

New Partnerships for Growth Research in Africa

February 25, 2010 – February 26, 2010

The Hotel Palomar, 2121 P Street NW, Washington, DC

Economic growth in Africa continues to rely largely on volatile commodity prices, leaving countries dependent on fluctuating global pricing and demand. Low private investment and minimal industry do not provide the more diversified base which would reduce Africa's dependence on single commodities and facilitate more sustainable growth and development.

While there is a consensus that African countries need to diversify their economies, there is less consensus on the most appropriate strategies to achieve such transformation. There exist an abundance of national, international, and non-governmental organizations and research institutions studying these important issues, but research programs of the various stakeholders have not as yet coordinated sufficiently and often lack the contribution and voice of African researchers. African researchers ultimately require a platform for bringing their work to the attention of major stakeholders.

It is against this backdrop that the Africa Growth Initiative (AGI) of the Brookings Institution brought together a diverse group of organizations in a workshop on February 25-26, 2010 to discuss "New Partnerships for Growth Research in Africa." One of the the primary objectives of Brookings AGI is to create a platform for collaboration and sharing of ideas between African researchers and other international development researchers working on growth research for Africa.

The Africa Growth Initiative has instituted partnerships with six research institutions in Africa that have considerable capacity for collaborating on growth research projects, and that were in attendance: the Development Policy Research Institute (DPRU) South Africa, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) Ghana, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) Uganda, and the Economic and Social Research Consortium (CRES) Senegal.

In addition to the six partner research institutions, other participants at the workshop included representatives from international research organizations and foundations: Africa Economic Research Consortium (AERC), Africa Progress Panel, African Development Bank (AfDB), The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Global Development Network (GDN), The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), International Growth Centre (IGC), International Monetary Fund (IMF), The Rockefeller Foundation, Swarthmore College, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University (UNU-WIDER), Wellspring Advisors, The World Bank, and Yale University.

While many of the participating organizations have bilateral relationships, the 'New Partnerships for Growth Research in Africa' workshop was the first time that all the organizations had come together to discuss how to pool efforts for a greater policy impact. Amplifying the voice of Africans in policy debates will require collaborative partnerships across Africa and the world.

During the first day of the workshop, the six partner African research institutions, international research networks, foundations and multilaterals gave their perspectives on the growth research agenda for Africa. The second day of the workshop focused on where and how we can collaborate and specific strategies to increase the voice/impact of African researchers.

Perspectives on the Growth Research Agenda for Africa

The View from African Research Institutions

The six African research institutions presented their current research plans and capabilities and commented on the AGI research agenda. The partner institutions are working on a wide variety of projects including: social protection, environmental policy, evaluation of government programs, growth research, employment, trade, regional integration, rural development, infrastructure development, private sector development, efficiency of service delivery, governance and accountability, education and health.

The African institutions also discussed some of the challenges they face as public policy research organizations. Financial constraints continue to be a primary concern for many African research institutions. Many institutions take on consulting projects in order to meet their financial obligations, which detract from their research agendas. Public funding provides access to the public sector that they would not have otherwise. However, civil society is often suspicious of government funded research and may not accept research findings as unbiased. As a result, African researchers struggle to balance independence and relevance/impact. Donor organizations can help to liberate African researchers from the constant need to search for funds. More stable long term funding will help African research institutions be independent and sustainable.

Institutions also struggle to find ways to make their voice heard and achieve impact through their research. Collaborative partnerships with institutions in other countries will allow to African research institutions to share their research with a larger audience. Partnerships also provide cost sharing benefits that can help to minimize financial constraints.

Another key concern for research organizations in Africa is how to retain top talent. African research institutions frequently lose talent to other sectors of the economy, as well as to international organizations, because they cannot offer the same benefits and salaries. The inability to retain top talent makes it very difficult for think tanks to continuously produce high quality research. Partnerships that increase researchers' exposure and provide greater learning experiences may help research institutions retain talent.

The View from Research Networks

Gobind Nankani of the International Growth Centre emphasized that international organizations should strive to partner with local African researchers when conducting research. It is common for international organizations to overlook local researchers even when they produce high quality research, because they have their own experts to do the job. There are many key issues that African researchers can, and should contribute to. For example, the Millennium Development Goals deadline is coming up in 2015 and Africans and the international community need to determine what the next steps should be.

To date, the majority of funding for international development research goes to northern-based researchers. It is alarming that only 6% of the approximately US\$1 billion for development research actually goes to researchers in developing countries. Smart public policy should always be grounded in empirical research and policies work best when formulated by local actors who understand the realities on the ground.

The View from Multilaterals and Foundations

With new interest in growth, it is important not to forget about poverty and inequality. Many African countries have seen marked growth in the last 10 years; however, this growth has had little to no impact on poverty reduction. Thus, a broad consensus of participants supported that AGI should focus on pro-poor growth. The current interest in industrial policy should also be coupled with creating decent/good jobs. Adam Elhiraika of UNECA remarked that the goal should be "employment-generating growth," and not just any growth.

In addition to noting the important issues facing Africa that should be driving any growth agenda, the multilateral organizations and funding institutions also saw a greater need to work more closely with African research institutions when developing research and policy. Multilaterals should pay more attention to what Africa's premier research organizations are working on and coordinate their research agenda's accordingly.

Finn Tarp of UNU-WIDER noted that the growth agenda should be examined with a focus on the triple crisis of food, finance and climate. Research must take each of these factors into account as these are the issues that will continue to threaten the world and most certainly Africa in years to come.

Claudia Juech of the Rockefeller Foundation observed that international organizations continue to work with the same African research organizations year after year. There needs to be a number of think tanks in each African country to stimulate public demand for policy research and to increase dialogue. Thus, it is important that AGI have a plan to expand the number of African research institutions it works with beyond the six partners.

Working Together: Where and How Can We Collaborate? How to Involve More African Researchers?

Partnering with Brookings

The goal of new partnerships for growth research in Africa is to amplify the voice of Africans in policy debates based on well structured research. The Brookings Africa Growth Initiative will provide a platform through which African researchers can reach policy makers and academics in the United States and in Europe, working jointly on communications and outreach.

In order to build long term programmatic relationships, AGI is seeking to build the partnerships research plan directly into its program mission and objectives. Once the institutional framework exists, researchers can better plan ahead for long term projects. Brookings AGI will also seek to formalize partnerships through MOUs and contracts which track deliverables and monitor impact. In this way AGI and its partners can ensure funders that they are meeting set goals and subsequently show results to the African partner institutions.

Partnerships within Africa

The six partner institutions will not only work with AGI but also with each other, taking advantage of synergies between institutions and regional learning. For example, both Uganda and Ghana are set to produce large amounts of oil this year; as a result, AGI is working with EPRC in Uganda and ISSER in Ghana on a project studying natural resource management policy issues. Dr. Borat from DPRU also recommended that the six partner institutions should also work with other research institutions in their home countries that are not part of this initiative. This will facilitate capacity building in the countries in which they operate.

Research institutions in Africa could facilitate collaboration through the use of information communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs should be emphasized and distance learning networks should be utilized among African research organizations to take advantage of the broad knowledge base on the continent. ICTs can help to reduce the cost of collaboration as they are a relatively inexpensive way to work together and share up-to-date research.

Building Relationships for Greater Impact

It is the depth and not just the breath of partnerships that matters. When institutions formulate deep relationships, similar to that of ISSER and Yale University, the research they produce is likely to be both relevant and actionable. Such partnerships are often mutually beneficial because local researchers are

able to develop new expertise while external researchers gain a better understanding of the conditions on the ground which improves the quality of the research from both partners.

AGI is committed to developing deeper relationships not only with the six partner institutions but also with secondary partner institutions. AGI can give AERC researchers an opportunity to present their work to audiences in the United States that they might not otherwise reach. Similarly there needs to be greater collaboration with UNECA and AfDB. AGI is also working to establish a more formal relationship with GDN, IGC and WIDER. Such strategic long term partnerships are the key part of increasing the voice of African researchers.

Ideas for Greater Policy Impact

There exists an information gap in Africa when it comes to communicating research findings. A significant amount of research is being done that external donors and policymakers are not aware of. Michael Keating of the Africa Progress Panel asserts that communicating research findings effectively is just as important, if not more important, than the actual quality of the research. This means understanding the target audience and determining the best way to communicate with them.

It is essential that Africa develop a league of researchers who can discuss various policy issues backed by solid research. The discussion on growth and the effectiveness of aid needs to move well beyond polemics and more African researchers need to be heard in this discussion. Backed by quality empirical research, they can present a view that challenges those who assert that aid has been bad for Africa. The question is how to move away from a world in which many of the decisions that impact Africa are made outside of the continent to a world in which Africans have a greater voice on development issues.

An important facet of outreach is focused communication to different stakeholders. Dr. Borat noted with concern that African researchers often ignore the investor community when producing their research. The investor community needs empirical evidence as much as policy makers. Despite the abundance of investment opportunities, African researchers have failed to communicate opportunities to investors in the United States and Europe for example. This flow of information is important for structural transformation in Africa.

Dr. Ssewanyana of EPRC emphasized that it is essential to involve stakeholders in the early stages of research. This will ensure buy-in from the target audience and allows for healthy debate on research topics. In addition stakeholders—which include donors, policy makers and sometimes the media—should be engaged throughout the project duration. This increases the chance that they will be more receptive to research outcomes.

Finally it is important for institutions in Africa to develop greater relationships with the media. Brookings AGI is often contacted by western media to comment on various matters, but does not have experts who can comment on all the issues posed. However, through its partnerships with the six research institutions, AGI will be able to refer western media to experts in the African institutions. This will increase the visibility of African researchers in western media while maintaining Brookings' reputation as the go-to think tank for knowledge on various topics.

Concluding Remarks

Collaborative partnerships have many benefits: they can help African researchers reach a wider audience; they bring on-the-ground expertise to northern partners; and they also provide cost sharing benefits that can help to minimize financial constraints. As such, there should be more South-South partnerships among African researchers as well as North-South partnerships. Deeper long term partnerships can lead to relevant, quality, cutting-edge research that will advance growth in Africa. Information communication technologies can also be utilized to share research and findings in a cost effective manner.

The focus of funding for development research should go to researchers in developing countries to build the capacity for conducting high quality research. In addition, it is important that international organizations adjust their modus operandi to include partnerships with local researchers. Such partnerships will improve the overall quality of growth research for Africa. In addition, growth research for Africa should emphasize pro-poor/job-creating growth. The research agenda for Africa should also take into account the triple crisis of food, finance and climate all of which are becoming increasingly relevant for Africa.

The Brookings Institution has a track record of successful outreach and policy impact; AGI will leverage this success to empower the six partner institutions to increase their voices in national and international Africa policy debates.

AGI will use the feedback from the workshop to revise its research agenda and draft proposals on the nature of collaboration between AGI and the six partner institutions as well as between AGI and the secondary international partners.