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VIEWPOINT:

THE MEANING
OF SELF
RELIANCE
FOR AFRICA

BY: Okwudiba Nnoli

Dr. Okwudiba Nnoli is a Nigerian lecturer in International relations at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and is working on a book on self-reliance and foreign policy in Tanzania

"We have been oppressed a great deal, we have been exploited a great deal. It is our weakness that has led to our being oppressed, exploited and disregarded. Now we want a revolution--a revolution which brings to an end our weakness so that we are never again exploited, oppressed and humiliated."

This quotation from The Arusha Declaration reflects the importance which Tanzania--and indeed all African states--attach to their desire for development. They aspire to attain a rapid and sustained increase in their moral and material standard of living, not hereafter but here and now. It is one thing, however, to desire development and another to formulate an appropriate strategy for its accomplishment and yet another thing to actually bring it about.

Self-reliance is an appropriate strategy for the achievement of development in Africa. It assumes a hostile external environment but argues that the challenge posed by this environment can and should be overcome by a forceful, courageous and rational reorganization of the African states and their external relations. The tendency to equate it with isolationism is mistaken. A country can be particularly active in international relations and remain self-reliant, because self-reliance seeks to control rather than eliminate the interaction among states.

The success of self-reliance in Africa depends on an understanding of the forces which impinge on African development, and the courage with which African leaders face up to the challenges imposed by these forces. Two broad general factors exert the preponderant influence on the process of African development. These are the colonial heritage of most of the African states, which is reflected in their links with the advanced capitalist countries, and their low level of power.

The association between Africa and the advanced capitalist states adversely affects development in many ways. It limits the independence and sovereignty of the African states because it creates a situation in which most of the major decisions which affect the African economies are made externally. A society which is dependent on another in many respects is powerless to reorganize its activities in the ways it deems necessary. The sense of dignity of its population is reduced, national morale and confidence are low, and in these circumstances it is difficult to mobilize enough human energy for development. Without true national independence, therefore, the people of a state remain underdeveloped in a significant way. As President Nyerere repeatedly points out, there can be no development without true independence.

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Economic dependence leads to an expensive drainage of funds from the African states. For example, between 1960 and 1964 more than half the surplus in East Africa from the financial activities of the foreign-owned insurance companies was transferred abroad, mostly to London.

It also distorts economic development. On the one hand, the goods and services which are developed according to the taste and standard of living of the advanced countries become those demanded by financially able Africans. On the other hand the goods and services which the vast majority of the African people desire are not supplied. The important cash crops are not even consumed in the country. Thus the modern national economy of an African state consumes what it does not produce and produces what it does not consume. Investment programs tend to emphasize the activities of the modern sector in Africa and therefore reinforce this irrational pattern of demand and supply.

Consequently, the vast majority of the African population are left outside the mainstream of development. Since they live in the rural areas, mostly on a level of bare subsistence, and are therefore outside the national market system, these areas can only stagnate or retrogress, not develop. Some may argue that the benefits of modernity and development in the cities gradually spread to the rural areas. This argument ignores the fact that increases in population are very high in the latter. The benefits of modernity that trickle down to these areas do so at a much slower rate than the increase in population. Rather than a gradual but significant increase in welfare there is a gradual decrease in the existing standard of living.

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Dependence on overseas economies distorts socio-political development. Participation in the socio-political life of the global capitalist network leads to the dissemination of capitalist values, ethics and morality and the establishment of essentially capitalist institutions in Africa. Thus the inherent contradictions within a capitalist society are imported into the continent. Personal wealth and its accumulation rather than

national progress and service to the nation become the purpose of work. Competition rather than cooperation becomes the basis of interhuman relations. Under these circumstances interpersonal and intergroup inequality, inherent in the capitalist way of life, finds expression in intertribal, interracial, interreligious, interelite, elite-mass, interregional and urban-rural hostility, suspicion and division. Instability is thus built into socio-political life. The lack of unity created by these divisions has led to a low level of national identification, low national morale and lack of national confidence, which reduce the power which an African state can bring to bear on international negotiations.

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Unlike the period when the US, Australia and Japan acquired their technology, the association of poor states with international capitalism today makes it extremely difficult for them to achieve a high level of technology. The advanced capitalist states' domination of economic activities in the modern sector of the poor states had been accompanied by an increased centralization of decision-making power at the headquarters of capitalist enterprises. Such peripheral states as the African countries remain imitative only. Yet economic development is impossible without the innovative attitudes and skills which leads to a full adaptation of technical knowledge.

Although the relationship between the African states and the advanced capitalist states is thus disadvantageous to African development, there is no reason to believe that the situation would be different if that relationship were with the advanced socialist states. The significant factor is power: a small power in interaction with a bigger power is bound to assume a subordinate role. African states, because of their low power-capability, are bound to suffer serious disadvantages in any relationship with the more powerful countries irrespective of whether these are capitalist or socialist.

In the light of these realities of African development, self-reliance in Africa implies a number of necessary steps. First, African states must nationalize all the significant means of production and distribution of resources within their borders. There is no substitute in this regard for total and complete state ownership. Partnership which involves a poor state and an advanced capitalist firm, even when the state has a majority holding, still gives rise to dependency and consequent distortion of economic development and retardation of technology. Complete nationalization, on the other hand, eliminates much of the structural dependence and prepares the ground for the establishment of mutually rewarding interdependent relationships. The drainage of funds as well as the distortion of the socio-economic and political organization of the state are arrested.

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Nationalization can only lead to development if it is accompanied by a socio-economic and political reorganization to remove the distortions caused by the structural dependence on the outside; bring the majority of the population in the national market system; increase agriculture and manufacturing as well as their immediate relevance to the needs of the people; blunt class inequalities, which lie at the basis of the other inequalities, hostility, suspicion and divisions within the country; ensure that cooperation, not competition, is the basis of interpersonal, intergroup and inter-institutional interaction; emphasize people over wealth as the purpose as well as the instrument of development; and regard its members on the basis not of their wealth but their service to the nation.

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A reorganization of the state along socialist lines is therefore desirable. In this reorganization, emphasis must be placed on rural development. Most of the political resources of Africa lie in the rural areas. Rural development must be along lines of cooperative farming and marketing interspersed and inter-connected with various poles of industrial growth. The initiative for the reorganization of cooperative agriculture must come from the people, who must also enjoy a reasonable degree of freedom in their decision-making while receiving good leadership and technical advice from the national government. The tendency towards the use of sophisticated farm implements must yield to the introduction of simple ones which the people themselves can then improve upon. This would help to create innovative attitudes and skills in the rural areas.

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There must also be a change in the attitude towards the nature and purpose of education and work so that emphasis is placed on technology, hard manual work, service to the community, maximum reliance by the individual on his ability, self-respect and self-confidence. This would help to mobilize all the available energy toward essential national development.

There should be a progressive diversification of the direction of trade, sources of aid, export commodities and monetary relations so as to maximize their economic benefits to the state and minimize any undue dependence on a major power or group of powers. This would eliminate or reduce the external manipulation of African economies for political purposes. Such diversification must also be geared towards the creation of mutually rewarding interdependent relations with as many states as possible.

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Reliance on the big powers should be reduced. These are the states which because of their power are most extensively involved in world politics. Their political interests are as global in nature as their power. Compared with the other powers the possibility of a conflict of political interests between them and the African states is the greatest. They are therefore more likely than other states to manipulate economic and other relationships for political purposes and to the detriment of true African independence.

Consequently, a greater reliance for aid on middle range powers such as Sweden, Canada, Switzerland and Yugoslavia--which have advanced economics but whose political interests in the world community are not as global--is desirable and should be encouraged. Similarly, there should be a greater reliance on the predominantly agricultural but fairly advanced states such as China and North Korea for investments and technical aid, in order to avoid the bias of the industrial-economic viewpoint which highly industrialized countries tend to impose on African problems and which distort African development. Such aid and investments must, however be cautiously approached in order to avoid and debilitating political consequences.

Emphasis with regard to the transfer of external sources to Africa--whether as investment, loan, grants or technical expertise--must be placed on their role in promoting innovative skills and attitudes that will enable local people to adapt technology to their local conditions and resources.

The acquisition of external resources and technology must be carried out directly by intergovernmental action and not by private infrastructural relationships with other societies. Intergovernmental relations are, however, questions of power. African states must, therefore, increase their power by ensuring a greater degree of unity in domestic life, a qualitative increase in their diplomatic activities, and a more active involvement in international life in a manner that is closely related to their development needs. Emphasis must be placed on the creation of the diplomatic skills and institutions necessary for successful negotiations at the international level.

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Secondly, the base of African power in world affairs must be broadened and consolidated. In this regard the coordination of African, and indeed Third World positions in key international economic and political institutions of the world is essential before, during and after critical meetings--not simply on questions of principle and goals, but also on specific proposals and bargaining tactics. Of course, African or Third World political and economic unity is the best means of increasing this power. In its absence, however, this close cooperation and coordination of activities, and the more limited regional economic and political integration of African states, may help and should therefore be encouraged in any way possible.

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Self-reliance as a strategy of development in Africa unites domestic politics, economic development and foreign policy. It points to the totality of national life, indicating the interrelationship of its various major facets and emphasizing its real purpose, which is the socio-economic, political and spiritual welfare of all its people. It must be based on a thorough analysis of the domestic and international environment within which this purpose is pursued. It remains the only strategy which can convert the presently hostile external environment of African development to a benign one.

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