

# **Institutional Frames and Regime Types in West African Development**

## **Terms of Reference for a Commissioned Paper**

Historically, development has always occurred within defined political and institutional contexts. The debate that has taken place in recent years has centred on the ideal political regimes and institutional frameworks best suited for the achievement of development. Much of this debate has been informed by *ex post facto* readings and re-readings of the historical experiences of the countries that are presently categorized as developed. Out of such readings and re-readings, attempts have been made to propose patterns and even correlations between regimes, institutions and policies and particular development outcomes. But as can be expected, there is no firm consensus that has emerged from the debates as to which regime types, state forms, policy combinations, and institutional frames are ideal to help late developers such as those represented by the countries of West Africa to achieve accelerated and sustained economic development and social progress. If anything, opinion continues to be polarized between those who, on the one hand, see a more or less tight correlation between political regimes, state forms societal systems and institutions (whether authoritarian or democratic) and those who insist, on the other hand, that the historical evidence is either agnostic or simply too inconsistent and variable to support any meaningful prescription of an ideal or rigid model.

West Africa has a long history of state formation which has also impacted on historical processes of economic, social and political transformation in the sub-region. The area has, similarly, known phases of authoritarian governance and experiments at democratization. Furthermore, the history of institutions in the sub-region dates back in time even as the form and substance of institutional frames have witnessed changes. Various phases in the development of the area have also been associated with different policy regimes that have carried equally differing implications for the process of development. It is, therefore, legitimate to interrogate the on-going debates on state type, political regimes and institutions and their correlation with development or lack of it using the example of the sub-region. But while such an interrogation is necessary, it is not made easy by the fact that the challenges of development faced in West Africa do not simply emanate from the absence of institutions, for the history of institutions in the sub-region is a rich and long one. It is out of this consideration that some authors have moved beyond the simplistic argument that West Africa does not have institutions to consider such issues as the nature of the institutions and regimes that have been and/or are still in place. In this regard, various characterizations, ranging from the neo-patrimonial, predatory and unsteady to the prebendal, sultanist and neo-traditional have been employed to characterize West African institutions and regimes, and, hence, their inability to deliver development. But it is doubtful if these characterizations are themselves helpful or even, in some cases, meaningful given the omnibus manner in which they are deployed.

The paper on institutions and regimes will be very important for the symposium as it will introduce the key issues in the state-institutions-political/policy regimes-development nexus into the deliberations of the meeting, examining the extent to which the organization, institutional expression and uses of power at different points in time have impacted on development processes and outcomes in West Africa. In order to do this effectively, a typology of state forms, institutional frames and political/policy regimes will be necessary. Particular emphasis should be placed on the factors that explain the outcomes that were registered and the policy factors, political regimes and institutional processes and actors underpinning them. But above all else, the paper should also seek to address alternatives with regard to the organization of power, territorial administration, and institutional effectiveness that could help the countries of West Africa to turn the table of underdevelopment, doing so in ways that allow for the pursuit of economic and social policies that promote democratic governance and sustained development at the same time. Of particular relevance would be the on-going debates about democratic developmental states and their feasibility in Africa.

Pertinent questions which the paper should aim to answer include: What typologies of institutions, political regimes and policy processes has West Africa known over the years and how have these impacted on the development of the sub-region? What historical trade-offs have been attempted between development and democratic governance, and to what effect? Beyond the claim that West Africa does not have institutions, is the core problem of development in sub-region to be accounted for by the types of political regimes and institutional forms that it has known over the years? What alternative modes of organization of power, institutional framework and political regime are available to West African states and to what extent are these feasible and/or viable from the point of view of long-term development?