

Discontinuities in the post-colonial nation-building project in Africa: understanding the causes of state collapse in Africa

Convener:

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Post-colonial state building endeavours on the African continent has been stymied by recurring economic, political and security challenges since the early 1960s. Many have argued that these challenges were not necessarily because of a lack of political will on the part of political actors but rather on the assumption that there has never been a solid state-building platform on the continent. Unlike in other parts of the globe, the de-colonial debate in Africa was mired by political intrigue, rent seeking and void of a developmental theoretical base through which the post-colonial state was supposed to be anchored. The response, some few years after the attainment of political independence, was the imposition of a one-party state in an attempt to address the lacuna of the developmental challenges, which these countries were called upon to overcome. Nevertheless, the one-party state structure together with the Marxist inspired five-year development plans failed to prescribe a workable developmental path for many African countries. The failure of the Marxist approach of the 70s and 80s saw the imposition of the World Bank and IMF economic recovery framework popular referred to as the SAPs. At the end of the 1990s, the SAPs had failed to restructure several African economies. The result was major economic, political and security challenges in countries on the continent. Security and political challenges along the Sahel region, The Horn of Africa and in the Central African Sub-region, attest to this assertion. As a result, the panel seeks to understand these discontinuities that have caused serious strained on the economies of the continent. Interesting enough, there has been robust debate, both at the continental level and among scholars of the global, that the economic challenges the continent has witnessed has led to state collapse, thus, necessitating a structural transformation of Africa's developmental agenda. The panel assumes that state and nation building should be the foundation of any new developmental approach on the continent. Because state building is a state centred approach to development, the panel focuses on the nation-building agenda that perhaps was lacking in the post-colonial development agenda. Did the political elites in post-colonial Africa favour a state-building agenda rather than a nation-building approach?

The panel proposal intends to unravel this assumption with data from both civil society and state actors in the development sectors operating on the continent. The objectives of the panel and the papers that would be presented would therefore seeks to understand whether the approach to nation building in post-colonial Africa respect critical nation building fundamentals necessary to sustain development on the continent? Critical to this would be to assess whether the continent need a new approach to development thinking and if yes, what are some of the theoretical approaches which the continent should consider.