

Reviews

Africa Emerges: Consummate Challenges, Abundant Opportunities by

ROBERT I. ROTBERG

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013. 269 pp. \$69.95 (hbk); \$26.95 (pbk)

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The latest instalment in the effervescent literature on Africa's apparent economic turnaround, Robert Rotberg's *Africa Emerges* fails to make a significant contribution to the topic. Although its author intended it to be 'intensely analytical' (p. 4), it is not. Rather, it is at one time or another a litany of empirical observations, a partial survey of existing literature, a regurgitation of the author's own previous work, and a repetitive incantation on the presumed benefits of good leadership and the alleged reform-mindedness of Africa's middle class.

The book counts eleven chapters, each of which – aside from an introductory overview – deals with a specific dimension (challenge or opportunity) of Africa's development. They are: population growth, climate and geography, education, conflict, corruption, infrastructure, mobile telephony, China, governance and leadership. Almost all chapters end with suggestions that better leadership might solve the problems associated with the topic in question, and the last chapter makes a final comprehensive push for that argument, invoking at length the performances of South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Botswana's Seretse Khama.

The book's essential weakness is its lack of overall analytical or theoretical connection, either within or across chapters and themes. Aside from the claim – to which I return below – that leadership matters, no general analytical argument is made. The different topics are not causally discussed, nor are they linked with each other or with the broader sets of incentives, constraints and structures that African rulers might face. Instead, Rotberg recites *ad nauseam* the performance of almost all of sub-Saharan Africa's 49 countries on almost all of the variables he covers. Hence, the reader will know that Kinshasa will number 12 million inhabitants by 2020; that the Central African Republic had more than a thousand cases of human trypanosomiasis in 2009; that Niger has a 75% university attrition rate; that 1 million people died in Angola's civil war; that Botswana is the world's 30th least corrupt state; that Ethiopia's Tekeze dam produces 300 MW; that Senegal's broadband coverage reaches 30% of its population, and so on. But the text provides little in terms of where these patterns come from, how these variables relate to each other and to the broader political economy of the continent, and why successive reform attempts over decades have met with little success in addressing many of the problems discussed.

While it does not offer original analytical insights, the book does review a fair body of existing literature. As a matter of fact, it often reads like a

literature review. As such it might provide a useful starting point for beginner students of these issues. But it does not critically engage with this literature, usually fails to bring in contrasting perspectives, and unduly relies on Rotberg's own previous work, leading this reader at times to question the value added of the present volume.

If the book does make an argument, it is that good leadership leads to development (passim, but especially pp. 189–215). This argument is flawed in several ways. First it is tautological, for how do we know that Khama or Mauritius' Seewoosagur Ramgoolam were good leaders aside from how well their economies performed? Second, it at least implicitly equates good leadership with altruism. But how realistic is it to expect that African rulers (as rulers anywhere else) would seek office in personal abnegation, particularly in a continent where the material returns to controlling the state dwarf that of most other occupations? Third, it belittles the actual quality of leadership of despotic rulers. Mobutu, Moi and Mugabe were/are exceedingly skilful leaders: witness their political longevity against tremendous odds. What needs to be explained is why their pursuit of power and regime consolidation came at the expense of development and public good provision, whereas this was not the case in Botswana and Mauritius. Unfortunately, Rotberg's argument does not dig this deep, merely contrasting 'good' – as in well intentioned – leaders versus 'bad' – as in evil – ones.

The only hint of causality Rotberg provides for explaining leadership quality – and the basis for his hopes that improvements are on the way – is that Africa's rising middle class apparently demands it (e.g., pp. 90, 101, 115, 187). But no evidence is ever offered for this claim. Moreover, Rotberg's taking for granted the significance of Africa's middle class contrasts with some existing estimates. Looking at sub-Saharan Africa alone, there might not be more than 32 million individuals spending between \$10 and \$100 a day, according to the African Development Bank (*Wall Street Journal*, 2.5.2011).

Despite its title, this book is essentially about how, for Africa to sustainably emerge, improved leadership must overcome the remaining obstacles to its development. The wealth of descriptive empirical material will make it worthwhile for beginning students of African development.

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Peacebuilding, Power, and Politics in Africa edited by DEVON CURTIS and GWINYAYI A. DZINESA

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The prospects for and numbers of 'developmental states' in Africa may be expanding but the continent still hosts more fragile or failed states than any other. This timely collection indicates how complex and problematic peacebuilding has become in the run-up to a post-2015 world of development. African agency may be growing but governance for peace and development remains elusive. This magnum opus of 15 chapters and 350 pages indicates ways in which 'liberal peacebuilding' is both deficient and misleading. But because it