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Nicolas van de Walle, Nicole Ball, Vijaya Ramachandran, eds. *Beyond Structural Adjustment: The Institutional Context of African Development.* Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 324 pp. $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-6316-1; $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4039-6317-8.

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The volume under review argues that the continent's economic renewal needs an agenda that moves beyond the rather narrow confines of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and their reform ingredients, and requires the promotion of the region's public institutions. An increase in their efficiency and effectiveness is, it is argued, urgently required. Indeed, the editors advance the argument that economic reform cannot succeed unless those states undergoing reform construct a far improved productive relationship with other institutions that organize and regulate economic relations. For it is within such a milieu that development is understood to take place. The book argues that an emphasis on institutions is increasingly important as the recent "democratization" waves that have ostensibly swept across Africa have brought new actors and interests onto the political stage, which impact upon reform projects in various ways.

The volume thus has chapters on financing development, tax reform, civil service reform, aid effectiveness, governance and the private sector, private investment, the security sector, and the relationship between states and associations. Each chapter seeks to identify the suitable role that various institutions can play in reinvigorating the continent.

The volume fits within a growing literature, which identifies institutional weakness in Africa as a major stumbling block to reform. This ties in with the acknowledgment that an effective and able state, capable of coordinating and spearheading the development process, is urgently required. This might be said to represent the new orthodoxy in some ways.

Yet the volume largely fails to deliver on how an emphasis on institutions is going to help the continent move beyond the "taming of structural adjustment" that many observers have remarked upon. It is dangerous to assume that the reform process has been successful and that we now are in some sort of second stage of reform, where "getting the institutions right" is the next box to be ticked. Even if we remain within the discourse of privatization and liberal prescriptions, Africa has privatized only about 40 percent of its state-owned enterprises. And much of the divestiture has been for smaller, less valuable, often moribund manufacturing, industrial, and service concerns. In fact, of the roughly 2,300 privatizations between 1991 and 2000, only about sixty-six involved higher value, economically important firms. Less than 7 percent of the privatization sales have touched upper-end infrastructure firms. And activity has been concentrated in only a few countries. Of the nine billion dollars raised from 1991 to 2001, a third was generated by a few privatization sales in South Africa. Another third came from sales in Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia,

and Cote d'Ivoire. Proponents of the view that SAPs have brought about wholesale privatization might consider that between them, some twenty-six other African countries had privatized a scant total of only seven hundred million dollars in assets up to 2003.

In other words, African elites have been successful in not only resisting wholesale privatization but have also retained control of those parastatals and state-owned concerns that are of higher value and economically important. This, of course, all makes perfect sense if we are to understand that economic policies and decision-making in Africa is, on the main, based on the need to distribute resources to furnish client networks. Certainly, the interests of the ruling elites systematically diverge from the broader idea of raising the general well-being of the populace. No wonder that Africa's institutions need help. But all this takes place in a context in which, as Van de Walle terms it, a "partial reform syndrome" exists–where symbolic gestures, rhetorical commitments, and promises of change mask and further lubricate the diffusion of largesse and patronage.

Even where the state does liberalize, African states have kept important minority equity stakes in those infrastructure sales that they have allowed. What has been avoided, whatever the critics of SAPs say, is structural reform and policies aimed at broad-based development. This resistance is found in both the economic and political realms. "Big Man" politics has survived the change from one party rule to the multiparty system across the continent. There really has not occurred any fundamental structural change in the way politics operates, although new actors have arrived on the scene. Politics remains an activity where a minority can make significant economic gains for themselves and their clients. Politics still provides easy access to public sector jobs, most of which continue to act as little more than sinecures for prebendarys and rents for the ensconced. State institutions continue to atrophy and the average African continues to miss out.

National development and a broad-based productive economy remain far less a concern to elites within such systems than the continuation of the gainful utilization of institutions and resources for the individual advantage of the ruler and his network of clients. In fact, the bureaucracy has developed its own set of interests (personal survival) and logic within Africa's institutions. This further distorts their role away from the ideal-type rational-bureaucratic model inherent in the type of institutional reforms that the book offers up as a solution to the continent's ills. It is hard to see how all this is relevant when institutions are more akin to a loose set of skeleton institutions, lacking in most capacities, than developmental agencies which are to "spearhead" the continent's rejuvenation. I suppose the key question is how we move from here to there. How can we go from institutions that are really sites for politically connected persons, dependent upon largesse from state elites and acting as predators upon the populace, to developmentally-oriented agencies leading the way forward? The book does not really answer this particular–but important–conundrum.

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