

**Greg Mills. *Why Africa is Poor-and what Africans can do about it*
(South Africa: Penguin Books, 2010, p. 531)**

*Reviewed by Jacob Lisakafu**

Drawing on rich personal experience and countless visits across the continent while running a number of head of state level advisory team in several African countries, Greg Mills comes up with a highly accessible book entitled "*Why Africa is poor and what Africans can do about it.*" The book offers a controversial argument for Africa's battle against poverty, corruption and poor governance. Mills is a director of Brenthurst Foundation based at South Africa which is dedicated to strengthening governments and economy's performance in Africa.

The book takes the broad view that African economic misery was deliberately caused by African leaders because of bad advice and policy they voted for choice. In comparison with successful countries in Asia and Latin America, Mills shows that Africa's poverty has not been because of mistreatment by colonial power; or necessary technical expertise is unavailable; or the world has denied the continent the access of Market and financial means to compete. By examining the several countries in African, Asian and South America continents Mills concludes that main reasons why Africa's people are poor is because the African leaders have made that choice. This book is an outstanding contribution in that it is among several ones to bring additional perspective to the question of stagnant and poor development in Africa, especially in the sub-Saharan Africa.

In his six chapters book, Mills gives a remarkable outlook at the development delay of economy, social and political aspects across African continent, seeking answers behind the countries bad leadership, poverty and aid-dependency. He found that the continent's untapped natural resource wealth is immense, from oil wealth, bulk of diamonds, gold to uranium to mention a few. Unfortunately, despite of all abundance natural resources and mineral

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wealth, Africa's economic performance remains dismal and prospects for the new era are bleak. In the same vein, agriculture, which employs the bulk of Africa's population, has performed abysmally, and eating becomes a luxury. The answer to why Africa is poor is simply that its leaders have made this choice (Mills 2010: 1-12).

Additionally, he noted that Africa is poor because its leaders have made selfish and bad choices due to weak leadership and lack of understanding of the economic realities governing economic growth. As an example, he noted that Kazakhstan took \$40 billion from oil revenue to put it into a rainy days fund. But in Nigeria, such revenue has disappeared into offshore accounts of rulers and is largely unaccounted for. Nigeria's situation is not unique to the country, it is a reality found throughout Africa. Thus, Africa's development delay is contrary to the East and Southern Asia and Latin America.

The book gives remarkable examples of huge poverty alleviation, improvement in service, rapid economic growth and notable success in creating a prosperous modern states in East and Southern Asia countries, especially in Singapore, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Kazakhstan and some of Latin American countries such as Costa Rica and El Salvador to mention a few. According to Mills three decades ago those countries were in bottom rungs of the third world. But these countries have developed from bottom to second and first world after choosing good policies such as opening up and deregulating markets thus attracting private capital and foreign investments, and making import and export easier, the employment rate, productivity and GNP increased dramatically for many years. Growing GNP enabled increased revenue from taxation which was used for investment in critical sectors, including the social sectors. Mills posed question if this happened in a barren patch of land in East and South Asia as well as Latin America, why not in mineral and resource-rich Africa, once assailed by similar crises lifting themselves, even remotely, out of the hardship?

Mills's advice to African governments in seeking long term and job intensive growth is to establish political and macroeconomic stability, politically, developing and maintaining transparency in government, the rule of law and government efficiency and economically by developing skills in the population, suitable infrastructure, and a meritocracy free from nepotism and corruption. The author argues that countries need to attract investors to public and private partnerships, thus encouraging private investment in targeted sectors of the economy. They need to implement tax reforms, public

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services reform and deregulation, to attract multinational companies, and to be aware of global competition. Also, he advises to be cost and price sensitive, and keeping the currency at competitive level. African governments should also avoid unnecessary protectionism agenda, and there is a need to remove import and export quotas and tariffs and facilitate trade procedures. Other important components that deserve attention are food security and diversity, education and empowering labour. A major goal is to focus on results in all sectors, including efficiency and customer satisfaction, for without a demand for products and services there will be no economic growth at all.

Mills's advice is significant to Africa due to the fact that many of its leaders have not been able to meet all these challenges. At time of reviewing Mills's work, many countries in Africa have been run by leaders who seem to have little interest in developing their own countries; they look out for their own survival to power through manipulated elections. In this regard Mills identifies common leadership problems, such as lack of education and relevant skills. Some leaders focused on creating their own wealth instead of wealth for their people. The author gives a number of examples of luckless leadership around Africa which has been possible because the people and the external community have allowed them to, for reasons related to self-interest, conscience and altruism (p.229). With the help of donors, the African leaders have successfully managed to externalise their problems, making them the responsibility of others. In response, the external partners have lacked the tools or political will to manage the relationship and their money flows according to the democratic reform and delivery record of their recipients.

In my opinion Mills's book follows similar paths of articles by Robert Rotberg "Strengthening Africa's Leadership (2004)", "The Shackled Continent: Africa's Past, Present and Future (2005)" by Robert Guest, and Paul Collier's "The Plundered Planet: Why We Must-and How We Can-Manage Nature for Global Prosperity (2010)". All the above scholars have shared similar argument that many African countries have fallen into poverty because of bad leadership.

However, the delayed development in Africa is not just simply a consequence of poor leadership as Mills argued. There are more strong reasons than that; one of the reasons is because of deep structural problems of the continent. This structural problem is caused by centre-periphery political and economic arrangements of pre-independence which have

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remained intact to-date between Western countries and African countries. In this system which is extremely unequal relationship, Africa in periphery is there to serve the interest of other parts of the world particularly Western countries at the centre. The use of various strategies to exploit African countries such as pressurizing them to enter free global market economy without sufficient power to compete has potentially disastrous consequences. This kind of unequal relation was well documented and argued by the late Jamaican don, Walter Rodney in his famous book "How Europe underdeveloped Africa (1973)". Basically, the relation is unequal whereby, Europe is taking the lead and cream and Africa is towing the line and submitted to domination. This is one of the reasons why Africa remains poor. Unfortunately Mills didn't provide enough information on this area; instead he focused only on leadership failure.

To get Africa back on track, the African leaders have to focus on growth which is necessary for higher production and consumption and to abandon policies based on short term preservation to stay in power. They have to focus on sustained economic growth that benefits all citizens by developing and implementing sound reforms through harmonious relationships with clear responsibilities between governments, donors, employers; sharing a growth formula in a vision of shared prosperity for all. Additionally, Africa needs to cut-off centre-periphery political and economic arrangement of pre-independence which serves the interest of the Western world and leaves African states without a say in this type of relationship. On top of that Africa needs more committed leaders who put public good unquestionably above their own person interests.

This book is essential for anyone interested in Africa's current development affairs. It may be interesting particularly to practitioners such as policy makers and other government functionaries and students of economic and politics.