Africa Must Walk Before She Runs: the Case for Agricultural Stability in Sub-Saharan Africa in Advance of a Global Trade Initiative

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AFRICA MUST WALK BEFORE SHE RUNS: THE CASE FOR AGRICULTURAL STABILITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN ADVANCE OF A GLOBAL TRADE INITIATIVE

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This article contrasts the developmental paths followed by the countries of Southeast Asia and their counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa. The comparison highlights both the lessons sub-Saharan Africa can take from the economic progress achieved by Southeast Asia in the last fifty years and the obstacles likely to impede replication of these achievements in sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, the paper notes the important role prioritization of smallholder rural agriculture ahead of export-oriented manufacturing played in accelerating economic growth in Southeast Asia and how adopting the same approach can benefit sub-Saharan Africa. An argument is made that barriers such as restrictions imposed by the ever-growing number of cross-border trade agreements, the heavy cost of improving smallholder agriculture, growing global protectionism and weak domestic policies or poor implementation of good ones, threaten to hinder sub-Saharan Africa’s ability to emulate the success of Southeast Asia. It is further argued that there is need for a fundamental shift in mindset and strategy on the part of sub-Saharan African countries if they are to successfully utilize smallholder rural agriculture as a vehicle for growing their economies. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to realise that good policies on their own are not enough and that they must be followed up with honest and aggressive implementation, with everyone sharing the same understanding on what the objectives are. The paper concludes that, while using the Southeast Asian model as inspiration and for guidance, the policies adopted by sub-Saharan Africa must pay regard to the region’s unique circumstances and changes in the trade environment over the years by employing creative and original ideas. The need for state bureaucracy that is sufficiently independent of societal pressures, but also not too detached from the community is also emphasized. Moreover, the critical role of the state in driving transformation through provision of the necessary financial and logistical support is also stressed. Lastly, sub-Saharan Africa is encouraged to conclude trade agreements that balance economic growth against the potential for serious harm to domestic economies.

I. INTRODUCTION

For some time now, a lively debate has taken place regarding how best to set sub-Saharan Africa on a path to sustainable economic growth and development. A myriad of ideas have emerged from these discussions, some of which have come to dominate the thinking around the subject. However, in a recent article comparing the developmental progress achieved by sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia over the last fifty years, an expert in contemporary Indonesian studies at Leiden University, David Henley, proposes a strategy for development in sub-Saharan Africa that deviates from some of the more established theories.\(^1\) He posits that sub-Saharan Africa should, as a starting point, adopt an approach to development that focuses more on improving agricultural productivity and domestic food supply among poor small-scale rural

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farmers, and only pursue export-oriented manufacturing at a later stage.\(^2\) This opinion goes against a long-held view by development and trade theorists suggesting that embarking on an “export push” would be enough to bring about rapid economic development in sub-Saharan Africa.\(^3\)

Reflecting on the remarkable strides made by Southeast Asian countries\(^4\) in terms of economic growth, Henley argues that, although export-oriented manufacturing has become a key component in these countries’ economies today, it was rural and agricultural development that initially facilitated and sustained what they have achieved.\(^5\) He believes that following the example of Southeast Asia in prioritising pro-poor and pro-rural policies can help sub-Saharan Africa achieve the same results. The significance of Henley’s article lies in the candid effort he makes to dispel what he considers to be a misguided tendency in some literature to promote an ill-timed push for export-oriented manufacturing in African countries, often to these countries’ detriment.\(^6\)

Interestingly, the views expressed by Henley come at a time when research findings elsewhere in the field of comparative development are also raising questions about some leading theories on development in Africa. One example is a recent study conducted by Africa Power and Politics (APPP),\(^7\) which found that the importance of “good governance” as a pre-requisite for sustainable poverty reduction in Africa has been somewhat exaggerated, with the result that the political and economic realities facing Africa were unduly down-played.\(^8\)

In this paper an attempt is made to address several key questions emanating from Henley’s article. These include whether the Southeast Asian model can find realistic application in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the kind of interventions different sub-Saharan African countries would have to implement assuming the answer to the first question is in the affirmative. The paper is divided into five broad sections. The first section is the introduction, providing a brief background to the issues discussed in the paper. The second section gives an overview of the developmental paths followed by several countries in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa aimed at highlighting some key differences in their approaches. The third section

\(^2\) Id. at 30.
\(^4\) Countries of the Southeast Asia sub-region comprise Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines, Christmas Islands and Singapore.
\(^5\) Henley, supra note 1, at 30.
\(^7\) APPP is a research programme consortium comprising research centres and think-tanks from France, Ghana, Niger, Uganda, the UK and the US, which is funded by the UK Department for International Development and Irish Aid for the benefit of developing countries.
focuses on the lessons sub-Saharan Africa can learn from Southeast Asia considering the latter’s admirable and rapid economic rise. The fourth section looks at the challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa in its quest for economic growth and development in today’s trade environment. In this section particular attention is given to the impact the various free trade pacts to which sub-Saharan African countries are signatories is likely to have on these countries’ flexibility should they want to introduce some innovations. The last section contains conclusions and recommendations.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL PATHS FOLLOWED BY COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The disparity in the developmental patterns of Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa over the past half century is as sharp as it is likely to get for any two regions. On the one hand, nearly all the countries in Southeast Asia have attained economic growth and poverty reduction at a rate that can only be described as astonishing. On the other hand, in sub-Saharan Africa the pace at which progress is being made towards attaining these goals is moderate at best.\(^9\) A good example is the fact that in Southeast Asia the rate of poverty dropped by over half from 1990 to 2008, while in sub-Saharan Africa it dropped only from 56% in 1990 to 47% in 2008.\(^10\) Another telling fact is sub-Saharan Africa’s continuing heavy dependence on food imports,\(^11\) something that Southeast Asia has, for the most part, effectively addressed. The contrasting experiences of the two regions become even more glaring when one considers that as recently as the early 1980s the per capita income in both regions was more or less the same.\(^12\)

Outlined below is an account of the developmental history of a number of Southeast Asian and sub-Saharan African countries, some of which were not discussed by Henley in his article. Incorporating the developmental background of these other countries is intended to draw attention to some important factors that in one way or another shaped the two regions’ growth patterns.

A. SOUTHEAST ASIA

A variety of policies and strategies adopted by different governments in Southeast Asia have been credited with giving impetus to the region’s meteoric economic rise. The measures undertaken covered a wide

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\(^9\) Supra note 6.
\(^11\) Id at 12.
spectrum of activities ranging from compulsory re-distribution of land to investment in rural infrastructure.\footnote{Jose Edgardo Campos & Hilton L. Root, The Key to the Asian Miracle: Making Shared Growth Credible 50 (Brookings Inst. Press 1996).} Underlying all these measures was the recognition by leaders in various countries that establishing broad public support for their plans was critical to the plans’ successful implementation.\footnote{Id.}

Significantly, all the steps taken were geared towards improving the living standards of all citizens.\footnote{Seth Kaplan, What can Southeast Asia teach Africa about Development? (Glo. Dash., 2012), available at http://www.fragilestates.org/2012/02/01/what-can-southeast-asia-teach-africa-about-development/ (last visited July 22, 2012).} This, however, does not necessarily mean that action on the part of governments in Southeast Asia was always motivated by noble intentions. Thus, while in some countries governments were inspired to act by ideological reasons such as social justice and nationalism, in others they were driven by less patriotic intentions such as a desire to cling to power in the face of radical opposition.\footnote{Id.}

Another important aspect of the developmental history of Southeast Asia is that, unlike in the majority of developing countries where the tendency has been to provide short-lived direct income transfers to the poor, the countries of Southeast Asia have generally implemented measures whose effect has been to enhance the likelihood of long-term self-sufficiency for their citizens.\footnote{Supra note 13.}

i. \textbf{INDONESIA}

Indonesia is one of the leading success stories of Southeast Asia. Although the country hardly exported any manufactured goods prior to 1983, it nevertheless enjoyed a steady rise in income levels from the late 1960s well into the 1980s.\footnote{Henley, supra note 1, at 27.} Thus, industrial exports can be ruled out as the reason behind the improvement in incomes. These improvements have instead been attributed to a series of interventions introduced by Indonesia in the agricultural sector, especially in food production.\footnote{Id at 29.}

Among the measures that were introduced were the use of enhanced high-yield seeds, adoption of better and more effective irrigation methods, subsidising the cost of fertilizers, stabilizing food prices by purchasing farm produce at fixed bottom prices and subsidising farmers’ input costs.\footnote{Göran Djurfeldt and Magnus Jirström, Asian models of agricultural development and their relevance to Africa 1 (Lund Univ., Paper for the Advisory Group and Sensitising Workshop, 2002), available at http://blog.sam.lu.se/afrint/pdf/asiamod.PDF (last visited Oct. 13, 2012).} With regard to the issue of unequal land distribution, a balance was restored through better regulation of tenancy contracts and

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{13} Jose Edgardo Campos & Hilton L. Root, The Key to the Asian Miracle: Making Shared Growth Credible 50 (Brookings Inst. Press 1996).
\item\textsuperscript{14} Id.
\item\textsuperscript{16} Id.
\item\textsuperscript{17} Supra note 13.
\item\textsuperscript{18} Henley, supra note 1, at 27.
\item\textsuperscript{19} Id at 29.
\end{itemize}
utilisation of these contracts to provide more equitable access to land for as many people as possible.\textsuperscript{21} The outcome of all these steps was Indonesia’s successful transition from being almost entirely dependent on rice imports in 1970 to being completely self-sufficient by 1981.\textsuperscript{22}

An important feature of the measures introduced in Indonesia was that they were led by the state and centred around small-scale farmers located in the rural areas. Following the decision to end the country’s dependence on food imports, the state provided the necessary funding and technologies to farmers to enable them to meet the set targets.\textsuperscript{23} The support extended to the rural communities also included improvements to road infrastructure, electrification, as well as building of schools, markets and health facilities. In many instances, labour-intensive methods were employed in constructing the infrastructure, which generated jobs for the local people.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{ii. MALAYSIA}

Much like Indonesia, Malaysia has witnessed remarkable economic growth and development since gaining independence in 1957. Today it boasts a diversified and versatile economy that is the envy of many countries.\textsuperscript{25} Considering that at independence it was one of the poorest countries in the world and that today it has almost completely eradicated acute poverty,\textsuperscript{26} the country has no doubt come a long way.

While export-oriented manufacturing enjoyed substantial government support early on in post-independence Malaysia, this quickly changed when the country embraced policies that emphasised rural and agricultural development. These policies were aimed at two specific goals, namely, increasing national rice output in order to make the country self-sufficient and improving the agricultural yield so as to generate better income and raise living standards for farmers.\textsuperscript{27} By the mid-1970s, each of these goals had been realized and producing tangible results.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, as in the case of Indonesia, the current developmental success in Malaysia can be traced directly to efforts to improve the agricultural sector and rural areas.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{21} Id at 12.
\textsuperscript{22} Id.
\textsuperscript{24} Henley, supra note 1, at 30.
\textsuperscript{26} Henley, supra note 1, at 32.
\textsuperscript{27} Djurfeldt and Jirstrom, supra note 29, at 11.
\textsuperscript{28} Id.
\textsuperscript{29} See Henley, supra note 1, at 34.
As was the case in Indonesia, the state took the lead in implementing the pro-rural, pro-agriculture development policies. One of the boldest measures undertaken by the state was investing in improved irrigation methods under the Muda scheme. In place between 1966 and 1974, the scheme became “... the largest single public sector investment project undertaken in Malaysia before 1980...” and contributed to nearly 60% of the country’s crop production. Other measures that were introduced included providing significant subsidies for fertilizer, keeping the prices of rice down through farmer support and providing funding for the replacement of old rubber trees with new high-yield ones. The critical role played by farmers’ associations in organising farmers, especially after the state-run co-operatives were broken up, should also not be overlooked.

Remarkably, notwithstanding the state’s prominent role in driving these efforts, agricultural development in Malaysia remained mostly market-mediated, with trade in agricultural products generally continuing to take place among private individuals and entities, and without the state’s direct involvement.

B. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

While sub-Saharan Africa has experienced some improvements in areas such as poverty reduction, provision of clean water and primary school education over the last ten years, it still lags far behind almost all the other regions in terms of overall economic growth and development. This is exemplified by the fact that it is home to a majority of the estimated 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty in developing countries, it remains heavily dependent on food imports and over half of the world’s children who are not in school reside in the region.

However, sub-Saharan Africa does not comprise a homogeneous group of countries with similar developmental experiences and outlook. On the contrary, various countries in the region have followed diverse developmental paths that have yielded contrasting results. For this reason, a number of sub-Saharan African countries, some of which were not discussed by Henley in his article, are examined below with a view to generate a better sense of what has worked and what has failed in the region’s approach to development.

30 Djurfeldt and Jirstrom, supra note 20, at 11.
31 Henley, supra note 1 at 33.
32 Djurfeldt and Jirstrom, supra note 20, at 7-8.
33 Id at 13.
35 Id at 7, 12 & 17.
This examination occurs in the context of the failure by many sub-Saharan African countries to give priority to improving smallholder agriculture, which according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), “...is the most serious post-independence error of judgment by African countries”.36

i. BOTSWANA

At the time of its independence in 1966, Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world and relied on foreign aid for close to 60 per cent of government spending.37 Thanks primarily to its mineral wealth, the country is now classified as an upper-middle income country.38 It has utilised the resources at its disposal to effect significant improvements in areas such as road infrastructure, services and life expectancy.39 These improvements notwithstanding, large sections of the population, especially in the rural areas, remain poor and mostly unaffected by the benefits of the country’s relative success.40

In view of this high incidence of poverty in rural areas, as well as the historical role of agriculture as the primary source of livelihood among poor families in Botswana, the government recognises that agriculture can potentially play a pivotal role in poverty alleviation.41 However, there are significant obstacles standing in the way of this potential that the government has yet to overcome. The foremost challenges for the country are its dry conditions and frequent droughts, which render crop production particularly difficult and risky, leading to low average yields.42 While beef production is a much more profitable undertaking than crop production due to exports to the lucrative European Union (EU) market, the problem is that it mainly benefits a few well-off farmers who have access to fenced off land and private wells that are a necessity in the dry conditions.43

There are also policy-related challenges in Botswana. Although at independence achievement of food self-sufficiency was a top priority for the government, somewhere along the way this changed and the government now places less emphasis on this objective.44 This change was reflected in the 1991 food

37 Michael Lewin, Botswana’s Success: good governance, good policies, and good luck, in 81 YES AFRICA CAN: SUCCESS STORIES FROM A DYNAMIC CONTINENT 81, 90 ( Punam Chuhan-Pole & Manka Angwafo, eds., 2011).
38 Id; MARTIN WHITESIDE, ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABLE FAMILY SECTOR AGRICULTURE IN BOTSWANA 6 (Lyplatt, Stroud, Glos 1997).
39 Lewin id.
40 Whiteside, supra note 37, at 6.
42 Whiteside, supra note 37, at 6.
43 Id.
44 Botswana Government supra note 40.
security strategy which abandoned the promotion of domestic food production and substituted a broader strategy involving food imports. Even the 2002 revised national food strategy makes this point quite clear by advocating “policy to promote commodities based on comparative advantage...”.  

Considering that Botswana has at its disposal a research base that is reasonably well qualified and resourced, it is rather disappointing that so far no significant progress has been made in developing agricultural technologies that can counter the harsh environmental conditions in the country. Lamenting this dearth of progress on the research front, Whiteside has remarked that “[c]hanges in research orientation, with improved farmer-extension-research linkages and more inter-disciplinary working [are] considered necessary to improve the relevance of research to farmers”.

At present, there are a number of active initiatives overseen by the Botswana government targeted at improving productivity in agriculture. These include the work of the Citizens Entrepreneurial Development Agency and the Local Enterprise Authority, both of which aim to provide support to small farmers through training, market access facilitation, mentoring, helping to draw business plans and the use of technology. In addition, there is the Arable Land Development Programme, the Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme, the National Master Plan for Arable Agriculture and Dairy Development, and the Integrated Support Programme for Arable Agriculture Development, all of which operate at grassroots level to improve productivity. These initiatives are without question a step in the right direction. However, bearing in mind the level of commitment and effort it took for Southeast Asian countries to finally make an economic and developmental breakthrough, questions remain as to whether the measures undertaken by Botswana thus far demonstrate the level of commitment required to succeed.

ii. **KENYA**

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45 *Id.*

46 Botswana has several agencies dedicated to agricultural research. These include the Department of Agricultural Research, which employs 97 researchers under three divisions focusing on animal production, range research and support services; the National Veterinary Laboratory, which employs 29 researchers; the National Food and Technology Research Centre, which has 2 employees; the Veld Products Research and Development, a non-profit entity specialising in non-timber forest products research; and Botswana College of Agriculture, accounting for over a third of the total research capacity and employing 27 researchers. In 2008, Botswana spent $4.32 on agricultural research for every $100 of agricultural output, which is among the highest in the developing world. See Gert-Jan Stads and Motlalepula Pholo, *Botswana: Recent Developments in Public Agricultural Research* 1 – 3 (Agri. Sci & Tech Ind., Country Note, 2011), available at http://www.asti.cgiar.org/pdf/Botswana-Note.pdf (last visited Oct 16, 2012).

47 *Id.*

48 *Id.*

49 *Id.*
When Kenya attained independence in 1963, one of the items at the top of its “to do” list was to invest in rural agricultural development and small farm employment.\textsuperscript{50} This interest in smallholder rural agriculture stemmed from the country’s having the vast majority of its population residing in the rural areas and dependent on agriculture for their sustenance.\textsuperscript{51} In addition, agriculture contributed as much as 35\% to the country’s GDP at the time and was considered a priority sector.\textsuperscript{52}

Indeed, substantial resources were channelled towards the agricultural sector. Part of these resources was spent on purchasing land that was previously in the hands of European settlers in order to resettle small-scale farmers.\textsuperscript{53} Although this expenditure has been criticized for causing poverty alleviation to be relegated to a “secondary objective”,\textsuperscript{54} it is submitted that in fact the expenditure was, at least in principle, in keeping with the goal of poverty alleviation in Kenya. Considering that the incoming post-colonial government inherited a country in which a majority of the rural poor had no land and continued to work as labourers in settler plantations operated under a semi-feudal system,\textsuperscript{55} providing them with land of their own could only have served to reduce rural poverty. This observation is confirmed by Nyangito and Okello, who have stated that “[t]he result [of these measures] was a monetized small-holder sector that contributed significantly to the total production and marketed volume...”.\textsuperscript{56} Similar redistribution of land aimed at empowering the rural poor in Southeast Asia has been acknowledged as having played a significant role in bringing about the region’s remarkable economic success.\textsuperscript{57}

Kenya did make some mistakes, however. Perhaps one of the country’s biggest mistakes was in the way it initially implemented its rural development plan. Most of the funds earmarked for smallholder agriculture were directed towards farmers who had a proven success record and the political elite, while excluding everyone else.\textsuperscript{58} This approach resulted in many of the people who needed assistance being the most overlooked. The government’s tight control over agricultural production and marketing in the post-independence period, which was aimed at addressing historical and social inequalities, also stifled growth in

\textsuperscript{50} Henley, supra note 1 at 36.
\textsuperscript{53} Id at 10.
\textsuperscript{54} Henley, supra note 1, at 36.
\textsuperscript{56} Nyangito and Okello, supra note 50 at 10.
\textsuperscript{57} Djurfeldt and Jirstrom, supra note 19 at 12.
\textsuperscript{58} Sundet and Moen, supra note 55, at 6; Henley, supra note 1, at 36.
the sector.\textsuperscript{59} Furthermore, assuming this paternalistic role is said to have resulted in the government neglecting to consult with the affected farmers in formulating, designing and implementing agricultural policy. The outcome of all these missteps has been a lacklustre performance by the agricultural sector since the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite the agricultural sector’s disappointing performance over the years, its importance seems not have been lost to the Kenyan government, which continues to see the sector as essential to its poverty reduction strategy.\textsuperscript{61} This is seen in a recent government policy document. The document, which takes cognisance of the shortage of land suitable for agricultural production in Kenya, makes proposals for diversification from low to high value crops, using improved agricultural inputs, greater emphasis on irrigation in order to limit reliance on rainwater, commercialisation of small-holder agriculture and better cooperation with other sectors.\textsuperscript{62} Other issues covered in the new policy include promoting the notion of private sector-led development of the agricultural sector and environmental sustainability.\textsuperscript{63}

iii. SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the agricultural sector functions at two distinct levels. At one level, there is the very well-developed commercial farming and at the other there is subsistence farming, mostly concentrated in the rural areas.\textsuperscript{64} Overall, the agricultural sector in South Africa accounts for about 8\% of the country’s total exports, 3\% of the GDP and 4\% of employment.\textsuperscript{65}

Prior to the advent of democracy in 1994, commercial farming benefited from various kinds of government subsidies, including drought aid and other disaster grants, as well as direct payments to industries such as wheat, corn and dairy.\textsuperscript{66} In contrast, subsistence farming remained informal and operated without much state involvement or assistance. This differentiation between the two facets of South African agriculture was also reflected in agricultural policies, which were tailored to ensure that the factors of production worked to safeguard the economic, political and social interests of the ruling minority.\textsuperscript{67} The agricultural policies did

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Nyangito and Okello, supra note 50, at 4-5.
\item Id at 4.
\item Alila and Atieno supra note 49, at 3.
\item Id.
\item Alila and Atieno, supra note 49, at 4.
\item Id.
\item Id.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
not, however, pay much attention to subsistence farming or the rural poor who derived their livelihoods from it.

It was only after 1994 that reforms were introduced to develop small-scale farming as a way to address rural poverty. Owing to the fact that a large section of the country’s poor was already working in farms, but only as underpaid landless labourers, agriculture, along with equitable land distribution, were seen as having the potential to generate better income and improve the living conditions of the rural poor.68 Hence, one of the primary policy objectives of the 1995 White Paper on Agriculture and the 1998 Discussion Document on Agricultural Policy was “…to support the emergence of a more diverse structure of production with a large increase in the number of successful smallholder farming enterprises”.69

The 1996 White Paper on Agriculture outlined three programmes that would form the foundation for implementing land reform in South Africa, namely, land restitution, land redistribution and tenure reform.70 Addressing the issue of land reform in South Africa was and remains particularly important from a developmental perspective. As Evans has noted, “dispossession from the land of the African population led to reduced incomes and a development failure because of the lack of ability for Africans to then utilise ‘hybrid rural-urban family strategies’”.71 Furthermore, the fact that land dispossession was not a feature of the Asian experience as it has been for South Africa and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa is seen as an important factor in the divergent developmental paths followed by the two regions.72

While the various agricultural policies introduced by the government certainly have the potential to transform agriculture into a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and development in South Africa, translating them into concrete results has proven to be a challenge. Despite a concerted initial effort by the government to encourage communities to take advantage of grants made available for land acquisition, the initiative has been beset by problems such as a sluggish pace of implementation as well as the acquired land being inadequate to allow beneficiaries to work it as full-time farmers.73 There have also been concerns that, even with the new policies in place, bias still exists in favour of commercial farmers because they produce for the export market, which negatively impacts small-scale farmers.74

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69 Viljoen, supra note 64, at 9.
70 Id at 8.
71 Evans, quoted in Routley supra note 22, at 11.
72 Id.
74 Food and Agriculture Organisation, supra note 35.
These setbacks notwithstanding, the latest policy on agriculture developed by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries - Strategic Plan 2012 - still refers to agriculture as “a key sector with the potential for large-scale job creation”. The policy also lists as one of the Department’s strategic priorities the intent “to create employment by increasing the number of participants in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors through support for smallholders”. Strategic Plan 2012 has clearly picked up on the theme of pro-poor, pro-rural development advanced by its predecessors. One can only hope that its implementation will work better than have prior plans.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the various sub-Saharan African countries examined recognise the potential for agriculture, including smallholder agriculture, to bring them closer to attaining their goal of economic development which has eluded them for so long. This is evident in the elaborate agricultural policies these countries have formulated, all of which stress the critical role of smallholder agriculture and the need to invest in it. However, despite these policies, for the most part the countries remain mired in conditions of poverty and underdevelopment that have dogged them since independence.

In view of Henley’s hypothesis that it was the decision to improve agricultural productivity among poor, smallholder rural farmers that helped Southeast Asia to attain economic success, the critical question is, what is it that the countries of Southeast Asia did which the sub-Saharan Africa countries have failed so far to do. The next section seeks to answer this question.

III. THE LESSONS SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA CAN LEARN FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

While many agricultural experts strongly hold that there are transferable lessons from the Southeast Asian experience, applying those lessons to alternative situations has certainly not been easy. This is attested to by the problems encountered by the sub-Saharan African countries reviewed above in trying to translate what are reasonably good policies, clearly inspired by the events in Southeast Asia, into tangible results. The question is whether there are things that the sub-Saharan African countries can do differently in order to secure a more positive outcome.

One school of thought is that, rather than try to replicate what occurred in Southeast Asia, countries in sub-Saharan Africa ought to find ways to reinvent the Southeast Asian model to make it suit their own unique circumstances. In terms of this thinking, these countries have to incorporate originality and inventiveness

75 Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, supra note 71, at x.
76 Id at xi.
77 Routley, supra note 22 at 27.
into their approach and use these to build on the experiences of countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. Routley sums up this thinking by observing that “[a]daptation and innovation should ... be the hallmark of any emerging developmental state rather than a dogmatic following of the East Asian model.”

Indeed, a lot of praise has been heaped on Southeast Asian countries and their neighbours in the Asia region for successfully building on technologies and techniques developed elsewhere in the world and producing alternative versions that are better than the original. A good example of this was seen when enhanced high-yielding dwarf and semi-dwarf rice varieties traditionally grown in East Asia proved difficult to cultivate in the tropical conditions of Southeast Asia. To overcome this problem, the countries of Southeast Asia came together in a collaborative research effort and were able to crossbreed two rice varieties from the two sub-regions to produce one that could be grown in tropical conditions.

An important aspect that is lacking, or at least not sufficiently developed, in the sub-Saharan African countries discussed above, and which the Southeast Asian countries had developed prior to achieving their extraordinary growth, is the capacity to effectively execute their developmental plans and turn them into concrete results. This state capacity, according to Routley, is derived from having a bureaucracy that is competent, effective and able to function with relative independence from societal pressures such as politics.

The significance of having an independent bureaucracy is that it permits the functionaries involved to make choices in their implementation of policy based on fair and objective assessments. Put differently, being independent puts the functionaries in a position where their primary consideration in issuing rewards and punishment in the course of their work is whether such measures would advance or defeat the goal of economic growth and development. Despite their autonomous decision-making authority, the functionaries must simultaneously remain sufficiently connected to the community to be able to ensure its continued support and involvement in developmental change and to render the necessary services.

This conception of capacity, of course, assumes orientation of the bureaucracy and its essential attributes towards the goal of development. Hence, commitment on the part of various key players in a country to growth and development as national goals, as well as effective mobilisation of the population to be part of the effort, are critical. The fact that political bias played a significant role in the way agricultural policies

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78 Id.
79 Id.
80 Djurfeldt and Jirstrom, supra note 19, at 10.
81 Id.
82 Routley, supra note 22 at 9 & 20-21.
were implemented in at least two of the three sub-Saharan countries examined, and with negative consequences, suggests that the requisite capacity to implement developmental plans effectively is not yet firmly in place in some of the sub-Saharan African countries, if not all.

One initiative that can help to stem corrupt government activities that end up rendering otherwise good policies ineffective is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) created under the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).[^83] The APRM was adopted “[i]n order to break with the habit of adopting very well crafted continental programs with no monitoring mechanism... .”[^84] In terms of this procedure, member countries agree to their conduct pertaining to certain values and standards seen as critical to the continent’s socio-economic development being subjected to scrutiny by fellow member countries.

Another feature of the Southeast Asian approach that sub-Saharan Africa would do well to take note of is the role of the state in the effort to bring about transformation. While the state took the lead in many of the initiatives, rather than invoking the use of force or punishment to induce cooperation, it seems that playing a supportive and activist role is a more effective method. As noted by Booth, “[t]he favoured forms of market intervention by Southeast Asian states which achieved development successes ‘involved investment, subsidy, and the supply of public goods (the redistribution of resources) rather than regulation (the use of coercive power beyond the power to tax)”’.[^85]

There is also the question of good governance and the extent to which it is essential for attainment of economic development. A recent study looking into the reasons behind the contrasting developmental paths followed by sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia found that the reasons had little to do with the two regions’ different structures or systems of governance.[^86] The study found that, as a matter of fact, at the time many of the Southeast Asian countries were undergoing rapid economic growth they had a higher incidence of corruption than sub-Saharan African countries.[^87] The implication of these findings is that good governance is not necessarily a pre-requisite for economic development. However, as Booth is quick to caution, this should not be understood to mean that good governance is unimportant or irrelevant to the quest for development.[^88] Instead, it means that countries of sub-Saharan Africa might have to review the order of their priorities and refocus of their strategies for growth and development.

[^83]: NEPAD was spawned from merging two development frameworks put forward by former presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, and was later adopted by the African Union in 2001.
[^85]: Booth, supra note 6, at 1, citing DRA Policy Brief 01, 2012.
[^86]: Id. at 2.
[^87]: Id.
[^88]: Id.
Lastly, sub-Saharan African countries should try to emulate the so-called “seed-water-fertilizer revolution” that helped to transform agriculture in Southeast Asia, but in ways that are appropriate to their conditions. This initiative, which involved a major drive to improve the quality of seeds utilised by farmers, employ effective modern irrigation methods and increase the use of fertilizer, is credited with laying the foundations for the Southeast Asian economic miracle. Implementing similar schemes in sub-Saharan Africa would, however, require commitment of substantial resources and a well qualified research base. Sub-Saharan Africa’s best hope of overcoming these obstacles is for the various countries to pool their resources and, to the extent possible, try to find common solutions. This would help to ease the financial burden, especially on the poorest countries. On the research front, the Southern African Development Community (SADC)\textsuperscript{89} set a good example in 2011 when it established the Centre for the Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Africa (CCARDESA), which is an initiative aimed at addressing the food security challenges facing the SADC region through research and innovation.\textsuperscript{90}

IV. THE CHALLENGES FACING SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

A. FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS AND AGRICULTURAL SAFEGUARDS

As can be expected, much has changed around the world since the early 1960s when the groundwork for the agricultural revolution in Southeast Asia was being laid down. Since then, trade between nations has increased dramatically, with hundreds of international agreements concluded to regulate the ensuing trade relationships, many of them affecting the agricultural sector. Like all the other regions, Sub-Saharan Africa has been a part of these developments and the consequences that flow from them.

The implication for sub-Saharan African countries has been that today their ability to pursue policies they want and whenever they want them is severely limited compared to their counterparts in Southeast Asia back in the early 1960s. Now sub-Saharan African countries have to make sure that none of the measures they take fall afoul of their obligations under the various international trade agreements. Moreover, in light of the issues raised above, when negotiating new trade agreements these countries must be careful not to agree to terms that would even further compromise their ability to implement measures they deem critical to growing their economies.

\textsuperscript{89} SADC member countries comprise Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia.  
In this section, two particular free trade agreements come under scrutiny, namely, (1) the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, Mexico and the United States and (2) the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) between South Africa and the EU. Examining aspects of these two agreements is intended to highlight the impact these kind of agreements can have on signatory countries and these countries’ ability to shape their own agricultural policies. The choice of the two is based on the fact that they are both between rich developed countries, on the one hand, and developing countries, some of which are extremely poor, on the other. The two groups of countries being on opposite ends of the development spectrum allows for a clearer demonstration of the agreements’ impact.

i. NAFTA

NAFTA came into operation on January 1, 1994, and bears some unique features that distinguish it from most other free trade agreements. In particular, its provisions on domestic investigations in instances of alleged violations are quite elaborate and offer very little scope for non-compliance. The agreement also imposes detailed and comprehensive procedural obligations not found in the majority of existing free trade agreements. From the standpoint of the individual parties, this means that, in so far as the areas covered by the agreement are concerned, they are severely limited in terms of independent future trade policy measures they can implement.

Rigid as NAFTA is, at its commencement it did allow for a few exceptions in the form of safeguard measures. Under Article 703 on agricultural goods, the parties could impose a tariff rate quota on certain specified goods. In the event that imports increased to higher levels than those stipulated in the tariff schedules, the parties were then permitted to raise tariffs, but not to levels higher than the lower of the prevailing MFN rate or the MFN rate operational as of July 1, 1991. The special safeguard in Article 703 only applied in respect of trade between Canada-Mexico and US-Mexico. More importantly, it lasted only for the duration of the 15-year transition period that ended in 2008.

Under chapter 8, NAFTA also allows the parties to raise tariffs or to introduce other trade restrictions otherwise disallowed in terms of its chapter 3, but only on a temporary basis. These exceptions are permitted as emergency measures where an upsurge in imports threatens to cause or actually causes serious

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injury to domestic industries. As in the case of Article 703, the exceptions only apply in respect of US-Mexico and Canada-Mexico trade.

Notwithstanding the obvious attempts in Article 703 and Chapter 8 to make up for the weaker economic and developmental position of Mexico when NAFTA came into operation, the country’s agricultural sector has suffered negative consequences flowing directly from the removal of tariffs. This has been particularly true following the lapse of the 15-year transition period allowed for Mexico to adjust to the elimination of its protective import tariffs. The subsequent opening of the country’s economy to foreign competition has put significant pressure on the local agricultural sector.

The pressure on Mexico’s agricultural sector has been exacerbated by government subsidies enjoyed by US farmers, which NAFTA does not regulate. These subsidies, which enable US farmers to increase crop production and lower their prices, have helped to enhance the competitiveness of US agricultural products vis-à-vis similar products grown in Mexico. This, in turn, has led to many of Mexico’s smallholder farmers being driven out of business and abandoning farming altogether. Commenting on the situation of the affected Mexican farmers, Pollan has remarked that, “[u]nable to compete, they have left their land to join the swelling pools of Mexico’s urban unemployed.”

The fact that the circumstances under which some US agricultural products are exported to Mexico are regarded to amount to “dumping” seems to have so far made no difference to the plight of the Mexican farmers. Moreover, the payments made to Mexican farmers by their government under the Procampo programme, as a way of helping them to remain competitive after NAFTA came into operation, have mostly ended up compensating farmers for losses resulting from US dumping, instead of going to improvement of productivity as was originally intended. In reality, however, these payments would most probably still be inadequate to help Mexican farmers recover from the adverse effects of subsidised US agricultural exports.

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92 Article 801.
94 Id at 3.
96 Under the WTO definition, “dumping” includes situations where products from one country are sold in another country at prices below their production costs. See GATT Article VI Sec. 2.2. In the nine years from 1997 to 2005, Mexico is said to have witnessed an influx of US agricultural exports with dumping margins of between 5-10% for certain meats and 17-38% for certain crops. See Timothy A. Wise, *Who Pays For Agricultural Dumping? Farmers in Developing Countries* (Triplecrisis, 2010) http://triplecrisis.com/who-pays-for-agricultural-dumping-farmers-in-developing-countries-2/ (last visited Oct 14, 2012).
97 Wise, supra note 92, at 36. In reality, however, these payments would in all likelihood still be inadequate to help Mexican farmers recover from the adverse effects of subsidies paid to US farmers.
If anything, Mexico’s experiences under NAFTA illustrate just how difficult maintaining a level playing field can be in a free trade agreement between countries that are at different stages of development and which enjoy varying degrees of political and financial clout. These experiences also show that, irrespective of the seemingly impartial language of the agreements, it is often the case that the strongest countries have the upper hand and can dictate how the agreements are implemented. Most importantly, Mexico’s experiences demonstrate the helplessness of the weaker countries to do anything to rectify deteriorating domestic conditions exacerbated by the agreement once it has been concluded.

For sub-Saharan African countries that are signatories to free trade agreements, the NAFTA example shows the kind of restrictions they can expect to face should they want to introduce fundamental changes to their agricultural policies. It also indicates how vigilant these countries need to be in negotiating future free trade agreements to avoid needless limitations on their ability to effect policy changes.

II. THE TDCA

The TDCA between South Africa and the EU covers numerous aspects including trade relations, financial aid, development cooperation and political dialogue. Although it was concluded in 1999, its implementation in respect of the different aspects under its coverage came at various times. The relevant date for trade and development was January 1, 2000.98

It is worth mentioning at the outset that, because the TDCA is a bilateral agreement between South Africa and the EU, its conclusion has a direct bearing on the economies of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland (BLNS). This is because the BLNS countries are South Africa’s partners in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), with the result that EU goods covered by the TDCA and imported into South Africa gain automatic duty-free access to the BLNS markets. Thus, for all intents and purposes, the BLNS countries are parties to the TDCA.

Like NAFTA, the TDCA has a specific safeguard clause devoted to the agricultural sector. The clause is contained in article 16 and reads as follows:

“Notwithstanding other provisions of this Agreement and in particular Article 24, if, given the particular sensitivity of the agricultural markets, imports of products originating in one Party cause

98 Kruger et al, supra note 87, at 53.
or threaten to cause a serious disturbance to the markets in the other Party, the Cooperation Council shall immediately consider the matter to find an appropriate solution. Pending a decision by the Cooperation Council, and where exceptional circumstances require immediate action, the affected Party may take provisional measures necessary to limit or redress the disturbance. In taking such provisional measures, the affected Party shall take into account the interests of both Parties.”

As reflected above, the special safeguard clause can only be invoked if there is actual or threatened “serious disturbance” to one of the parties’ agricultural markets. The interpretation given to the expression “serious disturbance” is that it imposes less stringent demands compared to “serious injury” used in the general safeguard found in article 24. More precisely, it is understood to mean that disruptions to ordinary patterns of trade in a domestic market of one of the parties are enough to trigger the safeguard clause, provided such disruptions are not temporary and pose no threat of serious harm. While this less rigid requirement is not uncommon in “European type” agreements, most free trade agreements impose the standard of “serious injury”.

On the face of it, it would seem that the lax conditions for invoking article 16 allow the parties to the TDCA more flexibility to avoid some of their obligations when need arises. This would, of course, work to the advantage of the SACU countries because they would be better positioned to take appropriate steps to effect improvements to their agricultural sectors. However, such flexibility is not guaranteed because the EU almost always makes up for the lax requirements for invocation of safeguard measures by insisting on stricter rules for implementing the same measures. The EU’s peculiar conduct in permitting lax requirements for invocation must be understood against the background of the group’s diverse membership, which always makes consensus on specific issues difficult. Thus, the EU’s behaviour is motivated more by political necessity than any concern for the interests of its trading partners.

In the end, therefore, the TDCA is not all that different from NAFTA when it comes to the extent to which it allows the parties flexibility to introduce changes to their agricultural policies. Should any of the SACU

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100 Id at 8.

101 Kruger et al supra note 87, at 21.

102 Id.

103 Id.
member countries try to transform their agricultural sectors fundamentally, stiff competition from EU will surely make this difficult. Indeed, SACU countries will soon start feeling the full impact EU agricultural imports now that the twelve year transition period allowed for South Africa to remove tariffs has come to an end.\textsuperscript{104}

Based on the preceding analysis regarding the proven and potential effects of NAFTA and the TDCA on the agricultural sector in the weaker signatory countries, sub-Saharan African countries have reason for caution in negotiating new free trade agreements with developed countries. Arguably the most important free trade agreement negotiations that many sub-Saharan African countries are presently engaged in are those for Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the EU. Some commentators have expressed the view that EPAs are unlikely take into account to the adverse effects of market access concessions on domestic regulations and market outcomes.\textsuperscript{105} It is, therefore, important for sub-Saharan African countries hoping to have a realistic chance of using agriculture to achieve developmental change in their economies to bear this observation in mind as they proceed with their EPA negotiations.

\section*{B. OTHER PROBLEMS}

The enormity of the task facing sub-Saharan Africa in trying to improve its agricultural productivity was highlighted in a recent article published in the New York Times.\textsuperscript{106} In the article, the author points to the fact that global crop yields have stagnated over the last twenty years, while agricultural revolutions of the kind seen in Southeast Asia have become increasingly rare. With specific reference to sub-Saharan Africa, the stagnation is attributed to the soaring cost of fertilizer among other things, which is reported to be twice the world average. To quote Cowen, “...the region that probably needs fertilizer the most also has to pay the most for it, and much of Africa doesn’t have the prosperity to make this an easy stretch.”\textsuperscript{107}

Among the solutions proposed by Cowen is for countries such as the US to halt subsidies for corn-based biofuels, which are contributing to escalating food prices.\textsuperscript{108} Without doubt such a step would help increase

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\textsuperscript{104} The twelve year transition period ended in 2012. See B. Rudloff and J. Simons, \textit{supra} note 66.
\textsuperscript{105} This is based on the fact that EPAs are a product of reciprocal negotiations in which the parties aim to maximise their own gains while also trying to minimise their losses. See Brenton, N. Dihel, L. Hinkle & N. Strychacz, \textit{Africa’s trade in services and the opportunities and risks of economic partnership agreements} 5 (Africa. Trade. Policy. Notes., Note No. 6. 2010), available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRREGTOPTTRADE/Resources/EPAPolicyNoteREVISED.pdf (last visited Oct 14, 2012).
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Id}.
\textsuperscript{108} About 40 percent of the US corn harvest reportedly goes into producing these biofuels instead of being consumed as food. \textit{Id}.
\end{flushright}
the amount of food available on the market and drive the cost down. However, this would not necessarily address the objective of food self-sufficiency that sub-Saharan African countries seek to achieve.

Another complication for sub-Saharan Africa concerns the way changes in the interaction between local and global capital have come to affect the influence states have within their own borders. The advent of globalization has seen the relations between the state and domestic businesses weaken as the latter become increasingly integrated into the global financial and business networks.\textsuperscript{109} These waning state-industry relations have meant less control by the state over the direction taken by the domestic economy. This obviously makes it harder for sub-Saharan African countries to shape their developmental policies.

In addition, sub-Saharan African countries must contend with protectionism on the part of developed countries bent on shielding their own industries from foreign competition. As Kruger rightly points out, “[d]eveloped countries...have shown a preference for anti-dumping measures and the carving out of agricultural policies to protect their declining industries against imports from developing countries.”\textsuperscript{110} This too adds to the challenges facing sub-Saharan African countries as they attempt to render their agricultural sectors more competitive.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The series of events that swept through Southeast Asia during the sub-region’s agricultural revolution have shown that improving smallholder rural agriculture can stimulate rapid economic growth and development. Through a number of measures that enhanced crop yields and raised income levels among small-scale farmers, within a short space of time Southeast Asia was able to achieve success beyond what anyone could have predicted.

In the preceding pages it was argued that, by adopting the right kind of policies and strategies, and timing their implementation appropriately, sub-Saharan Africa can emulate the success of Southeast Asia. At the same time, however, numerous hurdles, both internal and external, were identified that make the task facing sub-Saharan African countries a daunting one. Until these obstacles are adequately addressed, economic growth in the region is likely to remain elusive.

Taking on these challenges will require sub-Saharan African countries to adopt policies that, while modelled on the Southeast Asian example, also take into account the unique climatic, economic, political

\textsuperscript{109} Routely, \textit{supra} note 22, at 29.
\textsuperscript{110} Kruger, \textit{supra} note 87, at 37.
and other conditions in these countries. Furthermore, such policies must take cognisance of the changes that have occurred in the trade landscape since the agricultural revolution began to unfold in Southeast Asia some fifty years ago.

Particular attention must be paid to the important role of the state in driving transformative change in agriculture. This includes promoting agricultural research, provision of the necessary support for small-scale farmers and ensuring that all stakeholders come on board and rally behind the various initiatives. Despite its diminishing influence in various countries, for the most part the state remains the only entity truly capable of playing the facilitative role of raising the needed resources, brokering the necessary compromises between different stakeholders, and even enacting new laws where necessary. Equally important for sub-Saharan Africa is to develop the capacity to curtail corrupt practices and politically motivated bias that has repeatedly caused otherwise good agricultural policies to fail.

Insofar as safeguard clauses in free trade agreements are concerned, sub-Saharan African countries must strive for a balanced approach. Such an approach should allow for retention of enough flexibility to make intervention aimed at protecting the parties’ economies possible where necessary, while also not being so liberal as to make a mockery of the agreement.

To avoid being cornered into a situation like the one Mexico finds itself in under NAFTA, sub-Saharan African countries need to clarify for themselves what their developmental goals are and how they plan to achieve them before embarking on any trade negotiations.¹¹¹ They should then use this plan as their yardstick throughout the negotiations.

¹¹¹ Id.