

Structural Adjustment, Authoritarianism and Human Rights in Africa

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The effects of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and other policies of the major International Financial Institutions (IFIs), particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on social and political conditions in Africa have been the subject of extensive debates. Much of this discussion has focused on the negative social implications of these policies on parts of the population. It has been pointed out that although necessary for the sound development of the economies, the social cost of structural adjustment is often so negative that it tends to be counterproductive to what adjustment attempts to solve. In this debate, the emphasis has been on establishing a link between macro economic policy and the adverse social effects on the population at the micro level. What is often not sufficiently emphasized is the link between adjustment policies, the authoritarian character of their implementation by African regimes, and the implications they spell for human rights and responsible governance on the continent.

This article proceeds from the premise that adjustment policies have obvious negative social cost which make them largely unpopular and difficult to implement. Within this context, I examine the social cost of structural adjustment policies in terms of the authoritarian and arbitrary nature of their implementation by African regimes and the consequence of negative implications on human rights generally and, specifically, the conditions of free speech and political representation in governance. I argue that SAP, by creating critical problems of legitimacy for African regimes, erodes their political capacity to govern. This encourages regimes, some of which already exhibit dictatorial and authoritarian tendencies, to resort to even more repressive measures in carrying through adjustment reforms.

Although IFIs have tended to distance themselves from the authoritarian political actions of adjusting states, they do in fact set the tone for authoritarianism and human rights violations by insisting on politically difficult conditionalities in the implementation of economic reforms. I conclude that SAP, as it has been implemented in Africa, and human rights promotions are inherently incompatible goals. The derogation of human rights associated with the implementation of adjustment policies are in themselves counterproductive to the vision of socioeconomic stability and sustainable democratic development that informs adjustment programs in Africa.

The Structural Adjustment Agenda

The IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment agenda in Africa can be directly traced to the continent's entanglement in the debt trap following the 1980-1982 worldwide economic recession and the consequent collapse of world commodity prices. To support their weakening economies and increase production capacities, many African countries sought refuge in external loans from the IMF, the World Bank and individual Western nations. As a result of the debt crisis of the early 1980s, the IMF and the World Bank increased the level of the conditions required for loans and credits to developing countries. This set of conditions became institutionalized and has been labeled Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). According to a World Bank Study, "Structural adjustment is a process whereby a national economy is opened by means of the depreciation of the real exchange rate through a combination of demand and supply side policies."¹ Adjustment, in the view of the Bank, aims at setting the economy of a country back on a path of sustainable growth when it is faced with a macroeconomic crisis characterized by unsustainable internal and external balances.

When the IMF introduced SAP lending in the 1980s, twenty-four African countries drew up adjustment programs intended to improve the poor policies that were the primary cause of the 15 percent fall in Africa's GDP per capita between 1977 and 1985.² As of 1993, the IMF restructuring program was being implemented in 36 sub-Saharan African debtor countries under different names — Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), National Economic Survival Program (NESP), Economic Recovery Plan (ERP), etc. While the scope and content of these programs may differ from country to country, the key points remain the same. These include the devaluation and unification of the exchange rate and the elimination of exchange controls; curtailment of expenditure to alleviate budget deficits; cuts in public wage bill and social sector programs; market liberalization within the national economies, the elimination of subsidies and price controls; compression of real earnings and the liberalization of the labor market.

One of the basic notions of structural adjustment is that the local purchasing power within national economies has been overvalued, relative to its real international worth. The

object of the policy of devaluation is to reduce the value of the local currency, thereby stimulating internal production to make exported goods cheaper and thus increase their demand in the international market. The consequence of this in many African countries has been spiraling inflation and a dramatic reduction in the living standard of the people. Adjustment also prescribes the withdrawal of state control and interference in the economy in order to “free up capital and allow the market mechanism to operate through the impersonal forces of demand and supply.”³ In Africa, where there is a long tradition of government intervention in the economy dating from the colonial era, this implies a radical redefinition of the whole concept of government and governance. Government intervention in the economy through the control of national development plans and parastatal organizations such as the produce marketing boards is considered unnecessary, so many manipulative restrictions on the economy that should be done away with. IFIs argue that such state controls breed inefficiency, corruption and ineptitude. The elimination of government subsidies and the liberalization of trade are intended to open up national economies, strengthen the operation of market mechanisms and reintegrate the nations of Africa into the international economy.

The failures of adjustment economic reforms in Africa and the limitations of the political dynamics associated with their implementation have been well documented in several official reports of the World Bank and many other independent scholarly studies.⁴ We need not go into these in great detail here. For our purpose, it suffices to point out that criticism of IMF and World Bank inspired adjustment programs has centered on four main points. First, that the program of structural adjustment draws its inspiration from conditions in Asian countries where it was first experimented with, and takes little account of the peculiar socio-political circumstances of the postcolonial state in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, that the success rate of the programs is far less than what is desirable. Third, that the content of the programs invariably implies a turn to market economy as a result of the insistence upon privatization, trade liberalization and reduced government involvement in the economy. This fosters a political, rather than a purely economic agenda. Related to this is the argument that the World Bank is a principal protagonist of international capitalism and that by the imposing adjustment regimes in Africa, it seeks to challenge state-led, nationalist development ideology.⁵ Finally, and perhaps most significant, is the argument that anti-protectionist adjustment policies like de-subsidization and privatization tend to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few and further impoverish the mass of the people.

In response to these criticisms, IFIs have consistently maintained that adjustment policies, where properly implemented, have restored growth to national economies. In one report, the World Bank claims rather categorically that “in African countries that have undertaken and sustained major policy reforms, adjustment is working.”⁶ It claims that macro economic reforms have “spurred external competitiveness, trade reforms have increased access to imports,

and reduced taxation on agriculture has helped the poor while encouraging production and export.”⁷ It maintains that the disproportionate emphasis on the cost of adjustment ignores the “substantial benefits” of the program in Africa, and stating that of the 29 countries which had by 1994 adopted adjustment policies in Africa, the six with the greatest improvement in macro economic policies — Ghana, Burundi, Gambia, Madagascar, Malawi and Burkina Faso — enjoyed the strongest resurgence ever in their economic performance.⁸ They experienced an average growth rate of 2 percent in gross domestic product (GDP). The increase in their industrial and export growth rates was “striking” and agricultural growth was “accelerated.” But even at this level, the World Bank and the IMF concede that whatever macro economic gains that have been made have come at great social cost and that these gains have not always been manifested in micro economic terms.⁹ In other words, even in countries where adjustment has been implemented, the living conditions of the common person has not improved significantly. If anything, they have deteriorated.

Indeed, most independent assessments of the record of adjustment policies in Africa are less than encouraging. In broad terms, liberalization of trade in Nigeria, Zambia and Cote d’Ivoire led directly to the collapse of industrial production and the disengagement of productive capital. As a result of the liberalization of banking services and the privatization of state development banks for agriculture and industry, central banks in the continent lost control over monetary policies. While the devaluation of currency and the unification of the exchange rates may have temporarily increased the earnings of cash crop producers (as in the cocoa boom of the late 1980s in Nigeria), the real benefits more often accrued to the large commercial farmers, intermediaries and agro-industrial exporters rather than to the rural peasant farmer. In Ghana, (which has been held out as a model of the success of adjustment) and Kenya, agricultural credit to small scale farmers was reduced as a result of the increase in the price of farm inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, credit and transport cost.¹⁰ In Tanzania, the devaluation of the shilling by 26 percent in 1984; the de-subsidization of the staple maize meal; the increase in produce prices by more than 45 percent, and the relaxation of import regulations in line with IMF conditionalities all spelt disastrous consequences for the living conditions of the vast population of rural and urban poor.¹¹

Interestingly, some of the criticisms of IMF-style adjustment policies in Africa have come from other international institutions. Drawing on the report of the Khartoum Conference on the *Human Dimension of Africa’s Economic Recovery and Development*,¹² the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in 1989 produced a report criticizing adjustment program in Africa and provided what it called an African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programs for Socioeconomic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP). In the report, it was stated that “the overall assessment of the structural adjustment programs has led to the conclusion that, although these programs aimed at restoring growth generally through the achievement of fiscal and external balances, and the free

play of market forces, these objectives cannot be achieved without addressing the fundamental structural bottlenecks of African economies."¹³ The frustration with the failure in IMF and World Bank development paradigms to appreciate the role of "popular opinion and participation" was further demonstrated with the unanimous adoption by the United Nations' general assembly of the *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation*.¹⁴ The charter called for increased participation of community groups and individuals in the design and evaluation of development projects.

Quite apart from the obvious economic implications of adjustment policies in Africa, there are also less emphasized but equally crippling political implications of adjustment. These are often a direct fallout of the "social cost" of adjustment. For example, the liberalization of labor markets has left millions of breadwinners unemployed, while the introduction of fees in the delivery of previously free social services, including health and education, has raised the cost of living. In a situation, as in most African countries, where there are no reliable social welfare systems, millions more of dependents become destitute or "economic refugees" in the already overcrowded urban centers. Mass retrenchments in the public sector swell the rank of the unemployed, creating discontent, a restive population, and pervasive social tension. This state of affairs effectively erodes the capacity of governments to rule. While some African political regimes have responded to this challenge of governance by political manipulation and the selective appeasement of vocal sections of civil society, others have sought refuge in outright repression and authoritarianism in swallowing the bitter pill of adjustment.

Human Rights and the Dialectics of Adjustment and Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism in the formulation and implementation of structural adjustment policies in Africa manifests itself at two levels. First, the international authoritarianism of the IFIs, notably the World Bank and the IMF, seek to "impose"¹⁵ external decisions as conditionalities on the heavily indebted and vulnerable African states.¹⁶ In urging African regimes to show courage and commitment in the face of local opposition, IFIs and donor agencies set the tone of authoritarianism in the implementation of adjustment policies. Such foreign paternalism only serves to reinforce the authoritarian nature of SAP. Second, the authoritarian state, desperate to meet IMF conditionalities, often turns against its own people. Although both levels of authoritarianism are related, our main focus here is on domestic state authoritarianism while drawing parallels between it and international authoritarianism.

Several studies have associated SAP with repressive political practices in Africa, although scholars disagree in their interpretation of the precise nature of this link.¹⁷ Some writers present authoritarianism as a logical and necessary feature of the political dynamics of adjustment. It is argued that because adjustment seeks a shift from statism and protectionism to liberalization and a breakdown of entrenched state monopolies, opposition to it from aggrieved "rent seekers" who have traditionally benefited from state protec-

tionism can be expected. States therefore need to be strong and effective to manage these political pressures from the "losers" of adjustment. Bureaucratic capability and coercion are thus necessary to overcome resistance from groups with historic claims on state resources. Authoritarianism, it is argued, is a "necessary correlate for a form of accumulation resting on extra economic coercion."¹⁸ However, as Bagura and Gibbon have pointed out, this argument lacks empirical basis. The experience of adjustment reforms in Africa do not indicate that authoritarian repression has been directed at a specific group of supposed "rent seekers." Rather, repression has been indiscriminately directed at workers, the urban poor and impoverished middle classes and other opponents of adjustment who cannot, by any stretch of the term, be said to constitute a class of "rent seekers."¹⁹

A broader framework for understanding the relationship between authoritarianism and adjustment policies in Africa is the political economy perspective which situates state policies in the dynamics of class struggle. The political economy perspective argues that the local dominant classes in the Third World lack hegemonic power and can only prevail over dominated classes through a combination of ideological hegemony and physical coercion. In some parts of Africa where external factors dominate commerce and the bourgeois classes have little control over the dependent state economy, their ability to create ideological hegemony is weak, making it vulnerable and susceptible to challenges from below. This predisposes the post-colonial state, over which the dominant classes preside (whether military or civilian), to resort to the increased use of repression.²⁰ Within this context, Claude Eke has pointed out that "there is no way of implementing the structural adjustment program without political repression."²¹ The structures of neo-colonialism and the political pressures which adjustment create make repression inevitable. As a group of scholars put it:

For SAP to work, people's resistance to and struggle against hunger, unemployment, injustice, social and economic abdication of government of its responsibility to the welfare of the citizenry, exploitation and mortgaging of the future through the debt trap ... must be prevented by the rulers at all costs.²²

While there may be differences over the nature of the relationship between adjustment and authoritarianism, there is a simple consensus that SAP breeds repression and several country studies of adjustment reforms clearly demonstrate this. In Ghana, early openings in democratic direction were stifled in the interest of authoritarian control as SAP gathered momentum.²³ In Zambia the regime, faced with cross-pressure from domestic opposition and international financial and aid agencies, was constrained to adopt repressive measures to complement traditional methods of political management. In Senegal, the authoritarian features of one-party dominance were reasserted in the face of political tension precipitated by adjustment reforms and in Nigeria the wide spread opposition to adjustment was met with repression and the co-option of opposition forces into the ruling block.²⁴

A legacy of authoritarian rule dating from the colonial past pervades the African continent. African regimes

through which the International Financial Institutions have to operate are rarely truly representative, and genuine democracy is found in few countries. Until very recently, the norm has been some form of dictatorial rule by either military or one-party leaders — a state of affairs which has proved particularly conducive for the implementation of the politically difficult reforms of the public enterprises and financial sectors prescribed in adjustment programs. Military and single party regimes have shown more willingness in carrying out adjustment reforms where elected regimes have been more cautious. Thus, although adjustment may not necessarily create authoritarianism, it does intensify it. However, Beckman insists that authoritarianism is essentially a “property” of the adjustment process itself rather than of the states which are adjusting. He argues that while the African state had independently diminished in its capacity to maintain its traditional co-optive and clientelist mechanism of political management, the principal and decisive difficulty which adjustment creates for the state is its inability to meet popular expectations of what it can provide in the context of its submission to external forces.²⁵ The main point of this argument is that while the African state was already undergoing a crisis prior to adjustment, it is adjustment’s insistence on the termination of its traditional popular and national basis which obliges it to resort to dictatorship.²⁶ Whatever position one may hold, what is clear is that the link between adjustment and authoritarianism can easily be established.

The link between adjustment programs and authoritarianism in Africa lies in the fact that adjustment programs reduce the state’s ability to formulate and implement its own policies guided by public opinion and popular aspirations. Although many African governments do not normally consult with opponents and skeptics about matters of policy, the involvement of governments in dialogue about the formulation of adjustment programs has been very limited. Even more limited is the dialogue between the government and other interest groups within the state over the programs. One study of adjustment policy formulation in five African countries notes, for example, that “potential opponents and skeptics seem to be screened out of the dialogue.”²⁷ Even official World Bank reports of adjustment in African countries identify the lack of broad-based consultations as being a major factor in the failure of adjustment policies in Africa. The Bank acknowledges that in most African countries, adjustment programs have been formulated by a narrow group of technocrats and politicians without broad-based consultations. This trend, in the view of the Bank, “conflicts with the need for open discussion, debate and communication involving diverse groups.” Ownership of the structural reform programs, the Bank maintains, should be broadly based.²⁸

This stance poses two fundamental contradictions. First, the broad participation which the Bank claims is necessary for the implementation of adjustment programs will at the same time almost certainly cause a rejection of much of the program, as was the case in Nigeria.²⁹ Second, the Bank, by its own conditionalities and covert pressures on adjusting states to carry through unpopular reforms, forecloses the

option of broad consultations and open discussion. Thus, irrespective of IMF and World Bank ideals, the reality of adjustment in Africa is that a certain measure of repression and authoritarian rule is indispensable to its implementation. By undermining the capacity of ruling groups to sustain existing patterns of political coalitions, maintain patronage relations and respond to sectional claims, SAP effectively disempowers the ruling group and by extension, the state. The adjusting state therefore lacks the political capacity to implement SAP in the face of heavy opposition without recourse to repression. As Goran Hyden puts it, the post-colonial state is declared redundant and irrelevant.³⁰

Economic reforms in Africa have often been tied to demands for political liberalization and human rights by IFIs and donor countries. Democratic governance and political pluralism, which are part of a broader agenda of “minimalist state intervention,” are increasingly being required as conditions for continued assistance. This linkage of economic progress with democracy and human rights has led to political reforms in several adjusting states. Of the 39 African countries that had signed the SAP agreement by 1989, at least ten had inched away from one party or military rule to allow for political pluralism.³¹ But how far do these attempts at democratization really go? In most cases, these changes do not go far enough. The ostensible shift towards democratization and political pluralism has had little real impact on political representation and human rights conditions in many African countries.

Between Adjustment and Human Rights: Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana.

Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana are illustrative of the multi-dimensional link between adjustment, authoritarian rule and human rights in Africa. In the case of Nigeria and Guinea, the intensification of repression and authoritarianism was more or less a direct fallout of the failure of adjustment. Ghana is particularly interesting because even though it has been held out as representing a success story of adjustment in Africa, the country has not been spared the repression and human rights violations associated with adjustment reforms.

Upon taking power from General Muhammadu Buhari in 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida announced that the new government would be anchored on respect for the fundamental human rights of all Nigerians. He vowed that he would not preside over “a country where individuals are under the fear of expressing themselves” and promised that his government would be open and transparent. As part of the new crusade for human rights, some of the repressive decrees promulgated by the ousted Buhari regime were immediately repealed. For instance, the notorious Decree No. 4 of 1984, under which journalists were detained for publishing embarrassing information about the government, was repealed. Two journalists who had been jailed under the decree and thousands of other Nigerians who had been detained without trial by the National Security Organization (NSO) were released from jail. As a demonstration of its pledge to promote the rule of law, the Babangida regime also reviewed the cases of Nigerian politicians who had been convicted by military tribunals set up by the Buhari

regime.³²

These measures won the Babangida regime instant legitimacy. Rather than the limitation of freedom of expression which characterized the preceding Buhari regime, the Babangida government pledged to allow Nigerians to openly debate major national and political issues. Thus, within weeks of the *coup d'état* which brought him to power, Babangida inaugurated a nationwide "IMF debate" as a popular outlet for discussing, in particular, the impasse over Nigeria's negotiations with the IMF over a \$2.5 billion loan and, in general, the nation's economic future. The ostensible object of this debate was to allow Nigerians to participate in the formulation of new economic reforms intended to alleviate major distortions in the economy and to reduce the external debt. The debates which were conducted in the press and other public forums conveyed an unmistakable public antipathy and rejection of IMF and World Bank conditionalities. In apparent deference to public opinion, Babangida publicly repudiated the IMF and declared that Nigeria would instead opt for a "home grown" solution to its economic difficulties.³³ However, less than a month later, the president unveiled an economic package including the deregulation of the exchange rate, higher agricultural prices, financial liberalization and partial privatization. Although this package was presented as "home grown", it was actually negotiated with World Bank officials and was premised upon supplementary finance from the Bank.³⁴ One year later, a full SAP was introduced, which elaborated and extended earlier adjustment reforms. In essence, Babangida introduced orthodox adjustment measures under a nationalistic guise. The new adjustment program was presented as "a social program that will allow Nigerians to view their society with a little more care and a great deal more concern for the generations yet unborn...a revolution in national ethical standards and value systems."³⁵ In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, the main arguments advanced to justify the introduction of SAP were that it would stabilize the national currency; restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy and reduce over-dependence on the oil sector; reduce the dominance of unproductive public sector investment and enhance the growth potential of the private sector. The government contended that after two years, SAP would fundamentally transform the national economy. In place of a crisis-ridden, decadent, dependent and disarticulated economy, a dynamic self-reliant and productive economy would emerge.³⁶

Contrary to these expectations, the introduction of SAP proved to be no magic wand for Nigeria's economic recovery. Instead, its immediate results were mass retrenchments, inflation and declining wages. Unprecedented inflation, in some cases as high as 1,700 percent, led to the impoverishment of a vast population of working-class Nigerians. Statistics provided by the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) indicate that the inflation in the prices of basic consumer goods made them out of reach of even the average middle income earner.³⁷ These produced considerable discontent across the society. In mid-1987, a series of anti-SAP protests was launched by students, traders and the labor unions. The demonstrations, which sometimes turned violent, were

suppressed with police and military action. In 1988, the government announced a budget which stressed "adjustment with a human face" and included a number of "SAP relief" measures. These included increases in wages and public spending and a commitment to sustain petroleum subsidies. Interestingly, the multilateral financial institutions saw these as indicating the regime's flagging commitment to economic reforms and responded to these compensatory measures by withholding endorsement of Nigeria's economic performance. The IMF refused to approve a new loan when the existing agreement lapsed later in the year.³⁸

In 1989, when the full inflationary effect of devaluation and de-subsidization had become more evident in the rising cost of living, public restiveness over SAP erupted again with "SAP riots" engulfing universities and major cities across the country. As many as 22 fatalities were officially reported, but press estimates were at least twice as high. The overwhelming public opposition to Babangida's economic reforms was followed by a dramatic change in the declared policy of the regime towards human rights. After the brief period of tolerance and flirtation with respect for human rights, the Babangida regime resorted to overt repression involving extensive police action, the ban of newspapers and popular trade unions and the arbitrary arrests of perceived opponents of the regime's economic policy.³⁹ The repressive laws enacted by the Buhari regime, which had earlier been repealed, were replaced by new repressive decrees providing the regime with even wider powers of detention. The notorious Nigerian Security Organization (NSO) which had been scrapped as part of the regime's human rights initiative was replaced by an even more obnoxious organization — the State Security Service (SSS).

The process of containing opponents of the regime also involved political manipulation and the systematic suppression and harassment of vocal and critical groups within civil society. University campuses were closed and students' leaders arrested. The labor union (whose radical leadership had stiffly opposed the regime's economic policy) was dismantled while the Academic Staff Union of Universities was proscribed — its leader Attahiru Jega and several officials of the union were arrested and detained without trial. Admonitions were issued to other professional organizations, such as the Medical and Bar associations, which were protesting the adjustment program.

In 1987, the government unilaterally dissolved the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) and named a sole administrator to run the Congress when it announced that it would oppose government's withdrawal of petroleum subsidies. Several labor leaders were arrested and threatened with prosecution for treason. When one of Nigeria's prominent lawyers, Gani Fawehimi, attempted to organize a conference to discuss alternatives to SAP under the auspices of the Committee for the Unity and Progress of Nigeria, the gathering was disrupted by the police and subsequently banned. Ibrahim Ayagi and Oladore Olashore, chief executives of two of Nigeria's major banks, like many other public officers, were sacked for criticizing the government's economic pol-

icy.⁴⁰ This general atmosphere of repression and antagonism towards critics of his economic reform policies characterized Babangida's rule. Until he was forced to relinquish power in 1993, the adjustment program in Nigeria lacked popular support and was driven mainly by the predilections of Babangida and a small group of technocrats and bureaucrats who clearly favored adjustment policies because of the "gains" it held for the state elite.⁴¹ However, the popular resistance to adjustment reforms in Nigeria and the unprecedented scope and intensity of the repression employed by the state to sustain the policy had a significant impact on human rights in Nigeria in that it triggered the rise of human rights activism in the country. The period between 1987 and 1989, when SAP was actively being promoted by the Babangida regime, witnessed the emergence of several human rights organizations such as the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP). The activities of these groups have given human rights greater prominence in Nigeria's social and political agenda and have done more for the promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance than both state and World Bank initiatives.

The experience of adjustment and human rights in Ghana marks a contrast with that of Nigeria in that unlike in Nigeria, the explicit pledge towards a commitment to human rights was not one of the points with which the regime sought to ensure popular acceptance and legitimacy. In Ghana, the dominant theme with which Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings sought to justify and legitimize the "revolution," following the December 1981 coup, was the declared commitment to passing power to "the people" within the context of a transformation of Ghana's economic and political situation. In line with this objective, the regime suspended the constitution (thereby granting Chairman Rawlings wide and arbitrary powers); banned political parties; detained party leaders and took a number of repressive legal actions. There was no pretension on the part of the regime to a commitment to promote civil liberties, although the PNDC Law 42 (the retroactive decree which suspended the constitution) declared that "respect for human rights and the dignity of the human person are to be cultivated among all sections of the society within the basic framework of the exercise of all political power."⁴² In practice, the ruling Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) claimed the right to rule without discussion and treated individual and groups who opposed it as subversives seeking to destabilize the state.⁴³

From an initial Marxist and populist revolutionary posture which rejected capitalist oriented economic reforms, the Rawlings regime was forced by crippling economic crisis to accept IMF conditionalities for its economic reforms in 1983.⁴⁴ Ghana's economic situation had indeed become severely flawed as a result of two decades of mismanagement, falling incomes, lower exports and deteriorating infrastructure. Inflation ran in triple digits; industrial production recorded unprecedented negative growth; food was in short supply; cocoa production, the main stay of the economy, was in abeyance and to make matters worse,

nearly a million Ghanaians were repatriated from Nigeria, raising unemployment to unprecedented levels.⁴⁵ Within four years of the introduction of the PNDC's Economic Recovery/ Structural Adjustment Program (ERP/SAP), Ghana's economy witnessed some growth. Cocoa and mineral production improved dramatically, export earnings grew and most of the deteriorating infrastructure was restored. There were also recorded growths in real incomes and expansion in industrial capacity.⁴⁶ The World Bank and the IMF were quick to present the impressive statistics in their reports to show positive economic growth and the Ghanaian SAP was hailed as offering "transferable lessons from which policy makers in negative-performing countries may learn."

What many of these reports often did not indicate was the massive foreign aid which sustained Ghana's economic performance during the period and the gaping disparities in the distribution of the benefits of economic growth. The problem of distribution inequity was grave. Policies under the program were harsh to human development and few people benefited from the seeming economic growth. Urban employment rose because of the PNDC's retrenchment policies and mass impoverishment prevailed owing to the withdrawal of subsidies from public services.⁴⁷ Consequently, a feeling of alienation and disenchantment became widespread among people who had earlier supported the regime. Unable to turn the high economic growth to political advantage, the regime resorted to selective compensation and repression to consolidate its position.

With increased government revenues coming from SAP's economic resuscitation, the Rawlings regime now had both "the carrot for its friends and sticks for its enemies." Growing levels of external revenue inflows (some \$4 billion between 1983 and 1991 in concessional loans and grants) put the regime in a stronger position to dispense patronage to friendly and cooptable civil organizations such as the 31st December Women's Movement and the Ghana Private Road Transport Association and to harass and repress "unfriendly" organizations such as the Bar Association, the Association of Recognized Professional Bodies and the Association of Orthodox Christians. Members of these "opposition organizations" were targeted with pernicious legislation, politically motivated tax auditing and intimidation through the rehabilitated state media and the better provisioned state security apparatus.⁴⁸ If adjustment reforms had been successful, it was clear that the success had only manifested in strengthening and empowering the state in its position against civil society. As Gyimah-Boadi argues, the relative success of the Rawlings' regime's strategy of political domination can be explained largely by its control of a rehabilitated state which effectively guaranteed an agenda of state/regime dominance and civil society subordination.⁴⁹ The point to note here is that SAP, in spite of its relative success, could not be a force for building regime legitimacy in Ghana, where the polity has proved highly sensitive to political rights and liberties. Despite the apparent improvement in the national economy, the PNDC was unsuccessful in claiming a national mandate to rule. The success of SAP therefore did not foreclose the option of a

resort to suppression, authoritarianism and human rights violations in the regime's quest for legitimacy.

In Guinea, the implementation of SAP was also associated with military authoritarian rule. Just seven days after he came to power in a military coup, General Lansana Conté contacted the IMF and the World Bank, which initiated a SAP for Guinea. As elsewhere in Africa, the adjustment program which was subsequently introduced was not the result of any consultations or public debates. It focused on domestic reforms, principally the liberalization of price, trade, and exchange-rate policies as well as the rationalization of the civil service.⁵⁰ Predictably, these policies led to mass retrenchments in the public service and rising prices following the devaluation of the currency. The government's severe financial constraints meant that little was being spent on essential service resulting in delays in paying salaries, further fueling the feeling of discontent and general public unrest throughout the country. Those who felt the brunt of the adjustment reforms, notably students and the unemployed, staged protests and demonstrations. The government's initial response was to introduce compensatory and palliative measures to cushion the effects of SAP. But as in Nigeria, these only made the IFIs less confident of the government's commitment to the adjustment program. For instance, the IMF suspended negotiations for a new loan in May 1991 when the government decided to raise public salaries by 100 percent. Negotiations commenced only after the IMF had been convinced that such a move was politically necessary. Thereafter, the military regime resorted less to compensatory measures and pursued instead a strategy of repression to contain opposition to its economic reforms.

Guinea's poor economic performance became an excuse for disruptions and other political manipulations in the scheduled transition to democracy which Conté had promised in 1988. It would appear that the announced intention to move towards a multi-party democracy at approximately the same time as the introduction of SAP was a bid to calm the unrest of those critical of the government's economic reforms. However, this strategy backfired as many people thought that the transition period was simply too long. This resulted in further political unrest and sporadic violence throughout the late 1980s — a situation which became an excuse for further political manipulation and repression. The cancellation of the legislative elections scheduled for December 1992 was attributed to violence arising from the anti SAP protests.⁵¹ Human rights violations in the form of arbitrary police arrests and detentions were justified on the basis of the need to maintain national peace and security in the face of the growing opposition to the government's economic reforms. When Presidential elections were finally held in December 1993, President Conté won amidst allegations of fraud.

IFIs and Obligations to Human Rights

The human rights implications of adjustment and authoritarianism in Africa can be examined from two angles: first, the implication of authoritarianism for pluralism, representation and political rights; second, the implication of adjustment in terms of the restrictions on access to material

resources and the limitations on economic and social rights. The implications of adjustment policies on economic and social rights are rather obvious and have been elaborately examined in several studies.⁵² In contrast, the effects of adjustment policies and the authoritarianism associated with their implementation on political representation, free expression and civil rights have attracted less attention.

The World Bank has historically claimed that it is unable to make human rights considerations in its policy because that would violate the Articles of Agreement of the Bank. Human rights are seen as political issues and Articles of the Bank expressly prohibit all but economic considerations. This idealized view of the World Bank and the IMF is that they are supervising experts standing outside the political arena and concerned only with economic matters. However, with the deepening crisis in many African and Latin American countries in the 1980s, the Bank began to take a more interventionist outlook. The Bank's policies and operations were no longer restricted to economic matters but also began to involve the question of how to create the necessary environment for competent and politically legitimate regimes to emerge that would be fully committed to the goals of adjustment.⁵³ This shift in its traditional approach was partly a reflection of the thinking already gaining ground among scholars and policy makers that economic reforms alone cannot address the crisis in Africa and that good governance, political accountability, the rule of law and grassroots participation in government were central to the quest for a lasting solution to the African crisis. The Bank has thus been more forthcoming on issues of good governance such as public sector management and accountability, although the specific question of human rights continues to be treated with caution.⁵⁴

On the political right to representation and participation in government, the World Bank has emphasized the importance of political legitimacy and consensus in policy, grassroots participatory institutions, and models consistent with African culture in the formulation and implementation of adjustment policies in Africa.⁵⁵ The Bank argues that "underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance." SAP, says the Bank, cannot work without a well functioning state with an enlightened leadership that makes an effort to build a pluralistic institutional structure one that is determined to respect the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of the press and human rights at every level of government.⁵⁶

However, the World Bank's position on the desirability of good governance and respect for human rights is not only noncommittal but is, in fact, the antithesis of the authoritarian and dictatorial nature of the implementation of adjustment programs in Africa. Policy declarations about the Bank's commitment to political liberalism have had little effect on the Bank's activities in Africa. On the contrary, studies have shown how World Bank thinking in the early 1980s was to financially support authoritarian reform-oriented governments to enable them to overcome the short term domestic pressures expected from aggrieved "urban coalitions" and other opponents of adjustment.⁵⁷ As we have seen in the cases of Nigeria and Guinea, periodic re-

leases of World Bank and IMF loans were delayed or withheld when governments resorted to compensatory measures rather than continued repression in carrying through economic reforms.

The point must also be made that apart from their own policy obligations on good governance, in the case of IFIs, and the primary domestic obligations of adjusting countries to promote human rights within their own societies, there is a further international obligation on both parties to ensure that the assistance provided through international agencies is used for the progressive achievement of respect and fulfillment of human rights. The provisions of the United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR) clearly articulate this point.⁵⁸ In addition, UNCESCR has stressed that:

Wherever possible, the agencies [The United Nations and their subsidiary organs and specialized agencies, such as the World Bank and the IMF] should act as advocates of projects and approaches which contribute not only to economic growth or other already broadly defined objectives, but also to enhanced enjoyment of the full range of human rights.⁵⁹

However, these objectives have not been fully realized because there continues to exist a fundamental conflict between the content of World Bank inspired adjustment policies in Africa and human rights obligations of adjusting countries.

Conclusion

The policies of adjustment in Africa reinforce authoritarian and repressive tendencies in the state's mode of dealing with organized interests in society. This trend, which applies equally to both the failures and apparent success stories of adjustment in Africa, has implied severe derogations not only from economic and social rights but also from political and civil rights. In the case of Nigeria and Guinea, popular opposition to economic and social difficulties imposed by adjustment reforms reinforced the already evident authoritarian tendencies of the ruling military regimes. In Nigeria, where the Babangida regime had pledged itself to promoting human rights, adjustment created a crisis of legitimacy to which the regime responded with repression, abandoning its declared position on human rights. In Ghana, the acclaimed success of structural adjustment did not preclude resorting to repression and authoritarian rule. The success of adjustment empowered the state but not civil society.

The World Bank has responded to these and other limitations of adjustment policies by broadly incorporating the need for "good governance and accountability" into its policy agenda. However, this approach falls dismally short of addressing the human rights issues associated with the authoritarian character of adjustment implementation in Africa. Any serious attempt at promoting an agenda of good governance and popular participation in government must start with a more coherent human rights agenda. To begin with, the focus of adjustment reforms must shift from state macroeconomics to the primary social well-being of the individual. Human beings, with all the rights and freedoms that attach to them, should constitute the focus of all economic reforms and development assistance. Policies that

actively infringe human rights, no matter the transient economic attractions they hold, are invalid and counterproductive. Economic reforms, if they are to achieve any real improvement in the living conditions of people, must be founded on a specific and clearly defined framework of rights and freedoms which states and IFIs should have a legal and moral obligation to respect. Only by working within a coherent human rights agenda can adjusting states and IFIs ensure the legitimacy of adjustment reforms and the broader participation of social groups in their formulation and implementation.

Notes

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¹ World Bank, *Making Adjustment Work for the Poor — Framework for Policy Reform in Africa: A Policy Agenda* (Washington DC, 1988), p. 2. Also see African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program, *The Social Dimensions of Adjustment* (Washington DC, 1990), p. 5.

² World Bank, *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead* (Washington DC, 1994) p. 3.

³ J. Barry Riddell, "Things Fall Apart Again: Structural Adjustment Programmes in Sub Saharan Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30, 1 (1992), pp.57-58.

⁴ See, for example, Marcia Burdette, ed., *Rethinking Structural Adjustment in the 1990s*, (London, 1992); B. K. Campbell and J. Loxley, eds., *Structural Adjustment in Africa* (London, 1989); Andrea Giovanni Cornia, Richard Jolly and Frances Stewart, eds., *Adjustment with a Human Face*, 2 Vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Elaine Zuckerman, *Adjustment Programmes and Social Welfare* (Washington DC, World Bank, 1989); Michael Lipton, *The Poor and the Poorest: Some Interim Findings*, (Washington DC, World Bank, 1988).

⁵ Bjorn Beckman, "Empowerment or Adjustment? The World Bank and the Politics of Structural Adjustment," in Peter Gibbon et al., eds., *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment in Africa. The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa* (Uppsala, 1992), p. 87.

⁶ World Bank Policy Research Report, *Adjustment in Africa, Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead*, p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁸ World Bank Policy Research Report, *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms Results and the Road Ahead*, pp.1 and 58. Several critical studies of this World Bank report have been undertaken by scholars of development economics. One such critique is by Sayre Schatz. He concludes that the evidence in the report fails to support the claim of the World Bank that adjustment macro-economic reforms have promoted economic growth and that on the contrary, there are grounds for a "critical hypothesis" that these reforms have actually impeded economic growth. See Sayre P. Schatz, "Structural Adjustment in Africa: A Failing Grade So Far," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32, (1994), pp.679-692.

⁹ The World Bank has acknowledged the "social cost" of adjustment in several of its publications. In 1988 a Social Dimension of Adjustment Initiative was taken to address the problems of protecting poor and vulnerable groups from bearing undue hardship resulting from structural adjustment and economic reform. See L. Demery, et al., *Understanding the Social Effects of Policy Reform. A World Bank Study*, (Washington DC, 1991) and C. Grootaert, "The Evolution of Welfare and Poverty under Structural Change and Economic Recession in Cote d' Ivoire, 1985-1988," Policy Research Working Paper 1078, World Bank, (Washington DC, 1993).

¹⁰ Kola Adesina, "The Debt Trap," *West Africa*, August 2-8, 1993, p. 1337.

¹¹ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 2, 1984, 4, p. 7275. Also see Jane Carroll, "Tanzanian Economy," in *Africa South of the Sahara*, (London, 1985), p. 956.

¹² Adebayo Adedeji, Sidig Rasheed and Melody Morrison, eds., *The Human Dimension of Africa's Persistent Economic Crisis* (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1990).

¹³ UN ECA, *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment*

Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP), Nairobi, 1989. Cited in Sigrun Skogly, "Human Rights and Economic Efficiency: The Relationship between the Social Cost of Adjustment and Human Rights Protection," in Peter Baer et al., eds., *Human Rights in Developing Countries* (Oslo, 1994), p. 47.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolution. UN GAOR, 45th Session, Agenda items 12, 82, UN Doc. A/45/427 (1990).

¹⁵ While adjustment programs are not strictly speaking imposed, African debtor countries are often left with no alternative but to accept them, if only as a means of getting access to additional donor funds.

¹⁶ The authoritarianism of IFIs and the West towards African states has been given prominence by the former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. In 1985 he remarked that "The developed countries have a very large measure of control over the world economy. They act as a group and make decisions which they see as being their own interests... The IMF has become largely an institution for economic and ideological control of poor countries by rich ones," Julius Nyerere, "Africa and the Debt Crisis," *African Affairs*, 84, 337 (1995) pp.493-494.

¹⁷ For example, Y. Bagura, "Structural Adjustment and the Political Question," *Review of African Political Economy*, 37 (1986); B. Campbell, "Structural Adjustment and Repression in Africa," Paper at the African Studies Association Conference, Atlanta, 1989; E. Hutchful, "The Crisis of the International Division of Labor: Authoritarianism and the Transition to Free Market Economies in Africa," *Africa Development*, 12, 2 (1987).

¹⁸ These arguments have been put forward by several scholars. See, for example, T. M. Callaghy, "Towards State Capability and Embedded Liberalism in the Third World: Lessons for Adjustment," in J. M. Nelson, ed., *Fragile Coalitions: The Politics of Economic Adjustment*, (London, 1989); D. Lal, *The Poverty of Development Economics*, (London, 1983); and Peter Gibbon, "Structural Adjustment and Pressures Towards Multipartyism in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Peter Gibbon et al., eds., *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa*, (Uppsala, 1992), pp.127-168.

¹⁹ Yusuf Bagura and Peter Gibbon, "Adjustment, Authoritarianism and Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. An Introduction to Some Conceptual and Empirical Issues," in Peter Gibbon, ed., *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment*, p. 17.

²⁰ See John Rusk, "Structures of Neo-Colonialism: The African Context of Human Rights," *Africa Today*, 33, 4, (1986).

²¹ Claude Ake in Julius Ihonvbere, ed., *The Political Economy of Crisis and Underdevelopment in Africa: Selected Works of Claude Ake*, (Lagos, 1989), p.62.

²² The Ife Collective (a group of scholars based at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria), *The Guardian* (Nigeria), June 29, 1989, p. 15. Quoted in Pita Ogaba Agbese, "The State versus Human Rights Advocates in Africa," in Eileen McCarthy-Arnolds, et al., eds., *Africa, Human Rights and the Global System*, (London, 1994), p.160.

²³ E. Hansen, "The State and Popular Struggles in Ghana," in P. Anyang' Nyong'o, ed., *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*, (London, 1987).

²⁴ Bjorn Beckman, "Empowerment or Repression? The World Bank and the Politics of Adjustment," in Peter Gibbon et al., eds., *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment, The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa*, (Uppsala, 1992), p. 94.

²⁵ These arguments of Bjorn Beckman, in "Empowerment or Repression," are summarized in Yusuf Bagura and Peter Gibbon, "Adjustment, Authoritarianism and Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa," op. cit., pp.33-34.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Centre for Development Research, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Structural Adjustment in Africa, A Survey of the Experiment*, (Copenhagen, 1995), p. 19. The countries examined in this study are Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

²⁸ World Bank, *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead*, (New York, 1994), pp.429-430.

²⁹ In Nigeria, the government inaugurated a series of public debates on whether the country should opt for an IMF loan to alleviate the country's economic crisis. These debates resulted in a unanimous rejection of the IMF loan and its conditionalities.

³⁰ Goran Hyden, "State and Nation Under Stress," in *Recovery in Africa: A Challenge for Development Cooperation in the 1990s*, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (Stockholm, 1988), *passim*.

³¹ These countries included, as of 1989, Zaire, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra

Leone, Gabon, Zambia, Togo, Burkina Faso and Kenya. Eight of these countries had also proceeded to hold multi party elections.

³² Pita Ogaba Agbese, "The State versus Human Rights Advocates in Africa: The Case of Nigeria," in Eileen McCarthy-Arnolds, et al., eds., *Africa, Human Rights and the Global System*, pp.147-148.

³³ See A. Olukoshi, "The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria," Paper presented to the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Africa Workshop, (Uppsala, April, 1991).

³⁴ Paul Mosely, "Policy Making Without Facts: A Note on the Assessment of Structural Policies in Nigeria, 1985-1990," *African Affairs*, 91, 363, (1992), p. 230.

³⁵ Federal Government of Nigeria, *The National Economic Recovery Program: Emancipation of a Nation*, (Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, 1989), pp.6-9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Quoted in Pita Ogaba Agbese, "The State versus Human Rights Advocates in Africa," in Eileen McCarthy-Arnolds et al., eds., *Africa, Human Rights and the Global System*, p. 151.

³⁸ Peter Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation: the Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34, 1 (1996), p. 85.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "The Crackdown," *Newswatch* (Nigeria), 13, July 3, 1989, pp.9-15.

⁴¹ Many of the "gains of SAP," which the government held out as representing the success of the program in Nigeria, actually accrued to state elites within specific sections of the public and private sectors. The creation of a number of institutions such as the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure, the People and Community Banks and the Better Life for Rural Women Program as part of the broad program of adjustment became an avenue for political patronage. Economic restructuring furnished powerful state officials with a measure of control over emerging markets, providing new opportunities for corruption. Speculative pricing in the cocoa market provided a windfall for agro industrial exporters. The privatization and liberalization of banks led to a boom in the banking sector and attracted a new class of investors in retired senior civil servants and retired military officers. For a detailed discourse of the social inequities of SAP in Nigeria, see Julius Ihonvbere, "Economic Crisis, Structural Adjustment and Social Crisis in Nigeria," *World Development*, 21, 1 (1993), pp.145-149.

⁴² Section 1(b) of the PNDC Law 42 promulgated on February 18, 1983.

⁴³ Jeff Haynes, "Human Rights and Democracy in Ghana: The Record of the Rawlings' Regime," *African Affairs*, 90 (1991), p. 410.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discourse on the ideological and policy changes of the Rawlings regime, see Richard Jeffries, "Ghana: The Political Economy of Personal Rule" in Donald B Cruise O'Brien et al., *Contemporary African Affairs*, (Cambridge, 1989).

⁴⁵ Linda Van Buren, "Ghana's Economy" in *Africa South of Sahara 1998*, (London, 1998), p. 496.

⁴⁶ See E. Gyiamah-Boadi, "Associational Life, Civil Society and Democratization in Ghana," in John Harbeson et al., eds., *Civil Society and the State in Africa*, (London, 1994), *passim*...

⁴⁷ Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, "Structural Adjustment Programs and the Perpetuating of Poverty and Underdevelopment in Africa: Ghana's Experiences," *Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives and Area Studies*, 17, 1 and 2 (1998), pp.32-35.

⁴⁸ E. Gyiamah-Boadi, "Associational Life, Civil Society and Democratization in Ghana," in John Harbeson et al., eds., *Civil Society*, p. 141.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ World Bank, *Guinea: Conditions for Economic Growth. A Country Economic Memorandum*, (Washington DC, 1984).

⁵¹ Bonnie Campbell and Jennifer Clapp, "Guinea's Economic Performance Under Structural Adjustment," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33, 3 (1995).

⁵² See, for example, Sigrun Skogly, "Human Rights and Economic Efficiency: The Relationship between Social Cost of Adjustment and Human Rights Protection," in Peter Baer et al., eds., *Human Rights in Developing Countries*, (Oslo, 1994).

⁵³ This apparent shift in World Bank policy is well articulated in its document, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long Term Perspective Study*, (Washington DC, 1989).

⁵⁴ World Bank, *Managing Development: The Governance Dimension* — A

Discussion Paper, (Washington DC, 1991), pp.ii-iii.

⁵⁵ The World Bank's position on these political themes is well articulated in its document, *Sub Saharan Africa. From Crises to Sustainable Growth*, pp.61 and 193.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* pp.9, 30 and 192.

⁵⁷ See John Toye, "Interest Group Politics and the Implementation of Adjustment Policies in Sub Saharan Africa" and Bjorn Beckman, "Empowerment or Repression: The World Bank and the Politics of African Adjustment," in Peter Gibbon et al., eds., *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa*, (Uppsala, 1992).

⁵⁸ See articles 55 of the ICESCR which emphasizes the need for the creation of conditions of stability and well being which are necessary for the peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on the principle of equal rights.

⁵⁹ *General Comment of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, No. 2, 1990, p. 87.