

Godfrey Kanyenze, Herbert Jauch, Alice D. Kanengoni, Masego Madzwamuse, and Deprose Muchena (eds) (2017), *Towards Democratic Developmental States in Southern Africa*, Harare: Weaver Press, ISBN 9781779223074, xviii+361 pp.

This volume is based on a project initiated in 2013 and funded by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). Its contributions come from scholars and activists in the subregion. Guided by an ethics of advocacy for social justice and gender equality, they examine the constraints and challenges of six Southern African countries. The case studies include “three countries with a functional state with planning, policy and resource capacity (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa); a democratic but weak agrarian economy (Malawi); and two states facing systemic crises (Angola and Zimbabwe)” (32). Interestingly, in the local discourses concerning economic policy the notion of the developmental state has been hitherto mainly limited to a South African debate among those with governing responsibilities.

Not surprisingly, all case studies acknowledge that there is a long road ahead. In all cases, ordinary people would be much better off if a developmental state benefitting the public interest and not just a tiny elite were to flourish. This even includes Botswana, which is rightly identified as the most advanced in terms of “good governance” but displays a growing tendency towards authoritarian political dominance. Democracy, however, as the volume repeatedly points out, is among the major contributing factors to the strengthening of a developmental state in local contexts.

The first chapter sets the agenda by engaging with the conceptual framework of the developmental state. Stressing that capable states “are rooted in the attainment of conditions of equality and equity during the post-colonial period,” the chapter shows that “income equality is positively associated with the likelihood of having a ‘developmental state’” (34). As has been done so often before, it uses the experiences of the “Asian Tigers” as a reference point. While the Asian Tigers certainly have some general lessons to offer, their transferability to Southern African realities is limited because, at the very least, the notion of a democratic developmental state serves as the aspired-to goal and the importance of the role of democracy and participation in a developmental state is frequently emphasised in the chapters that follow. The chapter acknowledges this limitation but avoids engaging with some of the specific features in more detail. A word or two on the cultural differences and the predatory nature of the “politics of the belly” all too often emerging in African governments might have been somewhat justified.

Overall, however, the summary overview offers some relevant pointers, such as: “The basis of the effectiveness of the developmental state was its ability to combine state autonomy and embeddedness in a mutually reinforcing manner, safeguarding the state from capture by particular interests that would undermine its internal coherence and ability to interact with its economic partners” (11).

While the conclusion makes a short reference to the work of economic historians – “such a strategy was also used by the developed countries at the early stages of their development” (344) – this insight could have served as an impetus to add some cross-references to experiences such as the social contracts guiding the Nordic countries, elevating Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland from the bottom of Western European economies in the early twentieth century in terms of governance and social welfare to the top ranks today. The role of a mediating state promoting social contracts and uplifting the population from poverty to relative general wealth and prosperity could offer lessons as relevant as those of the Asian Tigers. After all, the very high levels of inequality are rightly identified as one of the key obstacles to promote and create a truly democratic developmental state in these Southern African societies, which rank among the countries with the highest income discrepancies worldwide. Quoting Carin Jämtin, the former Swedish minister for International Development Cooperation, now head of Sida, the authors share an important reminder: “Prosperity that is shared is not only morally right, it also gives people a chance to lift themselves out of poverty, creates legitimacy for responsible economic policies and can have an enhancing effect on long-term growth and prosperity” (341–342, fn. 1). As they stress, with reference to the Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy, coherence and cohesiveness within a state apparatus enhance an alliance between public and private interests “that insulated the bureaucracy from capture” (343).

While the second chapter engages with the lack of gender equality as another contributing factor to the challenges ahead, the following six case studies offer little comfort: South Africa’s shift towards neo-liberal policy and state capture offers sobering insights into a “dream deferred.” Botswana’s relative success story has of late been tarnished by an increasingly authoritarian tendency and shows signs of a growing mistrust in governance along with higher income discrepancies, while Namibia remains a “rich country with poor people.” Zimbabwe’s dramatic decline under Mugabe’s rule ended in an anti-development gridlock, which benefitted the self-enrichment of the few in control over the government and the military. Angola’s fat years of oil revenue in a similar way benefitted

foremost the ruling family clan while the ordinary population remained without benefit. Malawi's fragile agrarian economy continues to lack inclusivity amidst high levels of poverty. Unfortunately, despite the variety of specific socio-economic and political features, all cases show a lack of structural transformation: "Southern African states face a formidable challenge of making economic growth job-rich and inclusive, while at the same time redistributing wealth and access to resources, and safeguarding the natural environment" (355). Fundamental changes in political cultures as well as gender relations remain missing ingredients in the move towards a democratic developmental state, which would benefit not only a majority of people but also the legitimacy of their governments. The volume offers valuable insights into the obstacles that pave the long road still ahead. Published by the Zimbabwean Weaver Press, one might recommend that the new government under Emmerson Mnangagwa take note of the insights presented to take measures to ensure that the dramatic economic decline – with its dehumanising consequences for the vast majority of Zimbabweans – finally comes to an end.

■ Henning Melber