Governance for Development in Africa: Solving Collective Action Problems

By David Booth, Diana Cammack

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Drawing on in-depth empirical research spanning a number of countries in Africa, Booth and McCormick's path-breaking book offers both an accessible overview of issues surrounding governance for development on the continent, whilst also offering a bold new alternative. In doing so, they controversially argue that externally imposed 'good governance' approaches make unrealistic assumptions about the choices leaders and officials are, in practice, able to make. As a result, reform initiatives and assistance programmes supported by donors regularly fail, while ignoring the potential for addressing the causes rather than the symptoms of this situation. In reality, the authors show, anti-developmental behaviours stem from unresolved - yet in principle soluble - 'collective-action problems'.

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Editorial Review

Review

'This is a both provocative and unique book about the problems facing development policies. Based on very impressive field work, it successfully challenges the dominant theoretical models that have been guiding development policies for more than a decade. The result is a new model called "governance that works", which successfully combines realism with the most advanced theoretical approaches in this field of research. This book should be read by everyone interested in international aid and development policy.' Bo Rothstein, University of Gothenburg 'Booth and Cammack ask why so many development efforts in Africa have failed and give a thought-provoking and highly policy-relevant answer to this question. Demonstrating how development is a thoroughly political process, involving collective action, they turn contemporary policy thinking on its head and pave the way for a more well-informed discussion about how progress can be achieved.' Anna Persson, University of Gothenburg 'This book has a powerful message for policymakers struggling to improve public goods provision in low-income countries. Instead of trying to change demand and supply-side relationships, they should explore the way local institutions at all levels affect the ability of people to find solutions to collective action problems - and how external interventions can support or undermine them.' Sue Unsworth, Department for International Development, UK 'Provocative and detailed, Booth and Cammack's book provides a refreshing challenge to the mainstream good-governance agenda. With new and strong empirical evidence, they highlight the fundamental collective action nature of local developmental governance, in a way that is likely to fundamentally challenge scholars, donors and policy-makers, forcing us to re-evaluate our current approaches to actors and institutions in development.' Pierre Englebert, Pomona College 'Governance for Development in Africa is a brilliant, quietly radical work that transforms the way we think about development. This slim, elegant volume distils an enormous body of original research to analyse why some African political regimes actually manage on the ground to solve problems such as reducing maternal mortality or providing clean water. By examining African governance close up, Booth and Cammack demonstrate that dysfunctional African regimes can become developmental ones: not by following the usual policy nostrums to look and act more like modern, Western governance systems, but by adapting features of their own political systems to new tasks. It is deeply realistic in its view of African governance, and yet it is one of the most optimistic views of the possibilities of development that I have seen. It is indispensable for anyone who cares about African societies, but also for theorists of development anywhere.' Ann Swidler, University of California

About the Author

David Booth is a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute. Prior to this, he was a university academic at Hull and Swansea, latterly as Professor of Development Studies. He has been editor of the journal Development Policy Review (2000-09) and Director of the Africa Power and Politics Programme (2007-12). He now coordinates a joint project on Developmental Regimes in Africa while also contributing to training courses in applied political economy analysis for development agencies worldwide. David's publications include Rethinking Social Development (1994), Fighting Poverty in Africa: Are PRSPs Making a Difference? (2003), Good Governance, Aid Modalities and Poverty Reduction (2008), Working with the Grain? Rethinking African Governance (2011) and Development as a Collective Action Problem (2012). He has authored numerous journal articles, ODI papers and blogs in related fields.

Diana Cammack is a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute. She obtained her PhD at the University of California, and specialised in South African history. As a SSRC-MacArthur fellow on Peace

and Security in a Changing World she retrained at Oxford University in the early 1990s in human rights and the politics of aid. Diana led the politics and governance team at the Overseas Development Institute for three years and between 2008-12 she headed the Local Governance and Leadership stream of the Africa Power and Politics Programme. She has worked as a consultant researcher in sub-Saharan Africa for three decades. In recent years she has specialised in political economy studies, with a focus on the link between politics and development in neopatrimonial and fragile states.

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