Book Review

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Serges Dyoyou Kamga (eds.), The right to development in Africa: Issues, constraints and prospects. Ibadan: Pan African University Press, 2020, 773 pp.

The main focus of the book is the manifestation of the contentious issues of the Right to Development (RTD) as a constitutive feature of the human rights discourse in Africa. In spite of the many noble and comprehensive development initiatives on both, the global level and the continental level, aimed at the development of individuals and societies in Africa, by and large, Africa remains systematically under-developed, especially in comparison to the Global North.

Central to the shared argumentation of the contributions is that on one hand, international law and the United Nations (UN), particularly the Security Council *inter alia* are instrumentalised and politicised. The latter is meant to systematically police Africa and its institutions in order to comply with the so-called international standards, supposedly in the interests of Africa and the international community. Ironically, the so-called international community is deliberately loosely defined, if defined at all, which compounds the challenges of identifying duty-bearers responsible for, and accountable to the beneficiaries of the RTD. On the other hand, the lack of political will to implement and enforce international, continental and regional treaties and agreements, while hiding behind the façade of state sovereignty, is a major challenge for African countries. Admittedly, state sovereignty has not yielded equality of nations, in the view and perspective of most African countries. Several intra-Africa treaties and agreements have collapsed due to a deliberate lack of funding and under-funding from respective governments who are parties to the said treaties, conventions and agreements, for example.

Meanwhile, on the national level, and indistinguishable from the continental level, a lack of political will to implement and enforce treaties, conventions,

agreements and even national constitutions prove to be a challenge. What exacerbates the problem in sovereign domains is that, most governments in Africa are engrossed in corruption and lack institutional infrastructure to support their respective constitutions. As such, corruption is largely responsible for the lack of development as envisioned by RTD in African countries. Some African governments refuse to account to the regional bodies that they are a part of, and they refuse to account to the continental body, the African Union (AU) as well as refuse to account even to their own respective electorate. Further compounding the realisation of the RTD is the politicisation of judiciary systems in various African countries. Some courts in a number of countries are arguably perceived to be enabling various regimes to conceal corruption to their citizens. Therefore, impunity weakens governments' abilities to perform their rightful duties of the RTD.

The Afro-decolonial approach is proposed in this book. This approach hinges on African philosophies such as *Ubuntu* and *Letšema* as well as conventions that are Afrocentric such as gender-justice and gender-mainstreaming. The intimated Afrocentric philosophies and conventions promise greater and sustainable solutions to intra-African trade, interaction (free movement of persons and goods) and connectivity (owing to the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution [4IR]), with a hope to then cascade these down into the respective sovereign domains of Africa. Intra-African trade, for example, is meant to disentangle Africa from the very clutches of modernity's capital and its institutions as encapsulated in the Bretton Woods institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and international law itself.

Knowledge and knowledge-production emerge as key principles to attaining the RTD especially for women and children. There is need for decolonial approaches to knowledge-production and knowledge-dissemination that will counter the commodification of knowledge as endorsed by capitalist orientated colonial establishments. There is need to chart a different pathway to attaining self-actualisation and self-knowledge for Africans. It is equally imperative to consider making accessible decolonial knowledge, including free tertiary education, by Africans for Africa in pursuit of the RTD.

Methodologically, the book largely historicises and situates Africa in relation to the human rights discourse in general, but the RTD in particular. The book juxtaposes African nations with one another, as it simultaneously

juxtaposes Africa with the rest of the world. There is a strong sense of centering Africa and its nations in the narratives of the book. This is commendable as Africa then becomes the centre from which Africans engage the world. There is also a palpable sense of deliberate decolonial approaches and narratives in the book. The African experience, thought, being and perspective is given its due ontological and epistemological space. The book mainly leans towards the qualitative methodology with an exception of one chapter that uses a mixed-methods methodology, albeit in a limited fashion.

Meanwhile, there are three general categories of audiences who would benefit from this book. They are scholars, policy-makers and both, under and post-graduate students. While the general target audience of this book are scholars in the humanities and social sciences in general, this book will particularly find resonance with Law, Journalism, Development Studies, History, Sociology, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations scholars. To add, policy-makers whose interests are to remain current and relevant in their spheres of influence would certainly appreciate this book. Lastly, this book would, no doubt, benefit both, under-graduate and post-graduate students in the humanities, Law and social sciences; however, anyone with an inquiring mind on the machinations of the world would find it accessible in terms of language and depth of content and analyses.

Despite the foregoing narration of accolades in terms of substance and relevance, this book is not immune from gap(s) and limitations which are common to most intellectual productions of this nature. For example, the call for a reformed UN Security Council (UNSC) system is a tired argument. It is highly unlikely for the call to be heard now. It is being deliberately muffled. It is an established fact that Modernity and institutions born of it use the UNSC system to reconfigure the asymmetrical global economic power dynamics that are skewed in favour of itself and the Global North, to the detriment of the Global South and Africa in particular. While this book is not aloof to the challenges of development in Africa, it says very little on a different path way other than adding its voice to the calling for a reformed UNSC system. The book also seemingly and unwittingly endorses institutions such as international law, state sovereignty, and practices that enable global coloniality. While the book promises to be decolonial in its approach, it articulates very little the steps or methods needed to be taken in order for Africa to realise a decolonised (decolonial) world.

The other apparent limitation is that, while the book does not claim to speak authoritatively on all 54 African countries, it is rather limited in that only five African countries are analysed. The five countries in focus are: Cameroun, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Albeit, this observation can be countered by the fact that the authors reflected in the book are made up of a rich mix of African scholars from a lot more African countries than analysed.