

# Editorial

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On 12<sup>th</sup> September 2017, South Africa commemorated 40 years since Steve Biko's death in police custody. Steve Biko's ideals of Black Consciousness were girded by his call for political freedom. Biko was acutely conscious of the relationship between political freedom and economic freedom and was of the view that "for meaningful change to appear there needs to be an attempt at reorganising the whole economic pattern and policies within any particular country" (Steve Biko, 1977). The relationship between political freedom and economic freedom is complex and by no means will unilateral (Friedman, in Farr, Lord, & Wolfenbarger, 1998:248) and political freedom only lead to economic freedom if further measures are taken to create space for a country's citizens to productively participate in the economy, its governance and its economic development endeavours. In this editorial I reflect on whether, in Africa, there have been concerted efforts to create a positive correlation between political freedom and economic emancipation. Across Africa, a natural resource boom is underway with new discoveries of minerals and a global demand that is not abating. The 2016 African Economic Outlook Report (Cities 2016:5) confirms that in 2015 Africa remained the world's second fastest growing economy after East Asia. The Report portrays a fairly good picture for Africa's growth and notes that in 2015 Africa's growth in real GDP was estimated at 3.6% which is higher than the 3.1% for the global economy and 1.5% for the Euro area. All this presents opportunities to deliver prosperity and opportunity for Africa's citizens. Yet poverty, mistrust of leaders and underdevelopment remains rife in many African countries.

In this Issue **Akinola and Wissink** suggest that one of the decisive impediments to sustainable development and improvement in the living conditions of Africans has been the jettisoning of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) and the dismissal of its utilities for providing indigenous solutions to African problems. The authors site the positive contributions of IKS to, not only medicine, agriculture or climate change, but also to governance.

**Akinola and Wissink** suggest that indigenous knowledge is very useful in the area of governance and point to the disconnect between the conflict management systems of the modern states and those of their ethnic constituents as one of the possible causes of conflict, instability and lack of development on the continent.

What Akinola and Wissink do not highlight are the philosophies underlying African indigenous knowledge systems. One of the philosophies in Indigenous Knowledge Systems is the *Ubuntu* African philosophy of life which Jenjenkwa (2016:192) has defined as “a harmonious and humble co-existence with fellow human beings which underscores the interconnectedness of human beings for mutual gain”. Yet corruption and maleficence are high in many African countries. South Africa for example has been caught in a flurry of state capture. Unlike corruption, in which the corrupt attempt to circumvent laws, rules and regulations, state capture refers to corrupt efforts to influence how laws, rules, and regulations are formed. And that is why state capture is said to be the most pernicious and intractable form of grand corruption in the political economy (Hellman & Kaufmann, 2001:33). There hasn't been scientific research into state capture in South Africa and what we currently have is anecdotal. In this Issue **Dassah** reflects on state capture as a concept and refers to it as “a recent, but harmful unhealthy business-state relationship phenomenon with affinity to corruption”. Through in-depth literature study, Dassah highlights the metamorphosis of state capture into co-opted state reconfiguration in Latin American states, particularly Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. Against this backdrop Dassah advises that the experiences of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico are instructive for African countries and that state capture has dire, long-lasting consequences for African nascent democracies and emerging economies faced with alleviating poverty and unemployment. State capture with all its attendant manifestations can only sink countries into deeper poverty.

**Ukwandu and Jarbandhan** are quite explicit on the effect of corruption and poverty. In their article they call on Africans to insist on good governance and hold African leaders accountable for the mismanagement of national resources and poverty in their countries. For **Ukwandu and Jarbandhan**, a major driver of Africa's poverty and underdevelopment is bad governance and the endemic corruption that characterises public institutions on the continent. It is not geography, culture or malaria that is to blame. The usual scapegoats for many political leaders in Africa, namely colonialism and globalisation, were overcome (to a certain extent) by the

Brazilian presidency of da Silva, which put the needs of the poor first. They quote then president da Silva who attributes the success of his presidency in creating jobs to the accountability of the public institutions and the real partnership with business, labour and civil society. With this, da Silva's eight-year presidency took 30 million Brazilians out of absolute poverty and created 15 million jobs.

Poverty is a debilitating phenomenon but childhood poverty is even more debilitating given its effect on children's physical and cognitive development, which leads to low education levels and reduced productivity in their adult life thus perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty. In this Issue **Okem** presents a comparative analysis of child social protection in three countries – Brazil, Nigeria and South Africa. He notes that although the countries are characterised by high child poverty, Brazil, and South Africa have made more progress in the design and implementation of child social protection policies geared towards, not only alleviating child poverty but also, improving other socio-economic conditions of children. For Okem improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery, putting the plug on fruitless and wasteful government expenditure, taming the tide of corruption and broadening the existing tax base greatly contribute to childhood welfare and potentially prevents child poverty.

In addition to these administrative and political ideals, the youth require practical and targeted programmes to progressively improve their chances of sustainably contributing to a country's development and staying out of poverty. Several countries have implemented skills development and entrepreneurship projects to specifically target youth empowerment. In this regard varying success rates are recorded. Some of the factors that contribute to such projects, according to Wilson, Minkler, Dasho and Wallerstein (2008) relate to group dynamics, intragroup leadership, facilitator skills, and school-community contexts. **Boadu and Ile** add another dimension to these factors - participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) which is the buzz phrase in recent development policy discourse. Drawing on a quantitative study **Boadu and Ile** assess the beneficiaries' perspectives of the participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) process in the Local Enterprise and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP) in Ghana. In their conclusion they affirm that youth in PM&E plays a critical role in enhancing participation, empowerment, accountability, decision-making, capacity building and above all the sustainability of the intervention project.

Thus, although countries on the African continent have achieved political freedom and are generally independent sovereign states we are yet to see this political freedom manifest itself in a situation where all the citizens of all African countries enjoy the freedom to participate in economic activities that positively and sustainably impact their livelihoods. In Africa we are yet to see a situation where the public sector provides a conducive environment for this to happen, and where public services are efficiently and effectively delivered. The discourse in this Issue is instructive in the critical aspects that leaders, policymakers and citizens alike should be focusing on and these are – indigenous knowledge systems, avoidance of all forms of corruption, building strong institutions of governance, promotion of child welfare and youth empowerment.

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### References

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