

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Craft globally, blame locally: How global neo-liberal development cartographies obfuscate social injustices against the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa

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For over two decades now, Sub-Saharan Africa has been superimposed in a coercive and contradictory neo-liberal development economism agenda. According to this paradigm, markets and not states are the fundamental determinants of distributive justice and human flourishing through the promotion of economic growth that is believed to trickle down to the poor in due time. Despite the global intellectual criticism of this neo-liberal development economics orthodox of measuring development and wellbeing in terms of market induced economic growth, autocratic states in Sub-Saharan Africa that have accumulated un-dimensional growth continue to be applauded as role models on poverty reduction, wellbeing and social justice by donors and global development institutions such as the World Bank and international monetary fund (IMF). This is basically because they have wholly embraced the implementation of the anti-pro-poor neo-liberal structural adjustment tool kit. This study uses a critical hermeneutics methodology to expose the distortions embedded in neo-liberal gross domestic product (GDP) growth cartographies and how these disguise the social injustices against the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa with particular reference to Uganda. The study contends that in measuring development and wellbeing, human rights and social justice must take precedence over economic efficiency and GDP growth for that matter.

**Key words:** Cartographies, Neo-liberal development, social injustices, Sub-Saharan Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1990, there has been a seeming increasing commitment to human rights and social justice on the African continent and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa as evidenced by the increasing commitment to electoral and constitutional democracy, ratification of international human rights treaties and domestication of these

international human rights standards (political globalization).

In Uganda for example, even peasant cultivators were given the constitutional mandate to usher their leaders in and out of leadership<sup>i</sup>. In addition, women in Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya and Nigeria among other states were

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guaranteed the prerogative to equally compete with men in a formerly patriarchal public sphere.

This seemed to be a wind of change and new dawn on the African continent however, it was during the same time when an ambitious and predatory neo-liberal economic agenda was imposed on African leaders with structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that would propel Sub-Saharan African from a 'bottomless pit' of indebtedness and economic stagnancy (economic globalization) to prosperity.

These SAPs were enshrined in privatization, cost-sharing, retrenchment and liberalization. According to this neo-liberal New Public Management (NPM) agenda spearheaded by the IMF and World Bank, the state had to virtually withdraw from the management of the economy so that markets could take over the promotion of economic growth and the distribution of wellbeing. The promotion of neo-liberal growth is believed to be a positivistic process that is oblivious of ethics, human rights and social justice<sup>ii</sup>. This put many Sub-Saharan African countries in a contradictory positioning in the sense that, states which had leaders that had been voted into power by the citizens to promote and protect their rights and interests, were forced by neo-liberal precursors to turn against the same people by retrenching them from work without adequate compensation, evicting them from their agricultural lands to pave way for corporate agriculture.

In Uganda for example, the fabulous bill of human rights in the constitution and institutions that are supposed to protect the poor from social injustice are at total variance with the blatant violations of human rights by the state and the police brutality against anybody who dares to stand up against social injustices. In post genocide Rwanda, despite the flamboyant performance of the economy and vital institutions such as the health sector, the government has persistently violated the right to freedom of association and expression and a number of journalists and political opponents have lost their lives for standing up against the violation of human rights with impunity. This exposes the inadequacy of the GDP growth measurements in explaining sustainable development and human flourishing.

The persistent use of economic growth as a sole standard of development is an injustice. Economic growth is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of development and thus ought to be promoted in a frame work of equality, equity, environmental sustainability and respect of human rights for all irrespective of gender, sex, colour, opinion and social status. According to the National Development Plan, "the Ugandan Economy experienced varying growth rates when the Poverty Action Plan was being implemented, with an average GDP growth rate of 7.2% between 1997/1998 and 2000/2001 to 6.8% between 2000/2001 and 2003/2004, increasing

to 8% over the period 2004/2005 to 2007/2008 (NDP I, 2010: i)".

However, the plan is silent on how increased growth has enhanced the wellbeing, capabilities and livelihoods of the poor men and women in Uganda. We ought to be aware of the fact that a country can easily have increased growth amidst structures of gender oppression, heinous human rights violations, environmental degradation and social exclusion. This implies that the benefits from such growth are only enjoyed and controlled by a tiny percentage of the population leaving the multitudes to languish in a sea of poverty.

### **The demise of the socialist movement and the superimposition of Sub-Saharan Africa in the neo-liberal empire**

African nationalism espoused in the clamour for freedom and self governance bore fruits in the late 1960s when most of the states in Sub-Saharan Africa gained independence from their colonial masters. Colonialism was equated to capitalism and exploitation and therefore the 1970s saw a "restoration" of African identity and consciousness with a move to the left (socialism) in most of the states (Sklair, 2002:). The African leadership and intelligentsia chose socialism as an ethic of development and ideology of distribution because of its close affinity to African communalism. They argued that capitalism was individualistic and hence repugnant to the African social reality in which the common good takes precedence over the good of the individual. This social movement was led by Milton Obote in Uganda, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, Samora Machel in Mozambique, Nkrumah in Ghana and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania among others (Cox, 2005). However, the economic depression and political crises that characterised most of Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s saw the total crumbling down of this anti-capitalist social movement in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as state economic sovereignty. This period saw the superimposition of Sub-Saharan African states in the neo-liberal 'empire' of structural adjustment, privatisation and New Public Management (NPM). As a result, "the African intelligentsia has argued that colonialism was thrown out through the door only to come back through the window (Kiely, 2004)".

### **Growth-centrism and magnanimous economic performance in the eyes of neo-liberal precursors and proponents**

Since the mid-1990s, Sub-Saharan Africa for the first time in three decades, started growing at about the same rate as the rest of the world (World Bank, 2008b). For example, over the decade (2000 to 2009), economic

growth was very strong in East Africa, with regional real GDP growth averaging 6.6% annually (African Development Bank, 2011).

According to the World Bank "Uganda established a strong record of prudent macroeconomic management and structural reform between the 1990 and 2000s. The country was among the first Sub-Saharan African countries to embark on liberalization and pro-market policies in the late 1980s. During that time, a stable macroeconomic environment and sustained private sector-oriented reforms led to Uganda's graduation into a mature reformer in 2006. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged 7% per year in the 1990s and the 2000s (World Bank, 2008a)".

Uganda is regarded as the African country that has adopted the neo-liberal reform package most extensively (Harrison, 2006). It is considered the star performer of liberal economic reforms and the poster example that other African (and other developing) countries on the verge of starting reforms should copy it in almost every aspect (Kuteesa, 2010). The country's "apparent success (in the 1990s) allowed donors and the ruling political elite to claim Uganda as the jewel in their crown, an emblematic case for neo-liberal reform (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, 2009)".

Neo-liberalism was imposed on the country, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, by external actors in the process and aftermath of structural adjustment policies after the 1980s. It has since been pervasive, chiefly due to the powerful ideological, normative and material impact of the foreign agents of the 'development industry', especially the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the various bilateral donors, which promoted neo-liberalism in the country (Harrison, 2010); but also due to the (evolving) interests, orientations and actions of a range of domestic actors.

### **Pro-poor deceptive nuances in neo-liberal cartographies**

Although the World Bank was for a long time not concerned about human rights in its articles of agreement, in 2000 it embarked on its famous project titled; "Voices of the Poor". The purpose of this project was to solicit the views of the poor on poverty which were to influence both domestic and global poverty policies. Sub-Saharan African economies such as Uganda and Rwanda were cautioned to include the views of the poor in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). This culminated into Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) which solicited the views of the poor, rich, civil society among other stakeholders on poverty.

A close scrutiny of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) reveals that they are in tandem with neo-liberalism and technocratic assessments and hence are

largely devoid of the views of the poor. Now, if neo-liberalism essentially posits that markets are positive scientific processes that are self equilibrating and hence should not be interfered with by even the state, how can the views of the poor have any consequence under such a neo-liberal mantra. When examining these Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) closely, one will notice the prominence of neo-liberal nuances such as; privatization as the fulcrum of the economy and the surrender of agricultural livelihoods to corporate tyranny.

### **GDP growth centrism and the Uganda national development plan (NDP)**

The revision of PEAP has ushered in the National Development Plan, a neo-liberal policy planning framework oriented towards economic growth and virtually devoid of human development and the perspectives of the poor. According to the National Development Plan:

*The overarching policy of the NDP will intertwine economic growth and poverty eradication. Policies and strategies will be focused towards achieving accelerated and sustainable growth in the priority areas, creation of gainful employment and socio-economic transformation for prosperity. Increasing incomes beyond the subsistence level and stimulating growth requires sustained orientation of Government expenditure and interventions towards the effective resolution of the most binding constraints .... Attention to these areas will have impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, productivity, household incomes and overall economic development (NDP1, 2010:43).*

Despite being devoid of pro-poor perspectives, the first National Development Plan aims at transforming Uganda from a predominantly peasant low income to a middle income country within 30 years. The plan envisaged that the country will graduate to the middle income segment by 2017 (NDP1, 2010:43). Although the NDP claims to have been greatly informed by the experiences from PEAP which comprised of a number of human development imperatives, it categorically aims at eradicating poverty through promoting economic growth (NDP1, 2010). This economic growth yardstick was not derived from the views of the poor but is rather a view of neo-liberal technocrats in the ministry of finance. According to Amnesty International 2009 Human rights report:

*For the past two decades, the state has been retreating or reneging on its human rights obligations in favour of the market in the belief that economic growth would lift all boats. With the tide receding and boats springing leaks, governments are radically changing their positions and*

*talking about a new global financial architecture and international governance system in which the state plays a stronger role. That opens up an opportunity to also halt the retreat of the state from the social sphere and re-design a more human rights friendly model of the state than the one that has characterized international policy-making for the past 20 years. It creates the possibility to radically rethink the role of international financial institutions in terms of respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights, including economic and social rights. Governments should invest in human rights as purposefully as they are investing in economic growth (Khan, 2009).*

Amnesty further opines that:

*Many experts point to the millions lifted out of poverty by economic growth, but the truth is that many more have been left behind, the gains have been far too fragile – as the recent economic crisis shows – and the human rights costs too high. Human rights were too often relegated to the backseat as the juggernaut of unregulated globalization swept the world into a frenzy of growth in recent years. The consequences are clear: growing inequality, deprivation, marginalization and insecurity; voices of people protesting suppressed with audacity and impunity; and those responsible for the abuses – governments, big business and international financial institutions – largely unrepentant and unaccountable’ ... It is also clear that not only have governments abdicated economic and financial regulation to market forces, they have failed abysmally to protect human rights, lives and livelihoods. Billions of people are suffering from insecurity, injustice and indignity. This is a human rights crisis (Khan, 2009).*

### **Current narrative of economic growth, poverty reduction and development in Uganda by political actors**

Under the guidance of the IMF and World Bank, Uganda has painstakingly pursued an ambitious neo-liberal economic transition under President Yoweri Museveni since the early 1990s. Uganda has been hailed as an economic shining example, success story and the “development darling” of Africa by many international donors (Craig and Porter, 2006: 56). Despite successes in certain sectors and the adoption of an official Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) sponsored by the World Bank (WB), the poorest of the poor in Uganda have not necessarily experienced ‘poverty eradication’. Sustained growth in the country has averaged 7.8% since 2000, and official World Bank statistics say that as a result of this economic growth, poverty declined from 56% in 1992 to 31% in 2006 (World Bank, 2008a) and 18% in 2014.

Sergeant reiterates that:

*Positive statistics are so often used by the international financial institutions (IFIs) to inflate their current projects and to play up the successes of neo-liberal reforms to serve their own gain. The focus on economic growth and its ‘success’ in Uganda has resulted in ignoring massive human rights violations being committed by the Ugandan government on its own people and the impact that conditional aid has actually had on the poorest of the poor. Loan debts will be paid by the poor and not the human rights abusing government who borrowed them through structural adjustment programs that guarantee the international community will continue to have a hand in Uganda for decades to come (Sargent, 2009).*

According to president Museveni the Ugandan economy continues to be vibrant amidst economic challenges and reforms on the local, regional and International scene (Museveni, 2014). GDP rate of growth is 5.1%; inflation rate is 3.6%; foreign exchange reserves are US\$ 3.3 billion; export earnings are US\$ 4.9 billion; remittances from Ugandans abroad are US\$ 767.26 million; the total size of GDP of Uganda is 54.7 trillion shillings; the total size of GDP in US\$ (exchange rate) is US\$ 21.2 billion (Museveni, 2013).

What has brought about economic recovery in Uganda in the last 26 years in Museveni’s opinion are : “security of person and property brought about by the NRM, but more especially by the discipline of NRA/UPDF; the Private Sector, whose investments account for about 77% of all total investments in the economy, including investments of our citizens of Indian origin (who contribute 25-30% of all the total investments); the macro-economic stabilization and liberalization of the economy, which enabled us to control inflation for a very long time and to free the Private Sector from bureaucratic interference; the ever-expanding consumer demand in Uganda and in the Region; and some little support from Development Partner (Museveni, 2012)”. Museveni (2012) further opines that Africa growth is miraculous despite the lack of infrastructure, no electricity, and no roads. Africa has higher rates of growth of 5.8%, USA 1.9%, average global is 3%, the Euro Zone — 0.4% and Africa 5.8% rate (Osike, 2012).

### **Skeptical perceptions of Uganda’s miraculous GDP growth by donors**

With a value of 0.514 in the 2009 Human Development Index, Uganda has moved from the low to the medium human development level and at position 157 out of 182. Uganda was able to reduce poverty considerably during the past two decades. Household data show that between 1993 and 2006, the percentage of people living

below the poverty line fell from 56 to 31. Under the NDP, Uganda strives to further reduce this share to 24.5 by 2015. However, inequality as measured by the Gini-coefficient rose since 1993. There are strong disparities of poverty in terms of region and of rural vs. urban. Poverty estimates range from 5% in urban areas of the central region to 64% in the rural North (Austrian Development Cooperation, 2010).

As witnessed by the reduction of poverty, Uganda's economy grew steadily in the past decade with annual GDP growth rates between 6 and 10%, while in 2009 the rate dropped to 5% as a result of the global economic crisis. The annual growth rate up to 2015 is projected at 7%. But this progress had a mixed impact with respect to the Millennium Development Goals. Uganda is on track on the indicators of population below the poverty line, primary education enrolment, girl-to-boy ratio in primary education, prevalence of Human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), and access to improved water sources (for example, rural water supply coverage increased from 40% in the mid-1990s to 65% in 2009). On all other indicators, however, the country is off track and most seriously so on primary education completion and child and maternal mortality. This leaves Uganda with serious challenges to poverty reduction which, as is economic growth, is further hampered by the high population growth of 3.3% (Austrian Development Cooperation, 2010).

Development in the region of Northern Uganda was affected by two decades of violent conflict. Towards the end of conflict, the poverty rate was estimated at 61% which is double the national average. Socio-economic activities had virtually come to a standstill for most of the population in the central North and humanitarian assistance has become regular for several years. Confined within conflict, the population of the North in addition suffered from sociopolitical marginalisation in the national context. Violence, particularly against women and children, and land disputes are major problems. Following the cessation of hostilities in 2006, security was restored, the formerly displaced population returned to their places of origin and socio-economic activities slowly resumed. Nevertheless, the challenges for reconstruction and development remain enormous (Germany Embassy, 2014).

In response to these challenges, the Austria government directed its funding to efforts to sustainably reduce poverty, vulnerability and inequality. In line with the Austrian Development Cooperation policy on poverty reduction, this support took into account the multifaceted nature of poverty and target aspects of two dimensions of poverty by focusing on

1. The provision of sustainable social and environmental services and

2. Participation and empowerment.

It specifically contributed to

1. To the MDG targets 10 and 11 related to water and sanitation and
2. To the strengthening of human rights.

The Germany Government on the other hand supports Uganda's endeavour to move towards becoming a middle income country but puts special focus on promoting human rights, reforms in public financial management, contributing to peace-consolidation and improving livelihoods, particularly in Karamoja and other parts of Northern Uganda (Germany Embassy, 2010). In addition, Sweden's new development cooperation strategy for 2014 to 2018 aims at creating better conditions in Uganda for sustainable economic growth and development. The aid package seeks to strengthen respect for human rights, improve sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as promote sustainable growth and employment (Kagolo, 2014).

According to USAID, although Prosperity can be measured by poverty rates and GDP growth, and the distribution of prosperity can be measured by ratios and Gini-coefficients, a modern country implies democratic principles and orderly succession of power, transparency and predictability for the private sector and civil society, and efficient, equitable services for the population. Uganda's steady path of poverty reduction over the past 20 years could easily be broken in any number of ways, such as through major internal conflict, service delivery that cannot keep up with the needs of the growing population and economy, accelerated dissatisfaction over poor governance, or spiraling corruption caused by the emerging oil industry (USAID, 2011).

### **Systemic corruption and cronyism in Uganda amidst unprecedented GDP growth: An apparent contradiction**

For a very long time, many Ugandans have innocently argued that as far as corruption in Uganda is concerned, President Yoweri Museveni is being frustrated by his corrupt ministers. The implication of this perception is that the president is not corrupt and greedy like his political cadres. Today, Ugandans are still nursing the shock after learning of the president's acquisition of two executive Mercedes Benz vehicles at a cost of about 6 billion Uganda shillings (The Monitor, 2012). President Museveni has been very instrumental in the watering down of the Inspectorate of government and leadership code of Conduct 2002 which is a brain child of his NRM regime, for example:

*In 2004, President Museveni told off the former IGG,*

*Jotham Tumwesigye, to stop interfering with the work of other government officials, when the former ordered the arrest of Lucien Tibaruha, then Ag. Solicitor General, because the latter had sanctioned the payment of thirteen billion Uganda shillings to one James Musinguzi Garuga in compensation for his farm which had been allocated to settlers by government. On the other hand, he (the President) applauds the work of the current IGG prompting one to wonder whether it is a mere façade of a well orchestrated effort by the State to frustrate<sup>39</sup> the work of the Inspectorate of Government<sup>40</sup> and to limit its jurisdiction (Ruhweza, 2008).*

In addition when Kakooza Mutale, a Senior Presidential Advisor, failed to declare his wealth as required by the Leadership Code Act, prompting the Inspector General of Government in May 2003 to recommend that the President should relieve Mr. Mutale of his duties. Mutale went to court to challenge the decision of the Inspector General of Government (IGG), and his main ground was that there was no prescribed legal form on which to declare his wealth, which arguably was a mere technicality since all other leaders had managed to declare their wealth in various forms. Unfortunately:

*The President swore an affidavit in support of his application, thereby sending out the message that the President and his men were not interested in the fight against political corruption and as such were making it harder for the Inspector of Government to carry out his functions. This was confirmed by the President's willingness to re-instate Kakooza Mutale despite the fact that the said petitioner had contravened the law (as it was then). If it were not so, then the President did not have to be the deponent nor did he have to categorically state that he would reinstate the applicant despite the fact that the applicant had breached the law. This was a clear departure from the President's earlier commitment to strict adherence to the rule of law and zero tolerance for corruption (Ruhweza, 2008).*

In addition, when Captain Mike Mukula, the former junior Minister of Health appealed against his January 18, 2013 conviction to four years in jail for embezzling Shs 210m from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (Gavi). President Museveni gave him 100 million Uganda shillings as legal fees to help secure his freedom. The Presidential Press Secretary, Mr. Tamale Mirundi confirmed this development and described this conduct as Museveni's contribution to his friend (Lumu, 2013). Miria Matembe, an anti-corruption activists and former Minister of Ethics and Integrity in Museveni's government reiterated that Museveni can not lead the fight against corruption because many of the suspects are his relatives and cronies (Jeanne, 2012).

Despite his obliviousness to the neo-liberal dimension

of corruption in Uganda, Andrew Mwenda has succinctly argued that corruption in Uganda should be seen "...as a social institution through which political power is organised, distributed, exercised and reproduced (Mwenda, 2012)." In other words there is no way Museveni and his National Resistance Movement regime can exist without corruption. According to Roger Tangri:

*Under President Museveni, the management of state institutions has been increasingly subject to executive influence. Museveni has been personally responsible for appointing government ministers, higher civil servants, and army officers. 'The purpose of these personalized appointments is to make every office holder feel personally grateful and loyal to the person of the President instead of the institution of the State in Uganda'. Moreover, what has bound these senior state officials to the President has been the possibility of using their positions for the sake of personal gain. Museveni has been able to consolidate his support among top state personnel by allowing them to appropriate public resources for their own personal benefit. State House has also intervened frequently in governmental decision-making and the allocation of public resources. In exercising his powers, the President has been able to act non-transparently and without much political accountability in the area of public governance. By flouting public rules, regulations, and procedures, and manipulating situations of weak transparency and accountability, Uganda's current rulers have been more concerned with serving their own interests than with establishing honest and effective state institutions (Tangri, 2010)*

Despite the wide spread reports of rampant corruption in Uganda as evidenced in the embezzlement of 50 billion Uganda shillings meant for the Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) (Kakaire, 2012), and consequently the suspension of Aid to Uganda by Denmark, Norway, Ireland, Sweden and United Kingdom (Mugerwa, 2012), the IMF argued that:

"Uganda's economy was set to expand by 5 percent in the 2012/13 fiscal year from 3.4 percent in the previous period, driven by falling lending rates and higher government spending (The New Vision, 2012)". As usual the IMF did not explain how the increased growth was translating into the welfare of the citizens. In addition the World Bank also vaguely retorted that:

*it is reviewing its development assistance to Uganda while also strengthening its own measures to ensure that its funds are used for their intended purposes. The World Bank Group is concerned about recent allegations of misuse of public funds in Uganda and is calling for remedial action. The World Bank, however, said it will continue to work with the government of Uganda and*

*other development partners to help the country deliver on its national policy of “zero” tolerance for corruption (Wanambwa, 2012).*

Injustice was further manifested in the resolve of the executive to use tax payer’s money from the consolidated fund in order to refund the billion of shillings stolen in the Office of the Prime Minister (Nalugo and Mugerwa, 2012).

### **When economic growth thrives in Uganda amidst Heinous Human Rights Violations**

Although Uganda boasts of persistent economic growth over the years, the country is slowly but steadily moving away from the rule of law to rule by law. Despite the fact that the 1995 Uganda constitutions guarantees Ugandans the rights to freedom of assembly, association, freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment among others, the government has often used the police force to curtail all these rights. Members from the opposition are always in and out prison for standing out against the abuse of constitutional human rights.

All institutions of the state are enmeshed in presidential appointment powers. For example, the head of the Uganda Electoral Commission and all the commissioners in that institution are appointed by the president. One can imagine such an injustice where members of opposition political parties participate in an election where the incumbent president controls the referee and all liners. Despite all this farce about elections in Uganda, western countries such as the USA and western election monitoring institutions have always gone ahead to applaud free and fair elections in Uganda.

Chomsky aptly reiterates that “neo-liberalism works best when there is formal electoral democracy, but when the population is diverted from the information, access, and public forums necessary for meaningful participation in decision-making (McChesney, 1999)”. He further opines “that the US has repeatedly overthrown democratic regimes because: The more a country is democratic, the more it is likely to be responsive to the public, and hence committed to the dangerous doctrine that “the government has a direct responsibility for the welfare of the people,” and therefore is not devoted to the transcendent needs of Big Brother (US). We have to do something about it. Democracy is okay but only as long as US can control it and be sure that it comes out the way US wants(Chomsky, 2010)”.

It must be noted that Uganda has simply made a transition from a pseudo broad base movement (a single party in practice) system to pseudo multiparty political system. In addition the state continues to use extra constitutional organs such as the Kiboko squad to harass

individuals excising their right to freedom of assembly. The state had persistently used illegal safe houses to torture citizens and although victims of torture have been awarded compensation by the Uganda Human Rights Commission tribunal, 2012, the state has not compensated a majority of the victims of torture (UHRC, 2014: 208-214). During the walk to work protests in 2011, the world was shocked by the brutal arrest of Kizza Besigye and the incredible human rights abuses that were committed by the police and army on the citizens. Because of this brutal repression, many people wondered whether Uganda has simply made a transition from Amin to *Aminism*.

In addition, during the celebration of 50 years Uganda’s independence, a number of members of the opposition were detained in the homes under a colonial law called *preventive arrest*. Many Ugandans looked at this as an amazing paradox. In 2012, Ssemuju Nganda, a member of Parliament was arrested like a *chicken thief* for consulting members of his constituency (The Observer, 2012). In August 2013, the Parliament of Uganda that is popularly known as a rubber stamp of the president, passed a Public Order and Management Act (POMA) that greatly curtails the right to freedom of association and assembly. According to this law, Ugandans gathering in groups of more than three people need police permission or else will be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned. Sad still, the law brings back section 32(2) of the Police Act<sup>iii</sup> that was successfully challenged in courts of law. Such incidents show that the current government presided over by Museveni has nothing to do with human rights and social justice. Its major aim is entrenching its self in power using the USA and her client states as protectors. Sarah Tangen a former resident representative of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, has astutely described Uganda as a pseudo democracy with authoritarian traits (Schmidt, 2013).

### **Development induced displacement in the name of GDP growth**

Despite the availability of the 1998 Land act which provides security of tenure to peasant squatters, Uganda has witnessed massive evictions of peasants from their land over the years in the name of development and GDP growth. For example:

*On August 18, 2001, the Government of Uganda acting through the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) deployed its army which brutally displaced 392 peasant families (approximately 2041 persons). Their houses were demolished, properties destroyed, and staple crops such as cassava and potatoes were confiscated. Several of them were beaten up during the eviction. They were living on a small portion of land which was too leased to*

*the Kaweri Coffee Plantation Ltd, for the purpose of establishing a coffee plantation (FIAN, 2010).*

After the eviction, some peasants were employed on the coffee plantation as casual labourers. These peasants face labour exploitation on the plantation while the payment they receive is so low that they are unable to feed themselves and their families adequately. They are forced to accept labour exploitation because their land, which was their primary means to feed themselves, was brutally appropriated. Since the forcible eviction in August 2001, the displaced peasants have been fighting with all the means at their disposal to gain their right to food. After their attempts to reach a settlement by political means had failed, they filed a court case, directly against the Attorney General of Uganda in his capacity as representative of the Ugandan government on the one hand, and against Kaweri on the other. However, the hearings were postponed several times without any prior notice, making the long and expensive journey to the court futile. These Peasants in Mubende were awarded 7 billion Uganda Shillings in compensation in a court judgment delivered by Justice Anup Singh Choudry. However, the file has since disappeared. Justice Anup Singh Choudry opines that:

*Last year in March, I gave a judgment in the case in favour of the peasants of Kaweri farmers and ordered that the sh20m that they paid into court for security of costs be paid out forthwith. I was informed that the file was required by Nakawa court before the monies could be released. However, I was most reluctant to part with the file as I knew fully well that once this sensitive file left my chambers it would disappear, because we have mafia in the Judiciary. In the end I released the file to Nakawa court with a provision that it must be returned to my chambers..... "But, now the farmers cannot be paid because the file is missing. I note that the lawyers for the farmers are being tossed from one place to another or from one court to another each day for the last one year. "I fear we have mafias in the court, otherwise there is no rhyme, for such a massive file to be misplaced or to disappear (The New Vision, 2014).*

### **Environmental degradation in the name of GDP growth**

President Museveni has pursued a policy of modernisation of the economy for GDP growth even at the expense of environmental sustainability. He has accused the opposition of being development saboteurs and enemies of modernisation because they delayed the construction of Bujagali power project under 'flimsy' environmental concerns. He has come up with a legal proposal of making the offence of economic sabotage a

non-bailable offence contrary to the bill of rights in the 1995 Uganda Constitution. President Museveni's support of GDP oriented capitalism is eminent in his famous statement that:

*Madhvani is an Indian by colour, but he is more African than 2 million Africans combined because he is doing more value for the Africans. By producing sugar, soap and a number of other products he is paying the government of Uganda 45 billion Shillings in taxes. What is the wage bill of Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF)? US\$ 120 billion the whole year. Madhvani alone can pay you for five months! (The New Vision, 2014).*

On April 12th 2007, thousands of people in Kampala took to the streets to protest against the plan of government to give away 7100 acres of Mabira forest to Mehta, an Asian sugar investor. The investor intends to cut down the forest in order to facilitate sugar canes growing for his sugar corporation. The demonstration turned into a bloody riot that claimed the lives of one Indian and two Ugandans (The New Vision, 2007, The Monitor, 2007).

This event is a clear demonstration of the conflict between GDP growth oriented modernisation and environmental sustainability. President Museveni has demonstrated his commitment to the modernisation paradigm in the Plan for the modernisation of Agriculture when he vowed that he will not be intimidated by the riots about Mabira forest give way. He has categorically stated that, "I shall not be deterred by people who do not see where the future of Africa lies. They do not understand that the future of all countries lies in processing (BBC, 2007)". The pressure exerted on the state by the people of Uganda to give up the leasing of Mabira forest is reflective of the tensions between the choices of the people and the private sector motivated modernisation demands of the state. This is indicative of the fact that modernisation should be based on dialogue instead of coercion.

In addition, according to a report by Friends of the Earth International, the World Bank has provided millions of dollars in funding and technical support to palm oil expansion in forested islands off the coast of Lake Victoria in Kalangala, Uganda. Nearly 10,000 hectares have already been planted covering almost a quarter of the land area of the islands. Palm oil plantations have come at the expense of local food crops and rainforests. Local people have been prevented from accessing water sources and grazing land. Despite promises of employment, locals have lost their means of livelihood and are struggling to make ends meet.

David Kureeba from the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) / Friends of the Earth Uganda opines that:

*People's rights to land are being demolished despite*

*protection for them under the Ugandan Constitution. Small scale farming and forestry that protected unique wildlife, heritage and food of Uganda is being converted to palm oil wastelands that only profit agribusinesses. The Ugandan Government must prioritise small scale ecological farming and protect people's land rights (Friends of the Earth International, 2012).*

John Muiyisha, a farmer from Kalangala, tells of how he woke up one morning to find bulldozers destroying his crops. He had on the land for 34 years. Other community members were contracted to plant palm oil and then forced to sell their land because of debts, low income from palm oil and no food crops. Kirtana Chandrasekaran, Friends of the Earth International Food Sovereignty Coordinator opines that:

*These Ugandan testimonies show the fallacy of trying to make land grabbing work for communities or the environment. Decades of policies to privatise land and promote industrial farming from the World Bank have set the stage for a massive global land grab. Governments around the world need to stop land grabbing, not just try to mitigate its worst impacts. Governments must abide by their Human Rights obligations on land and drastically reducing demand for commodities such as palm oil from the West (Friends of the Earth International, 2012).*

The project is a joint venture between global agrofuels giant Wilmar International and BIDICO, one of the largest oilseeds companies in Eastern Africa with funding from International Financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Ugandan Government (Friends of the Earth International, 2012).

## Conclusion

This study has been premised on the contention that the global development policy paradigms that are reinforced on Sub-Saharan Africa disguise the nature of social injustices against the poor. These positivistic neo-liberal development policies use economic growth as a yard stick for measuring human wellbeing and flourishing and virtually ignore issues of social justice and human rights promotion and protection. This study has expounded on how heinous social injustices against the poor prevail in countries like Uganda despite commendable performances in the promotion of economic growth. This study has also contended that meaningful development must be centered on social justice and human rights.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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<sup>i</sup> Article 1(1) of the 1995 Uganda Constitution categorically states that power belongs to the people.

<sup>ii</sup> Social justice is an umbrella term that encompasses notions such as; distributive justice(fairness and justice when it comes to allocation or distribution of resources, privileges and burdens), commutative justice( justice and fairness when it comes to making and execution of agreements and contracts), empowerment to participate and influence decisions, equality and equitable treatment, curtailing structures and strictures of social oppression ,social exclusion and asymmetrical power relations between persons. It must be noted that social justice is inextricably linked with human rights. Human rights refers to claims or entitlements possessed by all human persons irrespective of gender, sex, age, tribe, nationality, opinion or social status. Human rights and social justice are founded on the principles of non-discrimination, human dignity, equality, equity and justice and fairness.

<sup>iii</sup> This section required one to get police permission before stating a demonstration or assembly. In a famous constitutional petition 9/2005, this section was nullified by court. Its reinstatement is an infringement on article 92 of the 1995 Constitution which categorically denies any legislations that aims at defeating a decision of court.