

II. Economic Reform in a Situation of Political and Economic Uncertainty: The Political Economy of Ghana Since 1981 Comments

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C O M M E N T

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There are a lot of arguments over structural adjustment programme (SAP) and its results. It is often said that SAP is successful in many Asian countries, but not very much in Africa. In an argument for SAP, Ghana is often referred as a successful example. Therefore Professor Folson's paper is very interesting, and it is very much helpful for us to understand what is really going on in Ghana and to evaluate economic reform backed by international agencies. Many African countries are in process of democratization and economic liberalization. The wind of democracy is blowing everywhere in Africa, but political future is not very certain in many countries. Economic future is much more uncertain. Let me take Zambian case. In Zambia where is my main research area, the government adopted SAP in April 1983 and implemented seriously since October 1985. A riot broke out in mine towns in Dec. 1986 because of a rapid increase in maize price. The government stopped SAP immediately and officially abandoned it after five months. The government started her own economic recovery programme and followed a path of 'Growth From Our Own Resources'. But by mid-1989 the government had begun to realize the weaknesses of its 'go-it-alone' policies.

In June the price controls except for those on maize meal were lifted. Urban dwellers, particularly low income people, suffered from a rapid increase in price. A big riot broke out in Lusaka in July 1990. The Zambian case shows us that SAP being accompanied with continuous economic crisis increased the economic hardships of the urban poor and declined the standard of living.

Professor Folson discusses economic reform and political

situation surrounding the reform in Ghana. The reform failed to improve a poor living condition although macro-economic indexes show that the ERP contributed to a recovery from stagnancy. It is suggested that the main cause of the failure is an administrative factor, that is, lack of decentralization. Professor says that the failure to institute any real participatory democracy has impinged on economic policy-making in a fundamental way.

Economic reform which is supported or forced by the IMF and the World Bank often increases the suffering of low income people such as a sharp drop in nutritional status and a sharp rise in child mortality in a transitional period to free market economy. The point is whether the period will continue for some time or end shrotly. In the case of the latter, some economists insist that the suffering and hardships of people are birth pains. In Zambia the new government has no choice but follows the same reform, and economic difficulties for common people will continue or even increase at least for a while. If the government will not succeed in economic recovery, Zambian democracy which started from last October will bring political unrest and will be even in danger of breakdown. However if the government will succeed in stopping economic decline since 1970s and in realizing economic recovery, she might see another problem, that is a further increase in economic dependency.

We have seen dramatic changes from one-party or military rule to multi-party democracy in some African countries such as Ivory Coast and Zambia. There are many governments which have already promised transition to a multi-party system. In East and Southeast Asia economic growth developed the middle class and working class who demanded democratization. In Africa people suffering from economic crisis wanted to change their government. Multi-party democracy was chosen as the slogan of anti-governmental movement under the influence of changes in former Soviet Union and Eastern

Europe.

In Zambia not only students and intellectuals but also urban dwellers, particularly the urban poor, and organized workers who suffered from economic crisis promoted the movement for multi-party democracy. In Ghana what kind of social group contributed to democratization since the late 1980s?

Now many countries seem to follow Western style multi-party democracy. However it is not easy to find and establish a democratic system which is suitable for the social and traditional conditions in Africa. Decentralization is the core part of democratization. Professor Folson's paper shows us the situation of decentralization in Ghana. I wish to ask one question. When Prof. Folson mentions decentralization and participatory democracy, does he intend to include a traditional decision-making system? In the system men and women are not equal, the younger and the elder are not equal. However I think we should not neglect this type of decision-making which might be useful to institutionalize democracy in the African context. I wonder if the modern and traditional decision-making processes can complement each other. How does he evaluate a traditional decision-making system and see its usefulness to develop democracy in Africa?

Lastly I wish to have his opinion about political future in Ghana although it is not a main issue in his paper. Multi-party systems in the 1960s disrupted national integration in many African countries because a political party was often organized on an ethnic basis. A typical example is Nigeria in the period of the first and even second Republic. Zambian First Republic is another example. Democratic Africa might repeat same situation which happened in the 1960s and 1970s although we have noticed the development of consciousness on the one hand, and the growth of various interest groups on the other for these three decades after independence. Ethnicity is now one among many factors to be

considered even if it is still important.

Let me repeat my questions. The first is about the relationships between decision-making process and the economic outcome by the reform. Could he explain a little more why Ghanaian economy showed good results in macro-economy, but poor results and even recession in micro-economy in the 1980s. I understand he suggests that a difference between the two is not just made by a time lag in the trickle-down of economic development.

The second is about the movement for democracy in late 1980s. How did low income people who suffered from the reform join the anti-government movement? What was the response of peasant farmers to the government and relations with the democratic movement?

The third is about traditional decision-making process and its contribution to institutionalize democracy at communal level.

The last is about ethnic politics in multi-party democracy. We see ethnic revival everywhere in today's world. I hope in the end of this century we would not feel nostalgic about authoritarian but relatively stable politics in the 1980s in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and many other countries.