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LESSONS FROM THE FIELD / SOUTHERN VOICES:

Localizing African Structural Transformation: Voicing Lessons from Madagascar

By Olivia K. Lwabukuna & Nicasius Check Achu // Thursday, September 8, 2016

The 2009 uprising in Madagascar that led to the overthrow of President Marc Ravalomanana and the subsequent intervention of the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) shook Madagascar to its core. The political crisis, which began with tensions and protests, culminated in violence against the opposition, a Malagasy military intervention, and the ousting of the president. President Ravalomanana's removal was followed by an AU and SADC intervention to mediate and resolve the conflict.

This dialogic and political intervention by the AU and SADC, while well intended, was not well received by all parties to the conflict because it lacked local credibility and inclusivity. The mediation's failure to comprehend the extent of the crisis, or opposition, locally stalled the process and almost resulted in a deadlock. There was also no coherent or harmonized position from the international actors involved in the mediation until after the appointment of former Mozambican president, Joaquim Chissano, as chief mediator. To date, weak governance systems and the historical lack of an inclusive, participatory approach to development, coupled with elitist AU and SADC regional responses, have complicated recovery from the crisis. Failure to set up appropriate social policies tailored to address the impact of the recurrent crisis on the vulnerable, or weaknesses in the policies that did exist, have also contributed immensely to exacerbating the consequences of the crisis.

The significance of local voices

The significance of local voices in reversing this trend cannot be overemphasized and the apparent absence of these same voices after the 'third wave' of democratization of the continent is perhaps disappointing. Civil society organizations, youth groups, women's associations, and special interest groups including climate change mitigation practitioners, democracy advancement groups, and health and wellness groups are important sources of solutions. They work collectively for the advancement of society in order to identify appropriate measures for mitigating limitations to a just society.

At the end of 2015, a project was undertaken in Antananarivo, Madagascar to gather information on the role of local voices within the African structural transformation paradigm. It achieved this by identifying specific lessons from Madagascar's approach to the resolution of its crisis. The project included evaluating and gathering information on the survival and resilience mechanisms employed by communities and civil society responses, as well as the government's role in resolving issues underlying the crisis. It employed a multidisciplinary approach to engage with and interrogate these factors.

Madagascar's situation was akin to many other African cases, where the legacy of colonialism combined with bad governance to create a political crisis that was eventually borne by the larger population. Madagascar's crisis, following the pattern, had to be resolved by external actors. This raises the question of whether local populations, which actually bear the brunt of these crises, are involved in making decisions as to how post-crisis countries will be governed, and if so, what their views toward the future would be. The project's fundamental queries were informed by this understanding and included: Is the absence of local voices a basis for the stagnated development project on the continent, and specifically in Madagascar? Where are local actors in the drive toward African solutions to African developmental challenges? Where are local actors when the international community militarily intervenes on the continent? Why have most external political and military interventions failed? Could the outcome of these interventions have been different if local voices were solicited? What impact do these political crises and unsuccessful interventions have on the vulnerable in African society?

The all-encompassing theme of '**Localizing African Structural Transformation'** sought to:

1. Assess the role of local voices with an emphasis on the concept of Ubuntu[1] in the resolution of inter-community conflict on the island.
2. Assess the place of the local voices paradigm in the midst of 'foreign' intervention on the African continent, and specifically in Madagascar
3. Assess governance and legal parameters permitting African and global multilateral intervention in Madagascar's internal conflict, and Madagascar's implementing structures.
4. Assess the impact of violent and low intensity conflicts on human security, especially on women and children, and establish government involvement and support towards providing basic social services for the vulnerable.
5. Assess South Africa's role in fostering African structural transformation by resolving the myriad of conflicts that have been the hallmark of Madagascar's development trajectory since its independence from France in 1960.

As such the project gathered information on contributions and impacts of the social-political history of Madagascar on the current state of affairs; intercommunity discourses on the new path to development in Madagascar; the role of governance, specifically legal and policy mechanisms in the creation and resolution of the crisis; implications of the crisis and social-political structures leading to the crisis, on the

vulnerable part of the Malagasy population; and appraised the role of external actors, including neighbouring and regional actors such as South Africa, SADC, and the AU.

Preliminary findings

- Madagascar lacked an inclusive participatory approach to development thinking prior to the 2009 political upheavals. Its governance structures did not respond to local realities in building peace and confidence amongst local communities.
- Local peacebuilding, social cohesion and development frameworks such as the Dina[2] and Fihavanana[3] had collapsed, paving the way for a protracted and knee-jerk approach to peace and nation-building initiatives.
- The crisis disproportionately impacted women and children, significantly increasing orphaned and street children due to unemployment and land loss for women, broken family structures, maternal deaths, and prostitution.

- Challenges and opportunities were created by the conflict, including a need for investment to reconstruct and develop the country.

There is indication that the recurring crises in Madagascar are rooted in political, social, and colonial legacies, and exacerbated by poverty and political manipulation . Contrary to popular belief, and assumptions , SADC, the African Union played a role which has little recognition. By simply engaging with the symptoms to the crisis, their roles almost seem redundant in light of the contextual dynamics. In fact Madagascar seems more inclined to relate to, and rely culturally, socially and politically on Indian Ocean and Francophonie regional organizations, than on SADC or the African Union.[4] This makes sense for an island that has the closer ties both historically and politically to France, Asia, and fellow Indian Ocean island states than mainland Africa. French socioeconomic and political influence actually calls for France's incremental role in peacebuilding, though mindful of Malagasy voices.

Additionally, contrary to expectations on the role of international legal orders in crises resolution and the important roles assigned to legal systems domestically, the law has incidentally failed to provide refuge or order as expected. The legal system in Madagascar is in disorder, distrusted by many and used mostly as a tool of power and political maneuverings. It is not regarded as a source of protection for the average Malagasy, and it does not seem to provide any form of comfort or hope for honest conflict resolution. Corruption, which is highly embedded in Madagascar structures, has negated any presumption of legal impartiality, or the law being a justice or social transformation tool. Investments of any sort in Madagascar must be cognizant of institutional corruption as a risk factor.

Withering a fragile peace?

Madagascar, like any other African state that has endured periods of instability and historical manipulation, is fragile. Its institutions are critically underfunded, understaffed, and urgently in need of strong management and governance. Additionally, as a country in transition, Madagascar still relies heavily on international aid and has for a long time been classified as a humanitarian-aid-receiving state. This has contributed to many gaps in institutional governance and accountability, including failure to account for funds, politicization and personalization of public institutions, and loss of confidence in public institutions and the government, which has create apathy and diminished calls for accountability and transparency. The large presence of donor and humanitarian support has, to a large extent, shifted responsibility for services from government to international agencies. This is not good for accountability because both citizens and government seem to now expect these third parties to provide services.

Lastly, the Malagasy psyche has been demoralized by continuous cycles of low intensity instability, economic and environmental crises, cultural and educational barriers, and political impunity, which has further heightened apathy.

The lack of inclusive participatory approaches to development processes, political impunity, and a total disregard for accountability can breed democratic decay and stagnated development projects. Madagascar presents a lesson for other African states: citizen engagement is what will sustain the post-colonial state as a vehicle for development on the continent. Madagascar proves there can be no democratic development if citizenship and civic engagement is discouraged. It is the perfect example of apathy, fatigue, and political dysfunction in post-colonial Africa, but it also presents an opportunity to rebuild if local voices are consulted.

Proceedings from this project will be available through forthcoming HSRC policy briefs and journal articles.

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1: An ethical philosophical worldview rooted in Southern Africa representing virtue-based humanity

2: Social codes

3: Fihavanana encompasses the Malagasy concept of kinship, hospitality, friendship, and goodwill between and among humans and/or other beings, including the spiritual. It is highly similar to the Ubuntu concept of human harmony and solidarity in co-existence (social cohesion).

4: In terms of economic relations, cultural exchange, investor presence, diplomatic relations, and so forth, the Francophonie and Indian Ocean presence is more notable than that of SADC.

Photo: The streets of Antananarivo, Madagascar. Photo by Maurits Vermeulen, via Flickr. Creative Commons.

Topics: Lessons from the Field, Peacebuilding, Development and the New Economic Paradigm, Southern Voices

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