



Regions
Refocus

Post-Colonialisms Today

A project to recapture post-Independence African agency and progressive policies for our times

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
November 2017

Proposals for research are invited for the Post-Colonialisms Today project at Regions Refocus.

Post-Colonialisms Today is a policy research and advocacy project on development policies and initiatives adopted, promoted, or formulated by governments and policy institutions across Africa in the immediate post-independence period. With a particular focus on the period from the 1950s/1960s to the onset of the crises of the mid- to late 1970s, the project aims to recover the key policies that sought to address what were then perceived as the limits of socio-economic progress imposed by Africa's colonial experience and to fulfil the material, cultural, and spiritual needs and aspirations that drove the movement for independence from colonial rule. Applying feminist and heterodox approaches to economics, these policies will then be examined in the light of on-going developmental challenges in Africa, with a view to identify ideas that can usefully be adapted.

Development policies adopted by most African leaders and governments in the immediate post-colonial period were motivated by concerns for the autonomous development of their countries, economic and social transformation, and their active place in a world of equal nations. In line with this, the policies were geared at the rapid transformation of their economies from essentially primary export, overwhelmingly small peasant-based agrarian societies, into 20th century industrial economies with health, education, and other social amenities for all.

In the pursuit of the goals of development, different (groups of) countries adopted different strategies and related policies, often under different ideological labels. These differences had different implications for the organisation of state and its relations with society, and probably had different effects on the realisation of the proclaimed development aspirations. In spite of these differences, however, there were fundamental similarities in policy instruments across different areas – including in areas such as industry, national ownership of natural resources, social provisioning. Significant among the complex range of factors behind this commonality of policy in the face of differences in proclaimed ideology have been the weight of the realities of the socio-economic and political structures inherited from colonialism and how they shaped available options, as well as the relative strength of African agency in the pursuit of policy.

As is commonly known, due to a combination of factors – some internal to African economies, others external to them and within the global environment; some related to the quality of policies themselves adopted, others to the context of the policies, etc., African countries succumbed to economic crises in the late 1970s. The IMF/World Bank neo-liberal programmes of “structural adjustment” imposed in African countries from the mid-1980s were meant to respond to the crises. In spite of their description, however, these programmes did not aim at adjustment or reform of existing policies, but rather the wholesale replacement of the policies and the related economic regimes. Central to this has been the primacy of free-market ideology as the guiding frame of policy. In the process, the importance to development policy making of the specific realities of Africa's economic structures as well as African agency were critically undermined.

However, close to three decades of neo-liberal policy in Africa has not only failed to deliver the objectives proclaimed for them. It has also become increasingly clear that the socio-economic structures that African countries inherited from colonialism are intact; arguably, even reinforced. And some of the very fundamental questions to the development of African countries arising from the economic structure of Africa's economies still persist.

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Understanding these issues, the questions to which they gave rise and the responses that they elicited, however flawed, is thus useful for addressing much of Africa's development challenges today. This project aims to contribute to building this understanding.

The thematic scope of the project is social and economic policies pursued by post-colonial African governments in the period under discussion, the institutions constructed in support of the realisation of these policies, as well as the cultural initiatives and forms developed as part of the processes of giving expression to African agency and needs in national economic development. Specific themes include:

- The challenge(s) of structural economic transformation in the post-colonial context (nationally, regionally and globally), and the articulations by various leaders.
- Different and contested strategies for development adopted in relation to the socio-economic and political structures inherited from colonialism.
- Policies of socio-economic transformation formulated, adopted and/or promoted – including:
 - industrial, agricultural, natural resource, trade, financial, monetary, policies, etc.
 - social development – education, health, water, etc.
 - cultural – language, integration, nationhood, etc.
- Institutions – planning, cadre formation and skills development for managing socio-economic policy, science and technology research in development, etc.
- Intellectual articulation of development ideas and debates.

Proposals may deal with topics under a single theme or across themes, and may be devoted to individual countries, groups of countries, or regions in Africa.

In addition to considerations of merit and relevance, proposals must also show a feminist as well as heterodox approach to analysis of social and economic development.

Proposals will be accepted from African scholars and activist intellectuals in English, French, Arabic, and Portuguese.

Proposal abstracts of approximately 500 words must be sent no later than 26 January 2018 to: postcolonialismstoday@regionsrefocus.org. Please include your full name, affiliation, and contact information with your proposal abstract.

Selected proposals will be announced in February 2018. Up to USD 5000 will be offered to support the fulfillment of each accepted proposal. An initial researchers meeting will be held in March 2018 to discuss the methodology and framing of the research papers. Draft research findings will be reviewed in August 2018 and finalized shortly thereafter. Research papers will be published in a compendium, along with distilled policy briefs and short opinion articles disseminated for broader audiences.

Note: While preference will be given to proposals, general expressions of interest will also be considered.

Post-Colonialisms Today is currently managed by Regions Refocus (an initiative that fosters regional and feminist solidarities for justice through policy dialogue at the regional level), with the active participation and support of a Working Group whose membership is drawn from people from across the African continent.