A Window into Changing Policy Priorities
Evidence from the Citizens of 34 African Countries

Mavis Zupork Dome, Master of Public Policy Program, Michigan State University

Introduction:

After gaining independence in the 1960s, many African governments in their quest for the growth and development of their economies pursued various development policies. While some experienced economic growth, development in general was slowed. In response, many countries adopted the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) policies introduced by the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s which some observers agrued only worsened their situation through to the latter part of the 1990s. Similarly, UN Millennium Development Goals policies in the 2000s are also not without contention. For instance, whilst various reports on one hand, have shown progress and successful implementation of these goals with positive impacts of reductions in poverty rates, increase in school attendance, growth in GDPs and human development. On the other hand, these very reports have also shown widening global job gaps; where over 60% of workers in the developing world still live on less than $4 a day, coupled with high school dropout rates among others. Indeed, development, as it were, is a measure of more than just human development indicators and growth in GDP. It is more or less about equal distribution and allocation of income and resources among social groups and the effects of productions and consumption on the people’s environment. Successful formulation and implementation of policies strives on participation, information dissemination and education. This project attempts to throw more light on these areas and more importantly, takes a look at the voice of the public in 34 African countries, so as to unearth their most important concerns for redress.

Methodology:
The study assesses popular views of problems that government should address in 34 African countries. The assessment was done using regional differences, GDP per capita and the Human Development Index for each country. Source of Data: The study uses secondary data from Afrobarometer Round 5 data collected in 34 African countries between 2011 and 2013. The question that was of focus is “In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?” Respondents could give up to three answers, so responses can total more than 100%. Also, for comparative analysis, various countries’ GDP and Human Development Index for 2012 were accessed from World Bank data and UNDP reports, respectively.

Analysis: Data were analyzed using simple bar graphs, scatterplots and means tests for variance

1. Problem Comparison by Region and GDP

- Over all, the data suggest the top most problems respondents across the 34 countries were most concerned of were Unemployment, health and poverty.
- With regards to economic issues, of most concern is unemployment and poverty. Employment stands out as the number one problem in countries such as Cote D’Ivoire, Cape Verde, Algeria and Namibia.
- In terms of regional differences, those in West African countries are most concerned with public services such as water supply, electricity and roads while those of North Africa are rather concerned with management of the economy.
- In relation to per capita income differences, Economic issues are top priority for all countries. Social service was the second most priority for countries in the upper middle income while those in the lower middle and low income countries indicates public service (roads, water supply and electricity).
- East African respondents are most concerned with poverty and management of the economy.

2. Problem Comparison Per capita and HDI

- From the scatterplot of education, it is evident that as Human development index of a country increases there is a reduction in priority the public places on education problems. The results shows less concerns about the education in those countries with high development index compared to those with lower human development index.
- The same goes for Health and GPD, which showed a negative but high correlation. Residents in countries with Low GDP were much more concerned about health than those with a high GDP. This difference showed significant at 1% and 5% (P< 0.0027).
- Comparing GPD with poverty and unemployment also shows evidently that respondents within lower GDP countries are more concerned about unemployment and poverty. While the differences showed significance for employment (P< 0.0001), that of poverty did NOT show any significant difference (P = 0.8736).

Conclusion:

- Using income levels and human development index of countries, it is evident that respondents are more concerned with economic issues followed by public or social services.
- Regionally, residents of North Africa are most concerned with economic issues compared to other regions. However, those of West Africa are most concerned with issues of Public service compared to the rest.
- The Per Capita Income comparisons indicate that all countries are most concerned with economic issues. Governance as a problem is ranked third in priority only among the upper middle income economies, whereas the lower middle and low income economies are more concerned with social services.
- It is also evident that high Human Development index and GDP reduces concerns with issues/problems related to health and unemployment.
- Based on these results, the policy recommendation is that more efforts should be put into policies and programs that will improve unemployment, health care and poverty.

Committee Members: Dr. Carolyn Logan; Department of Political Science, Dr. Joshua Sapotichne; Department of Political Science, Dr. Valentina Bali; Department of Political Science