

DEVELOPMENT MADE EASY

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Africa is in serious need of economic *development*, defined as the improvement in the quality of life of all people, as opposed to economic *growth*, which is an increase in income, usually for only a privileged few. Economic development is also a topic that raises much debate and discussion all around the world. A recent Google web search revealed over 97 million sites to visit for news, information, or discussion of the term “economic development” whereas “George W. Bush” yielded “only” 53 million, “Bill Gates” 13 million, and “Queen Victoria” a “mere” 2 million! Why then, if economic development is so enthusiastically talked about and so popular, is it so elusive and hard to realise in most African states, villages, and households? How can it be that all the resources committed to this end and all the people dedicated to this task seemingly cannot resolve the dilemma of non-development? It makes me think of the story that all the kings’ men could not fix Humpty Dumpty after his famous falling off the wall.

The answers to these questions are probably as plentiful as there are people contemplating them. There are no quick fixes nor any ready-made solutions or recipes to follow; the challenge is multi-faceted and complex. A person trapped in the cycle of under-development and non-development cannot rely on the authorities and analysts to come to his rescue, waving some kind of magical wand to remove poverty and set him/her on the high road to prosperity. Elected and appointed authorities officials and indeed all those in positions of intellectual, political, or financial power must not deny or neglect their responsibility to combat poverty and work towards development and a just economic system for all. But sound economic development can and should start at home, at the local, grassroots level, by and through people with vision, courage, and tenacity.

The household, which is simultaneously the heart and engine of any community, culture, or area’s *social capital*, should be committed not to dumbly succumb to outward conditions or driving forces. The wide road to self-destruction passes through a broken spirit. The narrow path to self-realisation and plenitude follows and grows through hope, and self-help, and

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anticipating both dangers and opportunities. Put another way, the household holds the key – *no, it is the key* - to durable local economic development, and, in Africa, and this leads us to focus squarely on the role of women. It is the women of Africa who keep the continent a hopeful and hospitable place. It is they who, despite extremely adverse conditions, manage to feed, clothe, care for, and school the next generation. And the men in Africa? Where are they? Sad to say, probably at the pub or shebeen. One day, the men will have to stand up and be counted. They will have to help make Africa work, and that in the marketplace. Trade, not aid, will enable the revitalisation of the economy, and it starts small, perhaps even very small. More important than the size of a business is the mindset of self-worth and self-sufficiency, of the people who run it and work for it, and the social and cultural context in which it operates – the collective mindset and worldview.

If we agree that all turnkey initiatives to sound economic development in rural Africa have to work with, and build on the household, as a community, collectively, what are the ingredients to enable the household to turn philosophical development ideals into reality? Given Africa's rural and agricultural orientation and advantages it seems clear that first of all *land*, or *natural capital*, and where needed, the *restoration of the land* is the foundation upon which we must build, and secondly that of food, water, energy and income security, which we will call the pillars of economic development. Thirdly, the land and these four pillars must be considered together, as forming part of a system bonded together with we might call *social capital*.

Natural and social capital and the restoration thereof

Natural capital is a metaphor introduced some 15 years ago (Costanza and Daly, 1992) and increasingly used to refer to the stocks of natural resources (such as forests, dams, mineral deposits, etc.) from which natural goods and services (such a food, fiber, jewels, etc.) flows. The restoration of natural capital (RNC) refers to the idea that faced with dwindling reserves – in Africa, and indeed just about everywhere – people can actually replenish natural capital stocks (and thereby the services or flows) and improve long-term human wellbeing. RNC therefore integrates economics and ecology in a manner that benefits people and at the same time improves the quality of the natural environment that sustains them.

As a corollary to natural capital, *social capital* is defined as the sum of the institutions, relationships, social networks, and shared cultural beliefs and traditions that promote mutual

trust within a community. A huge amount of social capital has been lost in Africa. But can it be restored? I argue that the answer is yes and, what's more, that without restoring social capital, there is little hope of restoring natural capital since it is the social capital that acts as the glue binding the pillars of development together. We can actually view economic development with the help of another metaphor, namely that of a house. Natural capital is the foundation, the pillars are food, water, energy, and income security, and the roof thereof is the social capital that protects, harnesses, and provides the final finishing flourish to the house.

Now let's go back and look at these ideas in more detail. The primary focus, the foundation, of the development house is the restoration and maintenance of natural capital. This implies caring for our land. The land is our basic resource; we derive all our livelihood needs from it. This applies equally to those in cities, those on large-scale commercial farms, or those in small rural villages. Once the land has become degraded, the development of the livelihood of the people who depend on it is seriously compromised. Many of southern Africa's rural areas are heavily degraded due to a variety of reasons. The restoration of natural capital aims at, while restoring the land, removing the pressures that caused the degradation in the first place. A restored land not only improves the productive capacity of the land, it also offers unique ecosystem goods and services essential for the farming community, such as improved water quality and water flow regulation, climate change amelioration and improved biodiversity to combat the outbreak of pests and other diseases. It is not impossible to envision a national and regional restoration project as a public works endeavour together with private concerns. Under such a scenario, restoration could employ many thousands of people while "selling" these invaluable ecosystem goods and services to those living on commercial farms and in cities, thereby contributing to income security. But should the development of the other pillars be neglected while we wait for the restoration of the land? No! They have to be considered simultaneously and in an integrated way for each individual community and village.

The restoration of land, food, water, and energy security is, interlinked; ultimately, each is a prerequisite and part of the solution for each of the others. Much of the land degradation, which reduces land productivity and hence endangers food security, is a result of the uncontrolled use of fuelwood, and overgrazing, and wrong fire management practices. This affects the availability and quality of water. Restoring the land, which improves the land productivity, reduces the need for over-stocking, and - combined with energy alternatives,

improves the vegetative ground cover, thus improving the quality and regularity of surface water flow. Simple and inexpensive interventions include the production and use of biogas from cattle manure as safe, affordable (or free), and sustainable source of energy, and, as a secondary by-product a nitrogen-rich bioslurry that has high fertilizer value. Combine this energy and fertilizer-producing technology with water harvesting techniques, and it is possible to run food gardens even in some of the most adverse climatic conditions! In such a way, through integrative thinking, the application of cheap technologies can make a huge contribution to improved and sustainable livelihoods. These pillars determine the quality of life and self-esteem, and that in turn is essential for people to be able to participate in the economy at a higher level.

Economic development, though it can and should be considered and contemplated in the highest of offices, should work where the people are. Technologies exist. Does the will to act exist?

Key References

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Key Websites to consult

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<http://www.naturalvaluation.org>

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