

Hand of hope

for development in southern Africa

The previous article on the WSF expressed disappointment about aspects of its role.

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provides a more optimistic response especially through his interaction with the research project, Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Southern Africa (Ansa).

The recent meeting of the World Social Forum in Nairobi affirmed the historical significance and distinctive institutional character of this transnational social movement. Its social and ideological composition united through a common commitment to fight against the damage done by global capitalism, and expressed through a multiplicity of discourses from feminist, radical religious, neo-anarchist, ecological to "open Marxist" was voiced across numerous panels, workshops and alternative cultural events.

Most striking about this gathering,

sitting for the first time in Africa, was its affirmation as the collective conscience of the world. For Africa, this has emboldened activists to claim the 21st century as Africa's. More importantly, it has strengthened a caterpillar like process, clumsy, haphazard, contradictory and open-ended, that is shaping the next generation of progressive activists required to lead transformation on the continent.

The significance of this cannot be underestimated given the pathologies that have afflicted Africa's ruling elites, reflected in rampant corruption, authoritarianism, megalomania and the betrayal of the national interest in global processes.

The WSF in Africa, unlike other places in the world, is an essential politicising vehicle to renew a post-colonial radicalism. This was starkly displayed when African progressives convened a session to launch the outcomes of a three-year research project for Ansa (Alternatives to Neoliberalism).

Ansa had its roots in the 1990s challenge by Zimbabwe's trade union movement to the consequences of structural adjustment policies. Ansa, championed by the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council (Satucc) and intellectually fathered by the late Professor Guy Mahone, was a historical turning point for progressive struggles in the region and potentially for the continent and should be supported and built on by progressives.

The outcomes of this research project are contained in a 500 page

book entitled *The Search for Sustainable Human Development in Southern Africa*. Many of the chapters provide alternative policy approaches to different aspects of economic and social policy. The emphasis is on getting champions of policy to think beyond a market based paradigm and to think differently about macroeconomics, labour markets, agriculture and rural development, mining, manufacturing, regional integration, public services, health, education and technology development.

These perspectives take as a point of departure an empirical investigation of the failed impacts of neoliberal policy approaches. More importantly, these alternative policy perspectives are underpinned by a gender perspective that places women at the centre of the development process and a recognition that development on the continent has to be informed by the cultural realities and practices of local societies. In other words, Africanised development is embraced, but not a globalised and homogenising Americanism with its self constructed racial and cultural superiority.

However, the Ansa approach is not about providing a basket of policy approaches. It is about demonstrating intellectually rigorous and heterodox approaches to development challenges in the sub-region. Beyond the policy ideas, and at the core of Ansa, is a set of ten principles which it believes should be the basis for approaching any area of development policy and strategy for the sub-region.

The ten principles are grounded in decades of development debate, learning on the continent and searching for indigenised development philosophies. These principles are: (1) development led by the people (2) autocentric development based on domestic human needs and local resources (3) regional integration led from the grassroots (4) selective delinking and negotiated relinking (5) alternative science and technology (6) national, regional and global progressive alliances (7) redistribution to empower the non-formal sectors (8) gender rights as the basis of development (9) education for sustainable human development and (10) a dynamic, participatory and radical democracy.

Recognition of the importance of Ansa shatters an almost 17 year deafening continental silence about alternative development paths for the continent. The attempt to provide radical African solutions to Africa's problems was defeated by 1990. The various left wing projects such as African socialism (Ghana and Tanzania) and scientific socialism (Angola and Mozambique) had failed on the continent for complex internal reasons, but most importantly because of external factors tied into the Cold War. Also, attempts for progressive structural reform through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in the 1980s, was marginalised by the World Bank and IMF imposed neoliberal orthodoxy as part of overcoming Africa's debt crisis. Since then

neoliberalisation of Africa has intensified and most progressives embraced defeat and others, such as Zimbabwe, have degenerated. Ansa confronts squarely this crisis of progressive political agency.

Support for the Ansa project has to be deepened because it is not a blueprint or prescriptive remedy for southern Africa's ills. It does not advocate a capitalism with a human face nor does it go to the other extreme of calling for a state-centric socialism as alternatives to neoliberalism. Instead, it provides a non-dogmatic framework that can be built on by progressive nationalist, capitalist and socialist possibilities that would emerge in the context of people-led structural reform.

As a corollary, Ansa in placing the needs of southern Africa's people at the centre of development and policymaking is calling for a reinvented political practice. This practice has to be distinguished from the old style AK-47 revolutionary zeal and the new brand of elite modernising practiced by current African leadership. Instead, the Ansa project calls for a transformative practice that works with the moral, procedural and substantive aspects of democracy. In other words, the mass-based democracy envisaged by Ansa is about ensuring that political leadership is accountable and embedded in national development

and not globalised to serve the interests of unelected transnational corporations.

Finally, South Africans should engage with Ansa across the political spectrum, because it reminds us through its analysis how South Africa's economic development has skewed the development of neighbouring countries in its favour. The African Renaissance debate in South Africa has not confronted this and its neoliberal version advocates a regional integration model that would deepen dependency on South Africa and deepen underdevelopment within neighbouring countries.

Progressive struggles on the African continent will not be the same again with initiatives like Ansa. It builds momentum for progressive change from below and through expressing transformative alternatives. Given the high stakes facing Africa and the failure of three decades of neoliberalism, let's hope Africa's elites in the African Union, SADC, the African Development Bank and other continental institutions are open to dialogue with alternatives emerging organically fully supported through the WSF process.

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Delegates at the WSF in Nairobi