

POLITICS

Adrien M. Ratsimbaharison. *The Failure of the United Nations Development Programs for Africa*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America. 2003. xiii + 154 pp. Figures. Tables. Bibliography. Index. \$29.00. Paper.

This book is a revised version of a Ph.D. dissertation in which the author purports to explain what he regards as the failure of two United Nations development programs for Africa: the United Nations Program of Action for African Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD), introduced in 1986, and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa (UNNADAF), introduced in 1991.

The first four chapters are devoted to arguing that the two programs failed to help Africa out of its economic woes. To give evidence of that failure, the author cites the fact that GDP growth in Africa between 1986 and 1990 did not increase, that the rate of population growth increased, and that per capita GDP therefore fell. If the argument stopped there, I would not object too strongly. However, the book goes on to label the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed on African countries by the Bretton Woods institutions (the IMF and the IBRD), which were in effect before and during the same period, as a success. How does one label the U.N.'s programs a failure and SAPs a success unless one can separate out and attribute different results to each? This is a paradox that the author does not even seem to recognize, much less explain.

Most of the book reads like a dogmatic diatribe against the U.N. and in support of the extreme classical economics paradigm that even the World Bank has recently been backing away from, thanks partly to these U.N. programs. For instance, Ratsimbaharison accuses the U.N. programs of assuming that all African countries have the same economic problems and, therefore, recommending the same prescriptions. Yet there is general agreement that this was the main problem with the orthodox economic theory-based SAPs. It was these that completely disregarded the sociopolitical realities of Africa and prescribed the same pill (privatization, liberalization, belt-tightening, devaluation, etc.) for all countries.

In addition, the book strongly implies that the U.N. programs should have disregarded African voices. For example, one of its main criticisms of the U.N. programs is that they took African *responsiveness* too much into account, meaning that the sociopolitical priorities of Africans should have been ignored, as they indeed were by SAPs. Rather curiously, the author goes on to disparage the attempts by African countries to foster economic growth through economic cooperation, because "African... integration schemes... [have not] been as successful as the European Economic Community" (54). Yet he does not explain how African countries were made better off by dealing individually with wealthy countries, while different forms of economic integration were being pursued across the globe.

Chapter 5 offers a remarkably strong justification for the fact that Africans were forced to accept whatever the industrialized countries wanted of them. But then Ratsimbaharison completely misses the point that these countries realized, by the middle of the 1980s, that SAPs were not easing their economic troubles. Indeed, Africans regarded SAPs as a way to make them pay their international debts, and nothing more. They tried to use UNPAAERD and the UNNADAF as desperate attempts to resist the irresistible forces that were determined to get every penny that could be squeezed out of them. It is hardly surprising that these schemes failed as development programs, although there is some evidence that they succeeded in convincing the Bretton Woods organizations at least to pay lip service to African priorities. From the African perspective, this was a step in the right direction.

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Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood. *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. London: Routledge, 2003. xi + 194 pp. Index. \$28.95. Paper.

Profiles of political and cultural leaders from Africa and the diaspora are still a largely undeveloped genre. The best examples so far are Robert A. Hill's *Pan-African Biography* (California, 1987), Norbert C. Brockman's *An African Biographical Dictionary* (ABC-CLIO, 1994), and Ralph Uwechue's *Makers of Modern Africa: Profiles in History* (Africa Books, 1996). Volume 3 of the ten-volume *Encyclopedia Africana* project, initiated in 1961 in Ghana under the editorial directorship of W.E.B. Du Bois, was to comprise biographies written by W. Alphaeus Hunton. Unfortunately, that project did not survive the death of its initiators. It eventually was revived by the Harvard University team of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, in a much watered-down and truncated version; the result, the one-volume *Encyclopedia Africana* (Basic Civitas Books, 1999), generally reflects a woeful ignorance of all things African and hardly does justice to the memory of its illustrious initiators. In these circumstances, *Pan-African History* could even be viewed as some sort of rescue operation.

Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, two British-based academics associated with the Black and Asian Studies Association, provide in condensed fashion the profiles of forty major political figures in the history of pan-Africanism, by which they mean "women and men of African descent whose lives and work have been concerned, in some way, with the social and political emancipation of African peoples and those of the African diaspora" (vii). According to them, "Pan-African history... includes chronicling a variety of ideas, activities and movements that celebrated African-