

they converge or diverge in their shared identity as members of the BRICS Forum.

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Governance for Development in Africa: Solving Collective Action Problems

by DAVID BOOTH and DIANA CAMMACK

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This timely book by David Booth and Diana Cammack packs an impressive amount into 139 pages. One of its main achievements is to synthesise key elements of what some have termed the ‘new mainstream’ in development thinking, which calls into question the tired ‘good governance’ agenda that has underpinned much development policy thinking for over two decades. There is more to the book than this, however. It presents a considerable body of empirical academic work emerging from the ‘Africa Power and Politics Programme’ led by the Overseas Development Institute from 2007–12. Thematically, while one eye remains on the question of economic growth (with references to the programme’s other work on this issue), the book is primarily focused on the provision of a range of public goods including maternal health and local security. As such it is admirable in scope, managing to link broader debates on the political drivers of economic development with a focus on local solutions to pressing community challenges.

The strength of the book lies in the concise framing of its core thesis regarding the failure of ‘principal-agent’ modes of thinking about blockages to development, and the superiority of approaches that conceive of these instead as collective action problems. There is a gratifying simplicity in the way that the zeal to reform corruption-ridden bureaucracies and the vogue for ‘active citizenship’ are presented as two sides (the supply-side and demand-side) of the same ‘principal-agent’ coin. Both of these approaches to governance, the authors argue, misguidedly assume benevolent, development-driven principals let down by their (bureaucratic or political) agents. Some caricaturing of these perspectives is forgivable in such a short treatise. The book aptly highlights the role of ‘politically-induced policy incoherence’ in explaining why both approaches tend to fall short. At the same time, sustained attention is devoted to cases of relative success in collective action for development; a commendable feature given the prevalence of negative analyses dedicated primarily to explaining why governance reforms and development programmes don’t work.

Despite these strengths, the argument is not quite fully threaded together. The relationship between principal-agent relations (or indeed state-society relations) and collective action problems, while alluded to, is not adequately explored. Relatedly, there is a lack of in-depth engagement with theories of collective action in the book. Even in a short piece, a little more theoretical depth would be beneficial given that so much is staked on the collective action idea. A further problem is that the analysis of elite collective action successes sits somewhat awkwardly with explanations of successes at a local, community level. The relationship between the two is somewhat unclear, largely because the

empirical comparisons range across micro/macro scales and between very different country contexts at the same time. Much of the more macro-level analysis of successes in overcoming policy incoherence relies on the case of Rwanda. The rapidly expanding critical literature on Rwandan governance, however, is for the most part simply ignored, which renders problematic the explanation of how problem-solving actually occurs in the Rwandan context.

Nevertheless, the overall premises and conclusions of the book are powerful, providing both critical insights and important challenges to policy-makers. Indeed, it is the latter who are both the key audience for the book and the primary target of much of its criticism. The question of what exactly policy-makers should do when armed with this analysis still feels rather underdeveloped, but these authors are certainly not alone in struggling to draw out detailed policy implications from their critique. This text adds further momentum to the growing call for context-sensitive, politically astute development assistance; academics, practitioners and policy-makers alike should read, take note and help to move these important ideas to the next level.

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Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison by PETER GESCHIERE

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Witchcraft has long been a touchy subject in anthropology. While it was quite popular to write about witchcraft during the colonial period, the decades following independence saw this line of inquiry go silent. It became unfashionable to study such 'traditional' themes when there were more exciting, more modern issues at hand. Moreover, witchcraft—as a theme—always risks carrying a sort of pejorative or even racist undercurrent of meaning; it cannot help but evoke the backward, the irrational, the pre-political. This began to change in the 1990s, owing in large part to the work of Peter Geschiere, whose book *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (1997) showed that concepts of the occult are dynamic and changing instead of static and timeless, and that they bear directly on people's experiences of capitalism, politics and the state.

In his newest book Geschiere takes this project a step further, setting out to show that the anxieties that many Africans express through the idiom of witchcraft are not at all unique or 'other'. Once we strip away the trope it becomes clear that witchcraft hinges on a rather general human experience: the disturbing realisation that intimacy is always intrinsically dangerous—that the most threatening aggression comes from within families and among neighbours. In this sense, witchcraft can be read as diagnostic of intimacy, just as intimacy is a handy predictor of witchcraft. From this angle a new set of questions comes into view: What is the nature of intimacy in any given context? To whom does intimacy extend? How is trust negotiated? What are the dangers that lurk therein?

This perspective compels us to rethink some longstanding assumptions about sociality. The classic anthropological view regards the home as a zone of love and trust—a safe haven within a dangerous world. Exchange theory entrenched