

Workshop Report

The Narratives of Africa Rising: Challenges and Opportunities for International Development and African Studies

General Theme

On December 9th 2017, we held a workshop on the above mentioned theme. The presenters were from Kenya, Liberia, and Japan. All the themes of the presentations articulated the concept of Africa Rising which has dominated academia and media discourses in the recent past. In general, the workshop sought to articulate the manner in which at the dawn of the new millennium, the general outlook of Africa to the most of the world was nothing but the gloomy images filled with widespread cases of despotism, wars, hunger, and corruption. The Economist devoted a headline in the 2000 that captured what most of the world's image was about Africa as "the hopeless continent." Almost a decade and a half later, there has been a paradigm shift in descriptions of Africa.

After decades of images of a disaster ridden Africa, the image of "Rising Africa" seems to be gaining ground. The Economist (2011) called it "The Sun Shines Bright", Time Magazine (2012) called it "Africa Rising", while there were other positives accounts were from Mckinsey, 2010; Robertson et. al, 2012; Anderson & Jensen, 2013 and Harvard Business Review whose theme was "Africa time is now" in 2013. Whereas the reality of Africa rising cannot be disputed, an in fact is a balancing factor to most often implied "single story" in narrating the state of Africa, the present growth in Africa is characteristically unequal, thus excluding or leaving behind a vast number of populations.

There seems to be enough support to the thesis that Africa is on the rise. Between 2000 and 2014, annual GDP growth has been 4.6 % (UNCTAD STAT, 2015) indicating a successful recovery from the lost decade (1980 -1990). Besides the upwards trends in economic gains, there has also been an increase in democratic regimes (Radelet, 2010). The most recent development in Nigeria and Ghana where incumbents have lost in democratic elections, and slimmer hopes of transitions of power in Zimbabwe inspire the narratives fo rising Africa. A more closer link to stable democracies is decrease of the conflicts as a mean to access power. Africa Progress Panel (2012) reported that most regions have significantly became peaceful. Furthermore, a technological revolution is underway in Africa. This revolution is only comparable to industrial revolution that transformed Europe forever. In 2013, the number of cellular phones surpassed the population on the continent (Fengler & Rawden, 2013). ICT revolution is expanding capability for the poor to participate in economy, social life, and political space.

Why and how have the images of Africa changed from those of a "growth tragedy" (Diamond, 1997; 2012; Sachs, 2003; Collier 2007; Eastly and Levine, 1997; Acemoglu, 2001) is a matter that deserves

much scrutiny by academia. The irony present in the narratives on Africa on the rise is that while supportive arguments draw examples of stabilising political environment, improvements in institutions, and overall economic improvements, proponents and advocates of AID have been on their own kind of "rise". Most countries even as they continue to engage with conventional partners (EuroAmerican) have increasingly sought to make new alliances especially with India, Korea, China, and Japan. Despite the narrative celebrating the rise of Africa, there are important questions that linger on the impact of that rise on economic inclusivity and in terms of alleviating poverty. The 2013 survey put the populations of sub-saharan Africa that are in vulnerable employment at 77.4 % (ILO, 2014). This data underscores the need to re- imagine economic growth trajectories in Africa especially on approaches that will seek to give new dimensions on the so called "informal economies." Despite the failure of the "rise" to secure decent jobs for the African youths (The Economist, 2014), it has as well failed to tackle the levels of poverty.

Summary of the Workshop

As narrated above, the narrative of Africa rising is not only about success of Africa but also a reality of rapid changes in administrative and governance structures and the rise of new set of challenges. This workshop consolidated the debate on Africa rising through three thematic areas: Aid regime and local governance, SDGs (PwDs), and the crisis of managing African cities in order to ascertain the narratives of Africa rising that have dominated policy and global media perspectives on Africa.

Experiences and Difficulties

Generally, the preparation went through successfully. There were hitches in communication and last minute cancellation from the intended commentators. The lack of a well coordinated African focus study or research group at the university made it difficult to make a pool of commentators and attenders. We are however, optimistic that in the future there will be opportunities to improve on the coordination of those interested in Africa.

Commentators

Tatsuo Murakami,

Associate Professor of Religion,
Faculty of Liberal Arts, Sophia University

Eri Yamazaki,

Professor by Special Appointment,
Centre for Global Discovery, Sophia University

Titles of the Presentations and Names of the Presenters

Toponymic inscriptions and urban identity in Nairobi, Kenya

Melissa Wanjiru, Department of Policy and Planning Sciences, University of Tsukuba

Addressing Disability Issues: Lessons Learnt from the Field

Miki Yoshizumi, African Area Studies, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University

Strategies for Aid in the Context of Governance Reform/Devolution in Liberia

Baba Sillah, Graduate School of Global Studies, MA. Sophia University

Encounters of AID Regime and Devolved Governments in Kenya

Kinyua Kithinji L, Graduate School of Global Studies, PhD Candidate, Sophia University

We are grateful to the GSGS for facilitating this workshop. We are also grateful for the support from the participating audience.