

**Welcome and opening address at the 13th
Highway Africa Conference: *Reporting 2010,
Development And Democracy***

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7 September 2009

The officials of Highway Africa, officials of print and electronic media institutions, of national, continental and international media organisations, of state departments and the Makana municipality, representatives and members of organisations and universities throughout Africa and other parts of the world, the Heads of the Rhodes School of Journalism and Media Studies, Prof. Guy Berger and Prof. Larry Strelitz, Prof. Fackson Banda and Mr. Chris Kabwato, distinguished guests, conference participants, speakers and colleagues: molweni, jambo, bonjour, born dia, good morning.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Rhodes University, to iRhini/Grahamstown, the Makana District, and the Eastern Cape; and to guests from other parts of Africa and the world, welcome also to South Africa!

The School of Journalism and Media Studies occupies pride of place at Rhodes University and on the African continent and we are honoured to once again host this 13th *Highway Africa* Conference. Over the years, the conference has become a key

event of Rhodes University, and its Pan-African nature gels well with our aspiration to be an outstanding African university 'which proudly affirms its African identity', and is rooted in the aspirations, challenges and struggles of the continent.

Beyond welcoming you, I have been requested to also briefly address the theme of this year's Highway Africa gathering, which is *Reporting 2010, Development and Democracy*.

It seems to me that if journalists and the media seek to report on development and democracy effectively then they need to have a good understanding of development and democracy.

Beginning with *development*, there is, of course, a huge literature on development, penned from within divergent social theoretical and ideological frameworks. Suffice to say that there are what may be described as, on the one hand, "thin" conceptions of development, and on the other hand "thick" conceptions of development.

“Thin” conceptions of development are essentially economistic, and tend to reduce the idea of development to economic growth and enhanced economic performance as measured by various indicators. Development reduced to economic growth gives rise to goals, policies, and actions that focus primarily on promoting growth and reducing obstacles to growth.

In contrast, “thick” conceptions of development extend beyond a concern with economic growth to embrace issues of a wider economic nature as well as social, cultural and political issues. At their most extensive, the concern is with structural economic change which widens ownership and eliminates or reduces income inequality, unemployment and poverty; with greater social equality; equity and redress for socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups; expansion of human, economic and social rights and civil liberties; the institutionalisation of a substantive democracy and vibrant civil society; deracialisation and decolonisation of intellectual and cultural spaces; and extension and the deepening of political and citizenship participation.

The title of the Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen's 1999 book, *Development as Freedom*, embodies well the "thick" concept of development. Sen writes that

Development ...is ...a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance. . . (Sen, 1999:3).

The contrast between "thin" and "thick" conceptions of development as well as their implications and contradictions is well-evincenced by Immanuel Wallerstein. In a seminal article titled 'Development: Lodestar or Illusion', Wallerstein argues that both liberal and radical political movements that assumed power after World War II "set themselves the double policy objective of economic growth and greater internal equality"

(1991:115). Posing "what is the demand for development all about?" he states that

the twin goals indicate the double answer. On the one hand, development was supposed to mean greater internal equality, that is, fundamental social (or socialist) transformation. On the other hand, development was meant to mean economic growth which involved 'catching up' with the leader (i.e. the US) (Wallerstein, 1991:115).

Wallerstein rightly argues that historical experience shows that 'social transformation and catching up are seriously different objectives. They are not necessarily correlative with each other. They may even be in *contradiction* with each other' (1991:115-6).

Turning to *democracy*, there are similarly also "thin" and "thick" conceptions of democracy. Thin conceptions tend to be satisfied with the formal aspects of democracy – a constitution that guarantees separation of powers between the

executive, legislature and judiciary, human rights, regular elections, political pluralism and so forth. Thick conceptions, while acknowledging that formal aspects are hugely important, embody a concern also with the extent to which rights are promoted, asserted and defended rather than simply proclaimed, the extent of democratic participation, the spaces for participation, the opportunities for holding elected officials accountable, with socio-economic rights, reproductive rights and so on.

In the African context in some quarters it has been argued that democracy is impossible without particular levels of economic development. The late Claude Ake notes that many regimes tied

the issue of democratization to economic development, asserting that the quest for democracy must be considered in the context of Africa's most pressing needs, especially emancipation from 'ignorance, poverty and disease'. The pursuit of democracy will not, it is argued, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. Nor will it give shelter to the homeless. People must

be educated and fed before they can appreciate democracy, for there is no choice in ignorance and there are no possibilities for self-fulfilment in extreme poverty (1991: 35)

This suggests that economic development must precede democracy. However, can democracy not impact positively on the process and nature of development? Ake's rejoinder is pertinent:

Africa's failed development experience suggests that postponing democracy does not promote development; (and) (e)ven if it were true that democracy is competitive with development, it does not follow that people must be more concerned with improving nutrition than casting votes, or more concerned with health than with political participation. The primary issue is not whether it is more important to eat well than to vote, but who is entitled to decide which is more important (ibid:35).

Amartya Sen argues much the same point when he speaks of 'freedom as an end and freedom as

means' and states that '(o)vercoming the inequalities of power associated with economic privilege is an important aspect of democracy in the full sense of the term' (cited in Motala and Chaka, nd:14;15).

I submit that if we seek to realise the goals of equity, social justice and social transformation we have to forsake "thin" conceptions of development and democracy and to choose "thick" conceptions of development and democracy. Without "thick" conceptions of development and democracy, it will be nigh-impossible to eliminate the historical economic and social legacies of colonialism, to transform economic and social relations, and erode and redress inequalities in patterns of wealth, ownership and opportunities. It will be also extremely difficult to meet the basic needs of people; democratise the state and society, and to ensure that development is simultaneously intellectual, cultural, social and political rather than just economic in nature.

Turning to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, this, of course, constitutes a media bonanza. Thousands of journalists and the world's media will descend on South Africa. Tons of print, hundreds of hours of visuals and thousands of gigabytes will be devoted to the event.

Many journalists, most perhaps, will simply cover the beautiful game and the happenings on and off the pitch. Others will also, as they indeed should, delve into the history, geography, economics, sociology and politics of the soccer spectacle being held for the first time on the African continent.

As a supposedly African event, it remains to be seen how, in what ways and to what extent the media coverage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup will differ or be any different from that of previous World Cup's. As an affair that is tightly controlled by FIFA, what opportunities will there be for African perspectives and lenses rather than the usual predominance of European perspectives and lenses. Will much of Africa receive its coverage of 2010 through largely through Europe and North America

or will there be more direct communication and information flows within the continent.

I hope that the themes of 2010, development and democracy will not be addressed in isolation from one another but will be explored together. One reason that it is important that the themes are explored together is that South African government has itself sought to link 2010 with development and democracy.

A recent book published by the South African Human Sciences Research Council brings together a five-year research project on 2010. The convenor of the book notes that "Sport has historically been employed as a means to enhance nation building, and constitutes striking moments of intense identity formation, projection and patriotism, often transcending entrenched social cleavages and providing politicians and other elites with opportunities to build and project common political identities. These large events are positively associated with processes of political liberalisation, democratisation and human rights - with enhancing

the prospects for, and quality of, democratic life” (*HSRC Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 2009).

The convenor notes that, “however, it is the economic and social development benefits that draw most attention. The anticipated economic legacy of a sporting mega-event includes short- and medium-term job creation, international investment and dramatic increases in tourism, ideally sustained over time. These events are thus seen as having direct revenue potential and able to unlock vast public and private investments for physical and social infrastructure as governments invest heavily in urban renewal, which causes a surge in local construction activity. Urban rejuvenation and infrastructure upgrades, including property revitalisation and the targeting of new areas for urban development are seen as key social-development goals” (ibid.)

According to the convenor, on the positive side:

- “The host cities and the economy generally may benefit considerably from investment in transport and information and communication technology”.
- “The 2010 World Cup will contribute to the design and implementation of an integrated public transport system in major urban conurbations. Getting public transport infrastructure up to speed augurs well for all South Africans. This could well turn out to be the event's biggest material legacy”.
- “Similarly, the 2010 World Cup does provide an opportunity to aid identity formation and instil a sense of patriotism” (*HSRC Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 2009).

Yet, other conclusions of the book must be cause for concern. In a nutshell:

- “The contribution of the event to economic development, including tourism, job creation and poverty mitigation, has almost certainly been overstated”.
- “The wider urban development benefits are also likely to be rather circumscribed, with little

evidence of infrastructural, service and facilities provision beyond the lifespan of the event”.

- The event's contribution to GDP is also being questioned in recent modelling exercises. Furthermore, in a country like South Africa where disparities among the rich and poor are among the highest in the world, inequality may even be exacerbated as a result of what many consider to be a failure to prioritise expenditure in a developing economy” (ibid.).

A key conclusion is that: “It is not always the case that dreams are realised through development, but if the articulation between the two in a developing economy context is well formulated and then scrupulously applied, the prospects of a better life for all are that much more easily realisable, and social justice so much more attainable. The 2010 FIFA World Cup will, unfortunately, fall short of these objectives” (*HSRC Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 2009).

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, as a University we are committed to serving South Africa and Africa

through the pursuit and making of knowledge, and excellence in teaching, research and community engagement. The hosting of Highway Africa and the promotion of critical debate among our continent's media specialists and journalists, in all our rich national, cultural and linguistic diversity, and with friends from other parts of the world, is one of the means through which we seek to do so.

In closing, I wish you an enjoyable and memorable stay at Rhodes University and in iRhini/Grahamstown, and a stimulating and productive conference that, drawing on the tremendous collective wisdom that is assembled here, deepens our common understanding of critical issues, and also lays the intellectual and organisational platform for next year's Highway Africa Conference.

Enkosi, asanteni, merci, obrigado, thank you.