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# SOUTH-SOUTH COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME

OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

**Constructing and Deconstructing the  
Democratic Developmental State:  
The Challenges of Democratization  
in Nigeria and South Korea**

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## Introduction

The prospect of a democratic developmental state in Nigeria and South Korea is in doubt, in part because of the existing structure of the post-colonial state, its conception of development, and politics. It is significantly so as democracy is not really central to the agenda of the state with respect to these countries. Coupled with this is the wane of democracy globally, following its decline during the Athenian City-State [Aristotle: 1981]. Even liberal democracy, a correlate of the market, which the core countries of the North have been propagating in Africa and Asia has not actually taken root, because the intentions of the Western countries and the Bretton-Woods institutions spreading this type of democracy are purely exploitative, and do not seek to enthrone democracy as such (Ake: 2001, 1995, Lumumba-Kasongo: 2006, Heo and Stockton: 2005)

It would be misleading, therefore, to argue that democracy has failed in Nigeria, because it never really got underway in the first place. In Nigeria, the state, which, ought to be central to the development and democratization project, remains as repressive, undemocratic and oriented to zero-sum politics as ever. The state does not really have development on its agenda. This is not to assume that the state has not formulated development plans, policies and projects; rather they only mimic the development models of the West, which cannot be replicated in Nigeria due to historical factors among others [Ake: 1985; Omoweh & Boom: 2005, Omoweh: 2005, 2006, Kaiser and Okumu: 2004]. South Korea is far from being a liberal democracy not because of its relative economic growth, but due mainly to its model of post-colonial authoritarian and undemocratic state. The kind of development promoted by such state can hardly be sustained as evident in the economic crisis of 1997/8 from which it is yet to recover [Bang-Soon: 2003, Omoweh: 2005]. Adequate scholarly and policy attention has to be paid to so many false starts that have characterized the construction of the developmental state, especially as the debate now emphasizes its democratic component.


## Background to the Study

In the received literature on the field, scholars have attempted to separate democracy from development in the formulation of the democratic developmental state as if they really mean different issues. Nothing can be more misconstrued, as democracy is only an instrument for the fostering of development, and indeed, a critical component of development. This raises serious theoretical problems that require scholarly attention.

Given the political trajectories of both Africa and Asia, the focus should be on democratization rather than democracy. This is because democratization is ultimately about the empowerment of the people in governance and ownership of the sought development, while democracy is an ideal to which nations have aspired to attain without much success. Zeroing in on democratization, it can be argued that, although the processes and institutions that can enthrone democratization may have been created, the feasibility of a democratic developmental state is far from being realized, let alone tested, both in Nigeria and South Korea, not least because of the theoretical conceptualization of the state; and the conceptualization of the state with respect to the two countries.

The state is used interchangeably with the government in the literature, whereas they connote different meanings. While recognizing the importance of the various institutions like the oligarchy, domestic bourgeoisie, fronts of local and foreign capitals as Miliband notes, and the structuralist perspective of Nico Poulantzas and the Marx Weber's emphasis on the bureaucracy in constructing the state, there is the need to go beyond these conceptualizations in order to gain a deeper understanding of reconstructing the [democratic] developmental state [Miliband: 1973, Poulantzas: 1969; Weber: 1964].

Conceptually, the state is not the same as the government, because governments come and go, but the state, as a superstructure and public force, remains. Its materialist context frames the state's development ideology and politics and that differentiates the state from the government. In fact, the government is only an organ of the state [Marx: 1978]. This is brought into greater relief when the question of who governs South Korea became critical as the economy



was sliding into crisis unfettered. To Parvez Hasan, ‘the government is the senior partner and major participant who determined all that went on in the Korean economy for the Korean State’ [Hasan: 1976 p.29].

The state is no less than a public force being propelled by institutional mechanisms and through which it [state] dominates and exploits the society for its class interests. Thus, the state is not class neutral, explaining why it cannot rise above its class interests in the kind of development that it promotes and the underpinning politics. Viewed in this context, the state cannot be objective in the sense that it uses the monopoly of coercion to police and guide the society impartially as misconstrued by mainstream scholars. Rather, the state is a specific modality of class domination, which autonomizes the system of institutional mechanism in order to dominate society for its parochial gains. [Ake: 1985; Omoweh: 2005].


In practical terms, the state goes beyond the instrumentalist and structuralist conceptions. The state is basically the political leadership, constituted as it is by those who may not be in government but in power as they wield enormous political, economic and social power, and therefore, decide the kind, content and direction of development and politics, inclusive of the democratization project. The state also includes those persons elected or appointed into political offices, who, in most cases, are only playing out the scripts of their mentors and self interests, but obviously not those of the people. The state’s approach to development and style of politics stems largely from the nature and grim institutional struggles and competition for access and control of the state’s political power because it holds the key to wealth. The needs of the people hardly frame development policy, programmes and projects of the state under such circumstance. It is largely so, because a tiny cabal within the state structure, who, in most cases, dominates the entire political class and dictates the content and direction of politics and development has tenuous relationship with production. This accounts for why the tiny faction within the state structure clings on to political power by all means and at all cost, as political power is coterminous with wealth.

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Little wonder then that in some instances, the state resorts to repression, violence, and extra judicial methods for enforcing its policies, whenever the people resist such policies. State's repression arises partly from the legitimacy crisis it suffers because the people vote without really choosing who rules them. This also accounts for why such state does not accommodate dialogue and debate, which are crucial democratic practices. The state conceives of democratization as a reduction in its power, especially if it is ground-up, as the people stand to be empowered by the process.

It would be mistaken, therefore, to assume that a state is developmental simply because it establishes, as its principle of legitimacy, ability to promote and sustain development as Castells Emmanuel has argued with respect to the 'Four Asian Tigers'. Emmanuel's argument lacks the requisite insight into the kind of development being promoted, the interests it caters for, the process that led to such development and its sustenance (Castells: 1992). In fact, records of an impressive economic growth as scholars like Byung-Nak used in characterizing the Korean state as developmental can no longer be sustained after the country's economic crisis (Byung-Nak: 1995). The Korean state's experience with economic development, with its emphasis on industrialization, has only unearthed the lack of viability of Samuel Huntington's 'authoritarian/hard state' projects that he had advocated for developing countries, given the opposition to their quest for industrialization from the core countries of the North (Huntington: 1991).

Drawing on the experiences of Latin American countries with industrial and political development, scholars like Chalmers Johnson, and Frederic Deyo had faulted the 'hard state thesis' espoused by Huntington. Referring particularly to the Asian Tigers, they argue that the state was anything but developmental and democratic (Johnson: 1995; Deyo: 1978). Growth, they rightly assert, can make development possible, but growth cannot be equated with development, as Alice Amsden's work on the industrial growth of South Korea would want us to believe (Amsden: 1989). African countries had, during the first decade of independence (1970s), recorded reasonable economic growth of about 3-5 percent especially from the agricultural sector, as evident in Cote d'Ivoire,



but growth did not really translate into economic development partly on account of the path the state took to development.

According to Thandika Mkandawire, a developmental state is one whose ideological underpinnings are developmental (Mkandawire: 2001). The trajectories of Africa and the Asian Tigers, however, can hardly be accommodated by his formulation, not the least because the kind of development being promoted by the state is hardly derived from the experiences of the people, nor enjoys any input from the people for whom the development is meant. In essence, the people did not own the development, but have had it designed and imposed on them by the state and the forces of transnational capitalism. Unfortunately, liberal democracy has become one of the instruments for imposing the Western ideology of development on African and Asian countries.

As noted, one major gap in the emerging discourses on the democratic developmental state is the tendency to isolate democracy and democratization and give them separate analytical focus. There is also the notion that the democratic aspect of development was not much emphasized in previous discussions and writings. To compartmentalize the debate is to weaken the theoretical strength of the concept. Rather, this paper seeks to deconstruct the concept of the democratic developmental state by addressing these issues holistically.

Development is a political process. It involves the rationalization of powers and interests, and the authoritative allocation of resources whether in the political, economic and social domains. The conception of a developmental state ought to pay attention to its ideological underpinnings, but that in itself does not make the state developmental. The state has to have the institutional capacity to undertake such development, and the ability to govern the development process in a manner that is participatory, accountable, responsive and consultative. Such development has to be owned by the people. The limits of the 'hard state' are not caused by the inability of growth to be transformed into development as evident in South Korea, but inherent in the path the state took to development and the contradictions engendered. Part of these contradictions is the undemocratic ethos the state has displays, particularly repression, and all-pervasive power.



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In all appearances, the problem with democratization in Nigeria and South Korea is not about its necessity, but timing. The undemocratic credentials of the post-colonial state and its own conception of development have 'blocked' democratization from getting started, dimming the prospect of a democratic developmental state. This paper seeks to help fill such gap by examining some of the detours, miscalculations and false hopes about the democratic developmental state.

### **Yet Another False Start?**

#### **The Democratic Developmental State and Democratization**

Is the democratic developmental state not another false start? Why did South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia fail to avert the economic crisis of the late 1990s if the state were developmental? Is the post-colonial state undergoing rethink in the hope of forestalling future occurrences? What lessons have African state learnt from the Asian crisis? These research questions not only express the pessimism about democratic developmental state, but also, will help in its reconstruction.

#### **The State and Development**

In Nigeria, like in other African countries, the debates on the need for a 'developmental state' began in the late 1970s when the apologists of the military regime were of the view that Africa needed a 'strong' state to bail the continent out of the woods, citing the experiences of Asian countries like South Korea where the autocratic state had performed a great feat. The quest for the 'strong' state in Africa was hinged on the ability and promptitude (without prolonged dialogue) with which it designs, imposes and perhaps, implements development policies, programmes and projects. Of the 46 years of Nigeria's independence, 30 years were under military rule with all the traits of the sought 'hard state'. Yet, 70 percent of the estimated 150 million Nigerians live on less than US\$1.00/day with *per capita* income of US\$250.00. The US\$121.8 billion earned from oil exports between 1986 and 2002 did not reverse the worsening material conditions of the majority of Nigerians, as the country was ranked as the 26<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world in 2002 (UNDP: 2000). In essence, the weakness of the

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Nigerian state, in spite of being repressive and autocratic, was identified as a major hindrance to the country's development crisis when the state adjusted (Olukoshi: 1991). The democratic credentials of the post-colonial state in Nigeria became a critical condition for the country's development, which the return to civilian government in May 1999 was expected to help redress, but has compounded.

The origins of Nigeria's development crisis and why measures to remedy it have failed will not be understood in so far the symptoms of the crisis are being dealt with, leaving the political roots of the crisis untouched. At the heart of the development crisis, is the Nigerian state, which sees development as its own exclusive preserve and conceives it in the image of the West. Worse still, the state pursues development with a great deal of confusion of ideas, purposes and interests, and with policies ridden with ambiguities and contradictions that make the sought development impossible to attain. It is significantly so because the state is undemocratic, predatory, pervasive, all-powerful and sometimes, plays God, that is, all-knowing. The people, whose well-being is the *raison d'être* of development, are excluded from the development, and are being developed against. Rent seeking is a preferred mode of surplus extraction to investing in production.

Has the Korean state taken a different path to development? Not really. As a former colony of Japan, the Korean state was instituted by colonial capitalism, which in turn shaped the kind of development policies and programmes and the political leadership adopted in the post-colonial period. The Korean state's experience with economic and political development was slightly different from Nigeria's, a former British colony, due, in part, to the nature of global politics, security and the geo-strategic considerations. South Korea became politically independent from Japan in 1948, but was surrounded by Communist North Korea and China. In an attempt to stem Sino-communist expansion in South East Asia, the United States of America took charge of South Korea for another three years after its independence. The Korean state was constituted to be autocratic. The US installed a puppet president, Syngman Rhee, who was later toppled in 1961 by General Park Chung-hee for his inability

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to reverse Korea's deepening poverty and political crisis.

To General Park, all that South Korea needed was an urgent economic growth. South Korea therefore, adopted a developmental state model, which, in practice, was a 'bureaucratic authoritarian state'. It was all the more so because Korea was a 'late late' industrializing country in post-1945 period. Under the bureaucratic authoritarian state, the government played centralized, interventionist and directive roles in the development process (Soh: 1997). Government kept a tight grip on the organized labour and other organized interest-groups' activities by using both ideological (anti-Communism) and physical coercion (military). National security (anti-Communist) and the Constitution were, and still are, used as excuses for continued dictatorship and the curtailing of workers' rights.

The Korean state's conception of the country's crisis as purely economic, engendered contradictions in its development strategy, as evident in its obsession with growth. The thinking of those entrusted with management of the state to, first, record growth in the economy before democratizing, raised more fundamental problems. This is because the strategy used to grow the economy was itself political, though it presented itself as economic. For instance, the state's policy to create the *chaebols*, which were the extensions of government, was sound in the face of the opposition from the West to Korea's quest for industrialization. As *chaebols*, they facilitated the state's industrialization policy, particularly the heavy chemical industries that actually brought about the rapid economic growth that the country recorded in the late 1970s. But the mega companies were not competitive as the state's economic policies and some of them such as KIA and SYANGN collapsed as it (the state) rolled back from the economy in line with privatization and the pressure for opening up the Korean market to western capitals mounted. It was obvious that the economy suffered from limited liberalization, with the majority of the private sector firms left relatively weak and unable to continue with the gains generated from the state-led industrialization.


That is not all. The efforts by the Park regime to civilianize himself resulted in bloody political contests within the political class inclusive of the military, all culminating in the assassination of

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General Park in 1979 through a coup d'état. Rather than abate, the political, economic and social crises in post-Park Korea escalated, bringing into the fore, the democratic deficits among other limits of the authoritarian state. The hyper-inflationary trend that was set in motion by the early 1980s, worsened throughout that decade. The crisis further deepened as the Korean state resisted the intense pressure to open its market for Western capitals, having joined the OECD. Korea was at a critical juncture of either retaining the iron curtain or pulling it down and risking the collapse of its fragile economy. The smooth political transition that Korea has enjoyed since 1988 did not really strengthen the Korean state democratically, as the country has recorded significant democratic deficits. This and other related issues, the paper seeks to compare and contrast in constructing and deconstructing democratic developmental state in Nigeria and South Korea.

#### Democratizing the State


Across Africa and Asia, the majority of the political elites have openly declared their desire for a liberal democracy. They discuss liberal democracy with passion, emphasizing the centrality of power of the people to its success. Unfortunately, what is before us in both countries cannot be called liberal democracy. Democratization is hardly discussed by the political elites, but subsumed under the general discourse on liberal democracy. Not surprisingly, the process of democratization has not really gone underway, with bleak prospects, therefore, for the realization of the democratic developmental state. Perhaps much more problematic is the fact that not as much scholarly and policy attention as given to democratic institutions is accorded to the democratization of the state in the literature. The starting point for the construction of the democratic developmental state is actually the democratization of the state, which, in practical terms, is the political leadership as noted. It is all the more so because the average politician in Africa and South Korea still fits into the Hobbesian politics - and until such limitation is transcended, he can be anything but democratic in action. Let me elaborate on this.



The 'two turnover test' says that, democratization begins with the exit of an authoritarian regime and ends after competitive elections have given rise to two successive peaceful transfers of government between contending parties'. There is also the view that, 'democratization is complete when all significant political actors accept that the electoral process has become 'the only game in town for allocating public office' (Whitehead: 2002 pp.26-27).

Both definitions raise the concern of whether elections have seen the exit of the authoritarian state in Nigeria and South Korea. It questions whether democratization has begun in Nigeria after the country has had two consecutive elections in 1999 and 2003. Has democratization been completed in South Korea, where elections have been peacefully conducted since 1988 to date? My answer would be an emphatic NO. Once the politician assumes office or power, he runs roughshod of democratic practices. What becomes development is his own imagination, but not derived from the experiences of the people. In all, the people are seen as sub-human and do not know what they want. This explains why the political leadership imposes their own idea of development (if any) on the people.

Development is about people, their well being, rights and security, among others. Democracy is only an instrument to achieve this and much more, but obviously, it is not an end in itself as the political elites often misconstrue it. Partly on account that the elections are won by dint of thuggery, money and violence, manipulation of the electoral system, but not based on their popularity, the majority of the political elites hardly relate to their constituencies and the people in whom ultimate political power resides; and when they do, they tend to see the people as servants. Political parties (56 in Nigeria, and 9 in South Korea) have, rather than perform the functions of interest articulation, aggregation, political education and leadership training among others, become business ventures for the rich, irrespective of whether the party is in government/power or in opposition. Rather than being instruments for democratization, political parties even frustrate the democratic process and by implication, the envisioned democratic developmental state. In Nigeria, the majority of the politicians who create political parties use them to actualize personal ambitions, because the initiator, founder, financier, chairman and presidential aspirant of the



majority of these parties are consummated in one person. That is why intra and inter-party politics and decision-making processes are personalized, acrimonious and undemocratic, and this is played out in political competition at all levels of government, sometimes, extending to the families. The same is true of South Korea. In all appearances, these are precipitates of false starts in terms of possible democratization, as political parties have become vanguard for achieving personal ambitions, where voting is flawed, human rights are violated and there exists undemocratic constitution(s), exclusive politics, open discrimination against women by the male folks in seeking for political office, weak opposition parties, and corruption among other attributes in both countries, though with varying degrees.

As rightly noted by Southall and Melber, the legacies of power left behind by the majority of African political leaders show that, instead of leaving office, they tend to continue to ‘stay in power’ and manipulate the process of succession politics inclusive of the Parliament, for their parochial interests (Southall and Melber: 2006). This is not peculiar to Africa: It equally is a major problem in Asia. All has grave consequences for the sought democratic developmental state in Africa and Asia.

In deconstructing the democratic developmental state, the democratization of the political leadership is key because the political elite has, in the first instance, to imbibe democratic principle, values and practices if it is to manage democratic institutions effectively. The creation of democratic institutions can only lead to democratization if the political elites are democratic in thought and action. That they are not democratic in this manner partly accounts for why the workings of the institutions like the Parliament, political parties, executives, the judiciary, are hardly guided by democratic principles and practices like broad-based participation and dialogue, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, open and successive politics.

As used in this paper, therefore, democratization is concerned with the empowerment of the people to participate in politics and development generally. Democratization is an instrument for achieving a people-centered development. To democratize the polity entails, among others, a broad-based participation in politics, which allows the people to freely choose who governs them, and are also at liberty to bring their leaders and representatives to book for


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their actions. If the actions, policies, programmes of the governments, and the political violence and protests in Nigeria and South Korea are aimed at achieving all this, then democratization is feasible in both countries. To democratize development is to enable the people decide the kind of development they want; and they become the essence of the development. Part of the democratization of development is to democratize the polity, particularly opposition politics, because it spices democratic practices, promotes healthy political competition, and helps sustain democratic transition. Democratizing the opposition also serves as a training ground for a shadow government, good governance, democratic politics and participatory development with prospect for a developmental state.

### **Analysis of the Problem**

The thesis of 'blocked democratization' does not foreclose the conduct of politics and politicking in Nigeria and South Korea. Of course, multiparty system, one of the conditions for democratization, is in operation in both countries. Opposition politics is still emerging. At one historical time or the other, experiments with democratization have been labeled as liberal, illiberal, semi and embryonic. Irrespective of these labels, a transition process is underway that is altering the authoritarian structures developed during the period of the first generation of political leadership in both Nigeria and South Korea. Elections remain the 'only game in town' in allocating public offices. There is a consensus of opinion among the political elites that there is no respectable alternative to democracy as a form of government.

However, the state still approaches development as its preserve, formulates and imposes its kind of development, which mirrors the West, on the people. It suffocates the process of participation, ownership and renewal, and indeed, the democratization of the governance of the development process. The state can profess to be democratic in thought, but obviously not in action, as it conceives of politics as winners-take-all; and as a means to wealth. Either in government and in power, or outside of power; or either acting in fulfillment of its parochial interests, or as a proxy to subterranean



forces, the state stifles the process of democratization from getting underway, because it sees democratization, which ultimately empowers the people, as a reduction in its power. Just as the state is threatened because of changes in the political system, which seeks to democratize how the system legislates, formulates, implements policies and the people gain access to power. The state can embark on a political transition only in terms of individuals and holding different political offices, but not a genuine change in leadership and political system along democratic practices, as the acrimony between the authoritarian incumbents and opposition will continue to deepen. All frames, in part, the democratization crises in Nigeria and South Korea. It is within this context that the deconstruction of the democratic developmental state is undertaken in both countries.

## **Conclusion**

An attempt is made in this paper to deconstruct the concept of democratic developmental state in Nigeria and South Korea. To do so, the paper has sought to examine in a comparative perspective, the origin, nature and politics of the post-colonial states in both countries and the path they took to development and politics. In particular, it examines the nature of the democratization crises of the state with emphasis on the openness of the political space; the political parties' politics; opposition politics; and the national political leadership. It suggests strategies that might permit the emergence of a democratic developmental state in Nigeria and South Korea.



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