

# Drawing on the Local Environment as a Locus for Solving Development Problems

**BETTY C MUBANGIZI**

In its pursuit for economic development and human development in particular, Africa's position relative to international systems is considerably weak. Poor performance of African countries is, in the main, brought on by social upheaval, political instability and a pervasive undermining of democratic regimes in favour of authoritarian ones. The causes of this state of affairs are numerous and multifaceted, originating from inside and outside Africa's boundaries. Therein too rests the solution – from inside and outside Africa's borders. The articles in this issue of the *African Journal of Governance and Development* resonate with the all too familiar cliché "African solutions to African problems" and show how local solutions offer more effective and sustainable solutions to a diverse range of settings than those developed externally.

Internal conflicts are a case in point. Questions have been raised with regard to the role of regional organisations with regard to international external ones in resolving internal conflicts in Africa. **Oluwadare** explores this point through the lens of the conflict in Mali – one of the most devastating on the continent but one with the least attention. Oluwadare notes that the African Union and ECOWAS have played prominent roles in conflict resolution within Burundi, Darfur, Chad, Somalia and Liberia. He attributes this to the cooperative, collaborative and supportive understanding between extra-African bodies with regional and sub-regional organisations within the continent. He proceeds to show that unilateral interventions would not have been as successful. Citing France's involvement in the Mali conflict as a case in point, Oluwadare admits that African peacekeeping forces need support in the form of logistics and financing to sustain them in the field but that this should be channelled through regional bodies. Direct unilateral involvement in conflict resolution, as France did in the case of Mali, only serves to foment the idea that such international support only works to maintain political, strategic, and economic interests in recipient countries. Moreover, Oluwadare argues, channelling the support through regional bodies has spinoffs not only for the mission, but also for future missions and could serve to institutionalise confidence building measures and ensure peacekeeping from within the continent. In this way, local support to local problems would be promoted.

The notion of institutionalising confidence building measures is discussed, albeit from an entirely different perspective, by **Ssempebwa, Nakaiza and Edopu** when they explore alternative paths to social transformation in sub-Saharan Africa. The authors draw on a synthesis of five studies on the political economy of poverty and social transformation conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda between 2009 and 2012. The synthesis shows that poverty alleviation programmes were more successful where the poor they targeted were involved in the definition of poverty. They further show that many poverty alleviation programmes were, in fact, implemented for people who did not perceive themselves as being



poor, thus yielding ineffective results. The discourse in this paper demonstrates a case for an ideological paradigmatic shift in the political economy of poverty and social transformation in the global south – from relegating the poor as passive *consumers* of poverty alleviation programmes to appreciating them as partners in the design of the programmes. This view is increasingly being advanced by development partners in the global south as a useful strategy in the promotion of sustainable livelihoods.

Forests are important for the exploitation of timber and non-timber forest products in sustaining livelihoods. Indeed, some forest insect resources such as bees and silkworms, have been domesticated for honey and silk production respectively. However, drought and unsustainable harvesting of insects for subsistence and commercial purposes threaten the existence of insects or reduce their populations as renewable resources. The management of these forest resources is often beset with tension between traditional and modern ideas on how to manage them. **Mapendembe and Mujere's** paper explores the management of edible stinkbugs (*Encosternum delegorguei*) in the Jiri Forest of Bikita district in Zimbabwe. Using participatory rural appraisal and in-depth interviews with selected respondents, Mapendembe and Mujere show that traditional political structures of the area are associated with the origins of edible stinkbug and are therefore central to the management of the forest in which the insect is found. The findings subscribe to the long held notion that, in Africa, local traditional institutional arrangements composed of chiefs, headmen, village heads and villagers that have been in place for ages are coherent and more likely to withstand pressures on natural resource degradation.

The last article in this edition adds to the discourse on the need to take cognisance of the local context if desirable policy interventions are to succeed. Using the histogram, spatial auto correlation and random permutations, **Korter, Olubusoye and Salisu** explore the Oyo State-Nigeria evidence-based case. They use this to explain the need of taking cognisance of neighbourhood characteristics in policy designs and decision-making to enhance significant remedial effects from interventions in an attempt to reduce road traffic accidents and deaths. From their analysis, Korter, Olubusoye and Salisu conclude that road traffic crashes are best managed within small geographical regions and that measures for intervention will yield significant results only when the remedial measures are not administered to the spatial units (LGA) in isolation.

Although they tackle diverse issues ranging from international peace protecting missions to protecting edible stinkbugs, there is a fundamental message inherent in each of these articles. The message is that the local should not be ignored, that there is value in inclusion processes and that external support can only yield fruition if it draws on the immense natural and human resources that abound in local communities.