNDP report has also recently shown that Uganda's HDI has consistently risen since 1990, from 0.281 to the current 0.422 per cent (p. 150). In light of this progress, "key actors involved in the Uganda model later based their input into the development of the PRSP on their experience of Uganda's success" (ODI, 2003, p. 22).

Uganda is therefore both the source as well as a prime example of the PRSP initiative in application. Although many indicators show improvement, it is important to note there are no definitive causal links between the country's progress and the World Bank's new framework. High growth rates have also not pulled the country out of "the lowest ranks of global economic indicators" (Harrison, 2001, p. 676) and as Shaw (2005) notes, the "development has not been evenly distributed across Uganda: the north remains more impoverished and alienated than the south" (p. 68). The following sections will therefore investigate these doubts, by exploring the realities of how and whether agency is fostered through the creation and execution of PRSP-related development strategies.

State-Level Partnerships

Partnerships have emerged as a main tenet in the World Bank's state-level participatory approach as they are seen as a means to return agency to borrowing governments. However, "genuine partnerships are seen to imply [...] equality of power" (Abrahamsen, 2004, p. 1455), which is difficult in a relationship where one party holds the purse strings. Barnet and Duvall (2005) add to this by highlighting that power differentials can also appear through "systems of knowledge that advantage some and disadvantage others" (p. 42-43). Therefore, considering the World Bank's common position as a developing country's largest creditor and its self representation as a development expert or "Knowledge Bank" (Cammack, 2004), true partnership with the state is hard to fathom.

This doubt is reinforced by Harrison's (2001) observation that the World Bank's "new language of reform is based on notions of citizen empowerment and participation*, and the overall vision is of a state administration that facilitates market-friendly growth*" (p. 676, my emphasis). As Uganda's experience will demonstrate, due to an unequal relationship of power, instead of putting choice into the hands of borrowing governments, PRSP partnerships have in fact further embedded the World Bank's preferred, neo-liberal policies.

According to the Valenzuelas' (1978) analysis of dependency theory, if the World Bank's approach were truly participatory, each country's development route or map would vary substantially based on the "ideological outlook of particular authors" (Valenzuela, 551). In the case of Uganda's PRSP experience, the rising power of the finance ministry and the increased promotion of economics-based training within the government point to an assimilation of neo-liberal strategies instead.

To summarize Harrison's (2001) depiction of the country's new ministry hierarchy, due to a prominent role in the PRSP process, additional donor funding, and exclusive training and technology, the Ugandan Ministry of Finance and Planning is now in a position of hegemonic power within the Ugandan government. By favouring this ministry, the World Bank has fostered an ideology of monetarism within the state (p. 664). This ministry's budgetary control over all other ministries has also enabled the added dissemination of neo-liberal ideals, such as fiscal austerity and an economically constrained focus for national growth, throughout the government.

In addition to preferential funding, the World Bank has also charged its education and training department with increasing borrowing governments' capacity for economic management (Williams, 2008, p. 62). In Uganda specifically, scholarships for economic degrees and funded research groups to promote economic planning and policy-making, have enabled neo-liberal ideals to further permeate government culture (Harrison, 2001, p. 665). Education plays a crucial role in socializing government professionals, meaning as a result of the World Bank's promotion of a Westernized education of development, "indigenous concepts and methods are ignored or relegated to a strictly subordinate position" (Brohman, 1995, p. 136). These examples show that, in contradiction to the World Bank's call for a "highly participatory approach" (As cited in Williams, 2008, p. 74), World Bank, state-level partnerships have instead encouraged neo-liberal reform, with the state acting as the World Bank's "embedding agent" rather than its own (Harrison, 2004, p. 67).

Local-Level Consultation and Provision of Services

The World Bank's participatory approach at the local level is double edged in its goals to decentralize the provision of public services to NGOs, as well as increase consultation with them in government policy creation. It therefore puts Foucault's theory into practice by ensuring governments operate *through* its constituents "as they [are] increasingly conceptualized as key actors to ensure both effectiveness in program-delivery and to confer legitimacy on governmental processes" (Sending, 2006, p. 661). Although Sending and Neuman argue that there is no transfer of power from the state to non-state actors in this new approach, they fail to incorporate the increasingly transnational nature of NGOs in their analysis.

As Kassimir (2001) points out, despite some indigenous NGOs, "not all non-state organizations operating in Africa are 'local' in origin, and few are exclusively local in terms of their political connections" (p. 103). Although Africa has seen an increasing "Africanization" of NGOs since the 1990s (Hearn, 2007, p. 1101), meaning more and more are of local origins, international NGOs (INGOs) and Northern NGOs are still commonly involved in a consultative or donor role. Even when looking more locally at community based or grass roots organizations, Hearn notes that because of their access to INGO or Northern NGO funding, "although indigenous, these have come into the NGO orbit and been caught up in its [transnational] dynamics" (p. 1102).

Therefore, in light of the previously mentioned balance of power within donor partnerships, the true level of indigenous influence in the NGO provision of public services or lobbying for policy change comes into question. Kleist (2011) demonstrates the potential impact of transnational relationships by emphasizing the Western influence of returning expatriate chiefs on local development initiatives in Ghana, while the Overseas Development Group (2003) offers a more explicit example exploring the extremely weak Southern representation of NGOs in Uganda's consultative PRSP process. In considering these broad examples of Western ideals overpowering or replacing indigenous interests, it follows that transnational networks in the NGO community can undermine agency in both the choice of development initiatives at the local level or in influencing policy at the state level.

In addition to undermining ownership of development strategies, increasing the involvement of inherently transnational NGOs, can also prohibit the greater agency of the population, which, as mentioned previously, is a pre-condition for the end goal of development. Since individuals are offered no formal democratic process in choosing which NGOs will represent their interests, it is difficult to determine whether organizations can be entrusted to act on their behalf. Kassimir's (2001) statement highlights this contradiction with the following examination:

Enactment of "state-like" functions such as service delivery by NGOs is directly linked to the politics within these organizations, the determination of who is recognized to speak for and lead members, and what members must do in order to gain access to resources and services that the organization may provide. p 99.

One example of a Ugandan NGO that is questionable in its representative capacity is the Catholic Church. The Ugandan branch of this INGO has played a crucial role in Uganda's history as a non-state actor that basically took over the role of the state throughout the country's civil war. Although its role has diminished now, it still "'govern[s]' its members through canon law, education, socialization, and more informal mechanisms" (p. 96). On the question of local influence in selecting its representatives, members in power, such as bishops, are only appointed by the powerful *Western* factions of the organization. This combined with its inherent goal of spreading a *Western* religion demonstrates the level of indigenous agency invoked by the Church in acting on its members' behalf.

According to Weaver (2007), the World Bank views local involvement so highly now that it tracks NGO involvement in its activities and ensures any increases are immediately reported as a means to further legitimize its initiatives (p. 503). Yet the transnational nature of NGOs and their impact on individual agency, as Ugandan examples have shown, completely disproves the participatory nature of this approach. In a telling editorial from over a decade ago, the Africa World Review noted that there was a "new strategy of global control which place[d] less emphasis on the state and prioritise[d] direct influence and control over communities through funding NGOs" (As cited in Hearn, 2007, p. 1097). Whether there is intent for global control in the World Bank's actions is beyond the scope of this paper; however the identification of its potential in light of the two growing forces highlighted in this paper, demonstrates how the peripheral may view and resent the new World Bank approach.

Conclusion

To hark back to Sen's (1999) position on the importance of agency, neither the World Bank's increased partnership with the Ugandan government, nor its greater involvement of Ugandan NGOs have served to increase agency in creating or executing effective development initiatives. Considering the World Bank's position after examining the failure of its SAP initiative, that "a sound strategy for development must take into account Africa's historical traditions" (Williams, 2008, p. 74), one would think these traditions would be incorporated as an important tenet in the succeeding framework. The Ugandan experience presents the opposite however, as Western, rather than indigenous, ideals have become more prevalent at both the state and local level. In refuting the World Bank's creation of agency, it is worth revisiting the fact that "while Uganda has been widely hailed as a 'success story' by the international community of late, this masks a different picture for the majority of Ugandans as they continue to live in absolute poverty" (Mbabazi, 2002, p. 42). Therefore, although the participatory approach is essential to development in its aims, its application through the World Bank's PRSP initiative needs revisiting and reworking before it can be heralded as a bearer of a new and better breed of developmental states.

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[*] Although, not mentioned often throughout this paper, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is the other major

player that created and now executes the PRSP process.

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