

**Anna Lekvall. *Development First, Democracy Later?* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2013, pp. 150)**

*Reviewed by Rodrick Henry\**

The debate on the primacy between democracy and development is not a new one. It has attracted a number of scholars and practitioners in the fields of democracy and development such as Seymour Lipset, Samuel Huntington, George Sorensen, Giovanni Carbarone, Joseph Siegle, Michael Weinstein, and Morton Halperin. The debate surfaces on two theses: first, economic development paves way for democracy; second, democracy paves the way for economic development. *Development First, Democracy Later?* is an additional contribution to this debate. The book approaches this debate by mirroring the position of democracy in the development aid agenda. Its analysis focuses on autocratic states: which are aid recipient. The author refers to them as "hybrid states." The central argument of the book is that democracy has not been a priority in the development aid. Aid for democracy receives less attention comparing to aid for development in aid arrangements. As a result, there is democracy deficit in development aid agenda. This state of affairs largely is by design. Donor community is overtaken by a number of factors: the success of authoritarian developmental states; diplomatic ties; and strategic interests. When these issues come into interplay, often, donors tend to trade-off democracy as a component of aid.

This situation has culminated into undesired consequences. It is the host ground for entrenchment of authoritarianism by empowering autocratic executives, furthering clientalism and failure of aid to reach the targeted population. In general, this is the reason for the failure of aid to bring about development. For instance, one of the critical problems resulting from the current aid arrangements is corruption. With the rampancy of this problem, Lekvall sees the aid in Africa as simply the avenue for political elites to consolidate and sustain their positions in power (p. 36). This is through a wide range of political corruption such as clientalism and patronage.

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\*Assistant Lecturer, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Dar es Salaam, E-mail: [henryrodrick@yahoo.com](mailto:henryrodrick@yahoo.com)

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Consequently, this scenario unleashes limitations towards democracy and democratization in general. The author contends that aid for development has higher chances to attain intended outcomes if and only it has democracy component. Therefore aid arrangements and aid agenda should not be insulated from democracy. She provides empirical examples to substantiate her stand (p. 29-30).

The author acknowledges the awareness of this problem by the aid community. In this regard a number of initiatives, intended to rectify such prevailing course, have been put in place. The Paris Aid Agenda of 2005 is one among such initiatives. It is premised under the principles of accountability and ownership of the aid. These principles would suggest positive shift for bringing democracy as a component in aid arrangements. But, Lekvall's assessment to this initiative concludes otherwise. She finds that, despite of these principles, democracy was not a key principle and has never been a priority in the way development aid is channelled (p. 84). Besides, when aid on democracy is provided it is simply on governance. However, governance is not the same as democracy and it cannot be the substitute for democracy. It is about concentrating power and insulating bureaucracies against political influence and not about political policymaking and democratic bargaining processes-the components of democracy (p. 92). Hence, she recommends the aid community to revisit its approach so that democracy is given a priority in all aid arrangements. This is by adhering to the aid forums that preceded Paris Aid Agenda. These are, the Accra Aid Agenda of 2008 and Busan Partnership-for Effective Development Co-operation of 2011 which emphasize on democratic ownership of aid by incorporating people, parliaments, private sector, local governments and civil societies.

This book is organized into five chapters. Through these chapters the author presents the theoretical and empirical discussion on aid, development and democracy. Chapter one presents theoretical and conceptual justifications for democracy-development synthesis; chapter two presents the state of democracy and politics in aid recipient countries; chapter three discusses the Paris Aid Agenda and its implications in aid arrangements; chapter four focuses on the analysis of democracy component in aid arrangements; and chapter five provides the propositions for furthering democracy in aid arrangements. These chapters are richly referenced and argued soundly. Lekvall has successfully contributed to the aid, democracy and development discourses by advancing a critique towards the prevailing state of affairs. The

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author uses very recent studies from reputable sources as a basis of her study. Much importantly, the empirical data throughout this book is enormously rich. This serves as cornerstone in understanding the explanation to the topic under study.

There are, however, a number of areas in which this book slips up. Largely, this is due to author's antipathy towards incumbents in the "hybrid regimes." She perceives them to be the obstacles in bringing about democracy and development in their respective states. This view is entirely reflected in her book. Henceforth, throughout this part of the review I will refer to it as "bias towards the incumbents." Firstly, it is about its myopic conceptualization of democracy. Lekvall sees democracy to be relevant when the opposition beat the incumbent executives in elections (p. 49). Therefore, a victory to incumbents implies that a country is not democratic. Critically, this conceptualization of democracy is seriously problematic. In my view it would have been plausible if the conceptualization is based on democratic institutions, systems and processes desirable for democracy rather than simply focusing on electoral outcomes. Notwithstanding, if this thinking is applied, most of the world states qualified as democracy-are not. This can tell why she has even failed to apply it when picking her cases as examples of democratic states. For instance she praises Botswana to be a democratic state (p. 113). This is despite the fact that the oppositions have never won executive powers against the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) since independence. This contradicts her thinking.

Secondly, Lekvall proposes that there should be increased aid to political parties and parliaments, in aid recipient states, so as to strengthen their role in aid processes (p. 66). Reading her book, the support for political parties is meant for "the opposition" as a counter to incumbents. I would agree with the aid to strengthen the parliament. This is due to the fact that it has the "legal and legitimate watchdog institution" status. Whilst, on the contrary, I find that supporting political parties is immensely problematic. Such sponsorship opens channels for external agents to drive the politics of the country in their favour as they decide who should be in power. Political parties are driven by the goal of capturing power. Providing them with the aid, by implication, facilitates this end. Notwithstanding, how will such political party after ascending into power insulate itself from the influence of its sponsor? Can it escape the situation where donors will have an upper hand in the decisions of running the state? Surprisingly, this is not considered despite the fact that, in the same work, the author claims to hold

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anti-intervention stance (p. 102). Yet her failure to reason out the consequences of having external agents financing political parties, as a solution to democracy deficit, contradicts her stance. Perhaps she has forgone her stance because of her "bias towards incumbents."

The third fault is on author's criticism over budget support. She is of the view that this type of aid is inimical to accountability and democracy (p. 75). This opens up channels for patronage and corruption. Due to this, incumbents are strengthened by giving them an advantage against other actors such as the opposition. Again, this is simply premised on "bias towards the incumbent" rather than impartial thinking. I am of the view that supporting the country's budget is an effective form of development aid. This is due to the fact that it aligns with the budget which is the outcome of planning, involvement of a number of stakeholders and parliamentary approval. Therefore donor's support in the budget facilitates its goals by bailing the outlined projects. At least, in this arrangement, a whole nation can claim the ownership. This is contrary to non-budget support which its arrangements by-pass the budget cycle. Besides it involves few actors. Here neither the people nor their representatives can claim the ownership. When the president capitalizes on the success achieved through budget support in the electoral campaign I do not see it to be problematic. By and large even presidents from the "democratic states" tend to do the same. Moreover, opposition parties in developing countries tend to use the same budget support to earn credit in their respective constituencies. This is by acclaiming their efforts to push the ruling government to initiate such projects in the national budget. This is despite the fact that such projects are funded through budget support. However, since the "bias towards the incumbent" has overtaken her conception, she simply forgoes such realities. Yet accepting author's stand leaves us with a number of questions to ponder. If we have to avoid budget support, what should be a mode of supporting development projects? Can we by-pass the role of the government in power? Does the author's thinking apply in the "democratic countries" or it is the prescription for the "others"?

Finally, but related to the above, is on Lekvall's proposal on a "ought to be" modality of aid arrangements. She proposes for a shift from state aid to people aid. Thus, donors have to start transferring the cash directly to the people (p. 118). According to her, such arrangements will help in reducing poverty and empowering people to demand for useful representation. Ultimately, people will be less tempted to receive corruption from politicians

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in exchange for loyalty. By this the author is trying to configure a way in which the state is sidelined in aid arrangements. However, I find this proposal a bizarre. This is due to the fact that such aid arrangement intends to create extended dependence by the people towards the donors. Indeed it simply shifts the loyalty of the people from the state to the donors. Under such arrangements, donors will be commanding their views and demands upon the people directly. An analogy of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), funded by foreign sources, provides us with a cautious picture. Most of them have been accountable to the donors and not to the people that they serve. This is revealed by Tina Wallace (2004) in her work titled *NGOS Dilemmas: Trojan Horses for Global Neo-Liberalism?* as well as Firoze Manji and Carl O'Coil (2002) in their work titled *The Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa*. Now come that it is the people who will be funded directly by the "daring donors." Will it be different from that situation of NGOs and CSOs? In my view, this suggestion intends to change the arrangements of aid not from the state to the people, as Lekvall seems to propose, rather into an absolute business of the donors entirely; hence from state to donor dependence. Although, the author is trying not to mention this explicitly, a close reading of the book reveals this conclusion.

Besides these faults, *Development First, Democracy Later?* is an important piece of work. It contributes to the on-going debate related to development and democracy. Moreover, it is very rich in terms of empirical data which makes it very gorgeous to read. Probably this is attributed by the fact that, the author is a well reputable person who has worked extensively in the field of aid for a number of years. Though she states that this book is not intended to academics, I find this book useful for various audiences who are interested to understand aid, democracy and development in the world and beyond such as graduate students, analysts and practitioners.