

SCHOLARLY REVIEW ESSAY

Histories of Development in Africa

Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon. *The Idea of Development in Africa: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xiv + 333 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Index. \$89.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781107103696.

Alice Wiemers. *Village Work: Development and Rural Statecraft in Twentieth Century Ghana*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2021. 265 pp. List of Illustration. Index. \$64.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780821424452.

Kara Moskowitz. *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945–1980*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019. 322 pp. \$36.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780821423967.

Muey C. Saeteurn. *Cultivating Their Own: Agriculture in Western Kenya During the “Development” Era*. Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2020. 222 pp. Index. \$80.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781580469791.

Development as an idea and practice in Africa has drawn widespread scholarly commentary and analysis. Most of the focus has been on geographical variation, dismal outcome, ambiguity, or the contradictory nature of modern development during Africa’s colonial and postcolonial periods.¹ The roles of local and international state and non-state actors have also been central to the analysis of these aspects of development. This review essay examines four recent publications that offer fresh perspectives on the topic. These historical works enrich our understanding of development by situating the process and idea of development within the intersecting locus of local, regional, national, and international trends, with a focus on Africa and Africans. Their focus on the historical perspectives on development and its most recent legacies on the continent is a significant addition to our knowledge about this important

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subject. They share more in common with regard to their impressive analyses, their different regional focuses notwithstanding.

Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon's *The Idea of Development in Africa* presents a broad historical discussion about development from which one can comprehend the specific cases that are analyzed in *Village Work, Seeing Like a Citizen*, and *Cultivating Their Own*. It is an in-depth analysis of why modern development in Africa has generated contradictions, failed, or been appropriated or subverted by Africans to the degree expounded upon by Alice Wiemers, Kara Moskowitz, and Muey Saeteurn in their respective works. But Decker and McMahon go further, delving deeper into the multidimensional facets of development, from its Western origins to its implantation in Africa through nineteenth century European imperialism and its entrenchment during the colonial period. They succeed at demonstrating that development for Africans is not only a lived experience but that it is also an idea, philosophy, ideology, culture, power, a knowledge system, and identity that can be—and has been—propagated by the West to suit Western visions or fostered on others to cultivate power, control, and influence over them.

These assertive elements are what Decker and McMahon describe as the “development episteme,” a knowledge system that subverts the state of being of others as “undeveloped” or as requiring “developing.” Consequently, Christian missionaries, and later the colonial states packaged development as a humanitarian gift to Africa. The authors thus draw our attention to the limitations of the development episteme, which narrowly defines Africa's challenges in Western socioeconomic terms. It overlooks tangible benefits that development should deliver to the African individual and family and portrays Africa and Africans as stuck in the past, thereby necessitating and justifying external intervention. In the process of implementing various systems of development, Europeans have ignored the ways in which Africans generated and deployed “vernacular development” to improve their condition. While Africans have resisted, questioned, reconfigured, or appropriated this form of development over the decades, the tenets of the development episteme have survived into development practice in today's Africa. Given that its legacy is still evident throughout sub-Saharan Africa following decolonization, the authors assert that “Africa's modern history has been a history of development” (3).

The Idea of Development in Africa offers a sweeping analysis of this history in eleven impressive chapters that span the period of time from the second half of the nineteenth century into recent years. The authors link the origins of the development episteme to the Western Enlightenment tradition, which subsequently morphed into the European “civilizing mission” through Christian missionary enterprise, then into the concept of “development” under colonial regimes. Scientific evolutionary theories aided Westerners in using development to create subjective categories of Africans as “primitive” or “less developed,” which are forms of racial “othering.” This elicited the earliest contradictions in the development episteme in Africa during the nineteenth century. As examples, the authors cite colonial economic “development”

initiatives in Mozambique and the Congo, where colonialists thrived on the very African slave labor that the Western civilizing mission sought to eradicate. Aside from Christian missionaries, nineteenth-century European travelers also contributed to the evolution of the development episteme in Africa by constructing an image of Africa that reinforced the continent as ripe for Western economic and cultural development, if not intervention. Ironically, this contrasted with the reality that Africa had for centuries nurtured knowledge systems that sustained illustrious ancient and contemporary civilizations, much as the new knowledge questioned the authenticity of African claims to those civilizations (41–42). Tragically, the new knowledge, not African indigenous epistemologies, widely informed colonial administrative and development practice in Africa. Once colonial rule was established after the late nineteenth century, eugenics and racism were instrumental in shaping the development episteme in Africa. European officials drew on pseudoscientific theories of race to transform Africans' evolutionary state, as these theories were practically applied in South Africa's colonial and apartheid states. Elsewhere in Kenya, Algeria, Madagascar, the Belgian Congo, and Rhodesia, eugenic ideas filtered into colonial development policies for Africans relating to demographic, health, and labor concerns. By the mid-twentieth century, eugenics in colonial development practice in Africa morphed into policies regarding sexual reproduction and "population control" (75).

The development episteme was not just about material aspects of the human condition. Rather, as Decker and McMahon demonstrate, it was a form of cultural imperialism or colonial indoctrination. For instance, British indirect rule reinforced Western notions of African ethnicities as unchanging and bounded geographically, which in turn ensured that ethnicity and colonial enforcement of Western norms on Africans persisted as markers in development work (89). Africans were not amenable to cultural alienation. The authors use the Kikuyu cultural protests of late 1920s and early 1930s against European Christian missionaries and the colonial state to demonstrate that Africans were less passive regarding cultural imperialism than is commonly believed. Conversely, across colonial Africa, some Africans adjusted to the pressures of cultural imperialism by embracing the opportunities offered by Western education—itsself a marker of the development episteme—and other aspects of western culture over indigenous culture. They included Africa's nationalist elite who, after independence, embraced Western education and development as hallmarks of modernity and development. Furthermore, some of these Western-educated Africans were conscious of the detriment of the colonial legacy to Africa's postcolonial search for political, economic, and cultural authenticity and advocated for decolonization of both the African mindset and development practice in postcolonial African states (94–96). This advocacy helped challenge the racial and cultural inequalities inherent in the development episteme in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Idea of Development in Africa also demonstrates the extent to which colonial institutions and academic disciplines were vital instruments that colonial states used to implement the development episteme in Africa. Western scientific research, technology, and “experts” played a core role in the endeavor, particularly in orienting development projects to advance the capitalist demands of the colonial powers. Key to unraveling the power of the development episteme were varieties of the natural and human sciences that informed colonial investments in crop and livestock production, mining, and public works. These sciences produced their own genre of knowledge in the name of “modernizing” African communities, yet they did more to advance the development episteme than to advance African interests. Besides securing profit for colonial states, Decker and McMahon assert that scientific research also “became an end of its own as the continent became a ‘laboratory’ for researchers” (121). Even with the power of Western science and technology, there were limits to colonial implementation of the development episteme. It failed to cushion African communities from the socioeconomic ravages of colonialism exposed by the Great Depression. Global conflicts, particularly the Second World War, exacerbated the colonial extraction of critical natural and African labor resources to the detriment of African livelihoods and living conditions. The widespread labor strikes in the 1940s and 1950s underpinned the shortcomings of the Western development mission, which remained largely unresolved despite colonial intervention through metropolitan funding programs in the British and French colonies.

Neither did post-war colonial developmentalism solve the African problems that had been amplified by the impact of the war. Decker and McMahon reveal how post-war colonial development re-invented and reinvigorated nineteenth-century theories that depicted African economies as stuck at subsistence level, thereby requiring modernization to a market economy. In the process, colonial governments expanded the roles of science and technology in “economic modernization” efforts, with relative success (147–51). Rather than helping to stem African anti-colonial sentiments, the invasive nature of this strategy and its dismal failure offered African nationalists a reason to demand self-reliance and self-rule.

Herein lay the conundrum of African independent states regarding development: while nationalist leaders sought to recover an African national identity less dependent on the West economically and politically, their pursuit of modernization through “big projects” perpetuated dependency on foreign aid and internationalized African development. This compromised the economic performance of the newly independent African states and allowed the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank to drive Africa’s development imperatives through structural adjustment programs post-1980s. These programs advanced the tenets of the development episteme by perpetuating extractive tendencies by foreign companies, promoting the rule of the global market in Africa’s economic recovery, and hampering African nations’ ability to guarantee safety nets for their people. These developments drive the authors’ conclusion that is a familiar

refrain: “Despite political independence, African nations had to concede a degree of economic control to foreign investors if they wanted to succeed in the modern world.” (152). This ensured that the development episteme endured into postcolonial Africa.

A critical feature of this endurance is what Decker and McMahon describe as the “NGOization” of African development (148). International NGOs (INGOs), both secular and religious, have expanded development’s platform to include humanitarianism, human rights, and poverty eradication, but their interventions harbor agendas resembling those of the colonial-era missionaries. Consequently, Decker and McMahon view these institutions as “new missionaries,” arguing that the rationale for their intervention in Africa’s twenty-first-century development replicates the power and moral relations of the civilizing mission of Christian missionaries of the late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries (170–76). On their part, Africans have not been either mere recipients or victims of development under the INGOs. The authors show that segments of the African populations, notably women, have tapped into international support to bolster their civic engagement and to challenge national and international agendas through local non-governmental organizations. As outlined below, the role of NGOs in Africa’s rural development is a vital component in the studies by Alice Wiemers, Kara Moskowitz, and Muey Saeteurn.

More often than not, the colonial development state targeted sectors central to African lives. Those sectors were portrayed as what Decker and McMahon describe as “problems” to the development episteme (187). These included Africans’ domestic space, exemplified by African traditional housing structures and patterns that were depicted as lacking in rationality and perspective. Missionaries, medical personnel, and administration officials ignored the socio-political dimensions of traditional African housing patterns. Instead, they sought to “modernize” these entities into “model huts” or “model villages” along Western rationalities, order, and discipline, all of which were deemed lacking among Africans. The authors conclude that the emergence of shanties or “informal settlements” reveal the dark side of Western-style development and modernization in postcolonial Africa. Besides housing, colonial education was another means by which colonial states and their agents entrenched the notion of separate paths of development for Europeans and Africans. In the process, Western education became a tool for indoctrinating Africans into separate development paths, while at the same time it provided educated Africans with a weapon to undermine the racist foundations of the development episteme and to demand economic and political freedom.

Aside from housing and education, Decker and McMahon also demonstrate how colonial concerns about African health and general welfare defined the problem areas deemed worthy of intervention by the development episteme. In search for better health and disease-free environments, the development episteme helped transform Africa into a “living laboratory” in which colonial medical officials and practitioners nurtured the idea of the

continent as a place of disease requiring that indigenous populations be coaxed into Western biomedical practices. This was the case, despite evidence of Africans embracing vaccinations, medicines, and treatments in concert with local healing technologies. Oftentimes, official medical solutions to public epidemics in Algeria, Senegal, Kenya, and South Africa involved residential segregation along racial lines driven by the fear of the “black peril.” Such fears turned the public health sector into a data-gathering forum to create a knowledge bank on tropical diseases and medicine, as well as a place of social control, prompting Decker and McMahon’s conclusion that “Colonial public health regulations transformed the Western Scientific doctrine of the development episteme into law and polity” (238). Thus, concerns about health filtered into questions relating to policing, labor mobilization, sexual reproduction, and nutrition. Generally, intervention in African health reinforced colonial development as social control or social engineering of African communities. When it came to industrial manufacturing, colonial states viewed this as necessary to the economic modernization of Africa. Yet the focus was on production of cash crops and mining, pursuits that amplified economic extraction rather than industrial manufacturing (258–70). The only projects that incurred massive financial and technical investment such as irrigation projects promoted production of primary commodities—cash crops—and engendered many ancillary ecological, economic, and social problems that undermined African communities even further. Whatever meager industrialization efforts were achieved, such as textile manufacturing, helped reshape gender working dynamics, which disadvantaged many women in French West Africa. Elsewhere in British Africa, industrialization faltered under London’s policies of protecting home industries from any efforts to encourage manufacturing in the colonies. Following African independence in the 1960s, new African governments were still persuaded that manufacturing was a panacea to employment and economic modernization. As already noted, their quest for industrial manufacturing created dependency on foreign capital. This has continued to increase the indebtedness of African nations, and by extension, created disillusionment with modernity and development on the continent. What *The Idea of Development in Africa* offers in a general but vivid narrative and analysis is examined more closely by Alice Wiemers, Kara Moskowitz, and Muey Sae-teurn in their respective works. They reinforce the arguments made by Decker and MacMahon by drawing from the development experience in different rural locations of Ghana and Kenya.

Wiemer’s *Village Work* is an impressive analysis of development experience in Kpasenkpe village in northern Ghana during the second half of the twentieth century. The book reveals the enduring nature of Kpasenkpe’s development experience revolving around labor, as shaped by the local, regional, and international actors covering four historical eras stretching from the 1920s through the 1980s: the inter-war period, the Nkrumah state, the era of global economic crises (1960s–1970s), and Structural Adjustment Policies period (1980s and 1990s). During this period, there was so much

demand on Kpasenkpe's rural labor by different regimes that this evolved into a sort of "project village" for development agencies, ensuring that this village became distinguished for its "concentration and longevity of development work" compared to other regions in northern Ghana (4). These developments helped fashion a "hinterland statecraft" in the region, whose origins and evolution Wiemers traces to the inter-war period when the colonial state's labor practices for development projects was critical. Chiefs and their families, particularly the family of Walugunaba Sebiyam, mediated and performed critical roles in these initiatives, to the extent that they were local "influencers" of development practice in Kpasenkpe. This allowed them to reap the benefits accruing from such developments as roadbuilding, which thrived on local labor to which chiefly families had considerable access (42–43, 50). They also benefited from access to Western education, which enabled them to forge careers that positioned its members as indispensable links between modern development and the village. Those without literacy advantages transformed family farms into a "family enterprise," even though the author could have been more convincing about how this aspect blurred or promoted the idea of development in Kpasenkpe. Nonetheless, this revelation by Wiemers confirms Decker and McMahon's observation that, far from being a tool of cultural imperialism, Western education offered a few educated Africans the opportunity to benefit from the socioeconomic disruption engendered by colonialism.

The politics of decolonization and the coming of independence in Ghana enabled a younger generation of progressive chiefs to continue to mobilize unpaid labor to fend off direct state control of local development initiatives. Like its predecessor, the postcolonial Nkrumah state relied on village chiefs and their educated families to provision labor as "self-help," thereby masking the external demands on unpaid village labor (52). Wiemers demonstrates how this unorthodox practice was partly inspired by the fiscal and resource constraints that plagued Nkrumah's government, which became desperate to legitimize its ideological and development visions. In the process, local (village) and national aspirations ran dissonant with each other, as exemplified in the Nkrumah government's prioritization of grand projects such as the Akosombo Dam as development modernization. On their part, chiefs and local government officials were instead focused on transforming Kpasenkpe into a gateway to the agricultural lands of the White Volta by rallying community "voluntary" labor in road construction as "self-help" and on improving local—as opposed to national—welfare (62–64). While its backers viewed this form of labor utilization as "development work," critics perceived it as disregard for human life. Nkrumah's pursuit of economic modernization through the Akosombo project confirms the conundrum of African independent states regarding development of the kind described by Decker and McMahon in *The Idea of Development*; that even as Africa's nationalist leaders aspired for less economic dependence on the West, their obsession with "big projects" perpetuated dependency on foreign aid.

The 1960s and 1970s still reflected continuities and contradictions in development practice in Kpasenkpe, as influenced by internal local and national aspirations as well as international economic crises. National economic and political uncertainty offered northern Ghana the potential for implementing a “green revolution” to help cushion a receding national economy. But this potential fell short due to inadequate government funding, the result of a decline in Ghana’s export economy. Kpasenkpe residents innovated on localized solutions to these crises. While some sought access to external support from well-connected relatives and neighbors, the local chief appropriated agricultural technologies loaned to the community by international funders and manipulated farmers’ groups to maintain local influence and negotiate with state development agencies over community development. Construction of local health centers relied on local labor that appeared as voluntary mobilization by local residents, leading to Wiemer’s assertion to the contrary: “Despite a variety of agendas that constituents brought to the hospital project... their performances of unpaid labor primarily succeeded in cementing the reputation of Kpasenkpe as a place where the chief could get things done” (111). Consequently, rather than deferring to existing scholarly castings of Ghana’s national outlook during the 1970s as tumultuous, Wiemers opts for a revisionist exercise by perceiving developments in the north as revealing internal reworkings by residents to reshape the structure and nature of the state locally.

The dismal impact of the World Bank’s structural adjustment programs on national and Kpasenkpe’s local development initiatives in 1980s and 90s paved the way for intervention by international NGOs. Despite this transformation, old habits in development persisted, if only to suit the shifting political and economic landscape in Ghana. The appeal of the “village project” offered NGOs such as the World Vision a model for development in the village, as officials allied with these agencies depoliticized scarcity of funding and other development resources by appealing to older/historical models of community responsibility, particularly “self-help.” Dubbed “community participation” (125), this strategy became a tenet of mainstream development practice in the village project, which, under the iNGOs, lost its political salience and became a technical rather than political strategy.

Village Work enhances our understanding of the long-term roles of labor and chieftaincy in modern development in Africa. However, Wiemers could have been more explicit on what changed permanently for Kpasenkpe residents within this long arc of engaging with state and international development. Furthermore, the author hesitates to point out the blurred lines between forced and voluntary labor over the stretch of time during which modern development unfolded in Ghana. Despite these minor quibbles, *Village Work* is a well thought out and meticulously written book, in which the author commands mastery of the argument and of local, regional, and international entanglements that have shaped northern Ghana’s development experience. It offers key contributions to the historiography of development in modern Africa, particularly regarding the nature and role of

statecraft in rural areas in this process. The work also transcends a discursive analysis of development by focusing on the created and lived incidences of development which involved performance by its African participants.

Moskowitz's *Seeing Like a Citizen* is another excellent addition to the history of development in Africa. Like *Village Work*, this book expounds on the ability of Africa's rural populations to explore opportunities presented by state development initiatives in a rapidly changing political environment. By using the experiences of the rural community of Uasin Gishu District (now County) in the 1960s and 1970s, the formative years of Kenyan statehood, Moskowitz deftly analyzes how decolonization and development are conterminous and constitutive historical processes. This farming community in Kenya's Rift Valley navigated the transition from colonialism to independence by accessing development aid and programs partly to constrain the state's stranglehold on development. In the process, the average Uasin Gishu village farmer fashioned responsible citizenship in a transformed, post-colonial world. Salient to this rural response to externally initiated development was contestation over access to land, an essential resource for a district that had been a bastion of European settler agricultural capitalism during the colonial period, and which later became a maize granary for the post-colonial state. To be sure, Moskowitz, just like Wiemers, also considers the community quest to access the benefits of education, healthcare, and infrastructure as essential, if only marginally important to the needs of the Uasin Gishu villagers. To these needs Moskowitz adds employment and famine relief measures as important in shaping Uasin Gishu's development experience in the 1960s and 1970s. The author uses the abilities of the Uasin Gishu residents to determine the outcomes of development interventions to contrast the prerogatives of "experts" and political leaders with the realities of ordinary rural inhabitants. Moskowitz describes these villagers as "new citizens," given their propensity to obstruct the implementation of state and international programs while constructing and revising the meaning of development and local and national political identities. This interpretation informs the book's title, which also follows from James Scott's *Seeing Like a State*, to demonstrate how decolonization and independence spawned "new" citizens who engaged the developmentalist state on their own terms within complex political settings. Citizenship, central to the book's analysis, was not imposed from above, but was a transactional outcome, even as economic and social inequalities in Uasin Gishu remained "nebulous" (9). Moskowitz charts out this aspect of Uasin Gishu history in seven impressive chapters.

Moskowitz reminds us that the key to understanding these development processes in Uasin Gishu is recognizing the colonial impact of the large-scale land alienation schemes that undermined access to ancestral land by the indigenous Nandi community. Consequently, the need for land reform in the district became critical as nationalism and politics of decolonization unfolded in Kenya in late 1950s. A key feature of this reform was the land settlement schemes funded by international capital and backed by the

modernist Kenyan state, which marked a new era of development initiatives in the district. Moskowitz demonstrates how nationalist politicians subverted resettlement programs by advocating for landless non-resident Kikuyu ex-farm laborers to gain land in Uasin Gishu, risking sentiments of injustice and antagonism among Nandi and Luyia communities who felt entitled to land in the district over “outsiders.” Corruption in the allocation of land in Uasin Gishu exacerbated ill feelings, and consequently, Moskowitz concludes that the land resettlement program occasioned structural inequalities along ethnic, class, and gender lines. However, the author could have elucidated more on the gender dimension of these inequalities.

The assertion by Decker and McMahon regarding the inherent contradictions in the development episteme is given more life in Moskowitz’s book, particularly in Chapter Two. Moskowitz reveals how landless Nandi, Luyia, and Kikuyu strove to follow official channels for access to land in the schemes as an expression of their responsible citizenship. Yet, the multiethnic groups who were allocated land in the schemes sparked intense competition for monopoly in those settlements, pitting the Nandi (Kalenjin) against non-Kalenjin settlers (Luyia and Kikuyu), an expression of “sub-national trends” within Uasin Gishu. But Moskowitz’s claim that the rural communities developed two citizenships could have been expounded upon to better reveal the tensions between ethnic identity and national citizenship in a nascent Kenyan postcolonial state. Also, the assertion that the Million Acre Scheme organized resettlement around ethnicity (81)—so that allocation of land favored ethnic communities abutting the schemes—is overstated. Kenyan authorities deliberately targeted potential settlers from landless families from ethnic communities unrelated to the schemes’ geographical locations. Otherwise, how would one explain the presence of Maragoli (Luyia) and Kikuyu settlers in Uasin Gishu, a district that was regarded as an ancestral home of the Nandi (Kalenjin)?

But Moskowitz is correct in asserting that the settlement programs fell short of their objective of ending landlessness, thereby eliciting contradictory outcomes for squatter communities. “Shadow” land-buying cooperatives hijacked land allocation channels, thereby preventing squatters from being allotted land in the schemes in Uasin Gishu. Squatters who succeeded at accessing land in the schemes remained unemployed, thereby failing to generate the start-up capital necessary to make their farms productive to repay loans and earn meaningful livelihoods. These developments spawned poverty, ambiguous land rights, and inequalities in land ownership within the schemes, aspects that hurt women and landless men the most. These individuals became marginalized citizens created by these development programs. This, then, is a further example of the contradictions spawned by the development episteme elaborated by Decker and McMahon in *The Idea of Development* and in Wiemer’s *Village Work*.

Moskowitz also charts the ways in which the state, in its early years of independence, supported the creation of local institutions in Uasin Gishu to foster economic development among the peasant farmers in the settlement

schemes, while at the same time enabling them to learn leadership and management skills within those institutions. These institutions were cooperative societies that were also construed as “development,” as they were designed with help from development technocrats who wished to have these institutions aid the state to capture rural producers, thereby serving as agents of state capitalism (117). The cooperatives would provide marketing and agricultural services to their members, and more crucially, the state intended these cooperatives to serve economic and administrative functions by allowing those settled in the schemes to participate in the governance of those schemes. This nurtured forms of civic and economic citizenship among Uasin Gishu rural inhabitants, allowing the author to reinforce the book’s core argument that development helped fashion responsible citizenship in the early years of Kenya’s independence. For Moskowitz, this enabled the state to recast citizenship as an act of responsibility, participation, and accountability through cooperative development for the settlers in the schemes. But inefficiency and corruption hampered the cooperatives, forcing farmers to make autonomous decisions about when to engage or withdraw from them, based on their own personal interests and experiences. This enabled them to challenge the state monopoly over their civic and economic duties as citizens. This perspective revises our understanding of the role of cooperatives in Kenyan historiography. Aside from representing a conscious collective effort by landless Kenyans to access land and boost agricultural potential on their farms with minimal or no state support, cooperatives provided the government with an alternative bureaucratic governing structure in rural areas at a critical time of national shortage of manpower for the developmentalist state. The value of the book is most evident on this theme in Kenya’s history.

Moskowitz expertly grasps the political economy of the causes and consequences of the maize crisis in the early 1960s and its influence in shaping opposing ideas about citizenship. While government officials envisioned transforming those who had been allocated land in the settlement schemes into reliable producers—and therefore, citizens—failure to support them through guaranteed better market prices and equitable access to relief food created a contradiction in official policy and a general distrust of the state. For their part, the farmers turned to alternative marketing channels outside of state control, while those hit hardest turned to clientele networks for survival.

Harambee (“pull together”) was a form of self-help implied in the national government’s clarion call to all Kenyans to contribute to nation-building through local development projects by offering communal unpaid labor for the construction of roads, hospitals, and schools, with the promise of government support through funding, material, and technical expertise. Moskowitz contends that the call unleashed impulses that further contributed to contradictions in citizenship and development in Kenya’s first decade of independence. From the state perspective, self-help was an effort in national development by coopting community participation, a commitment to

responsible citizenship. Yet this strategy enabled the state to negate its role as a provider of essential services and instead relied on citizens' initiative, labor, and capital to advance its development vision, even as Uasin Gishu's wealthy elite hijacked development projects to advance their own political agendas (170). Community self-help groups contested this external overreach by tailoring local projects to suit local rather than national development, as they considered the state unreliable. Many others looked to NGOs to meet their needs. Even so, Moskowitz downplays the relative success of self-help across Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, the assertion that harambee schools were "empty" (170) begs caution, as it overlooks the large numbers of students who sought access to primary and particularly secondary education in the years following Kenya's independence in 1963.

Outside of contestations over land, labor, cooperatives, relief distribution, and self-help, Moskowitz also considers the impact of industrial manufacturing in western Kenya on competing views between community and state over development priorities in Uasin Gishu. This provides a relevant lens for understanding how international capital, national dreams, and local aspirations intersected to generate competing development visions. Efforts to build a paper project financed by international capital backed by the developmentalist state created further disjuncture between local and national development priorities. An industrial pursuit conflicted with the squatters' need for land, as the government committed land meant to settle the landless to commercial forestry to supply timber to the proposed factory. Only through persistent resistance were squatters able to secure government willingness to settle them on a section of the contested land. On the other hand, the industrial venture foundered due to management and financial woes, a classic failure of a development project meant to modernize the national economy. For Moskowitz, this outcome illustrated the ability by a local rural community to determine how development resources would be controlled and conflicting development interests resolved (198). Overall, *Seeing Like a Citizen* is a meticulous account of the history of rural development in a decolonized community, shaped by the distribution of development resources and local participation, and how these processes in turn shaped notions and practices of modern citizenship bottom-up.

Saeteurn's *Cultivating Their Own* is another significant elucidation of rural subversion of conventional development impulses to suit local (rural) needs. Its focus and argument complement *The Idea of Development in Africa*, *Village Work*, and *Seeing Like a Citizen* in several ways. The book is an excellent critique of state developmentalism in Maragoli, western Kenya, during the late colonial period, which reveals why and how the Maragoli community challenged externally imposed development projects. Like Uasin Gishu, Maragoli was once a breadbasket of the Kenya Colony, a status that was subsequently undermined by historically high population densities and land scarcity in the late colonial period that is the book's focus. Similar to Wiemers and Moskowitz, Saeteurn considers the decolonization and early independence periods as critical contexts for analyzing inroads of modern

development into rural Maragoli. Decolonization also allowed Kenya's nationalist parties to cultivate competing visionary development ideologies that influenced development policy in the area. That influence was manifested in the "back to land" call of Jomo Kenyatta's government, urging Kenyans to focus on agriculture as a solution to the socioeconomic challenges of the nascent state.

The World Bank and international NGOs involved in Maragoli's development initiatives shortly before and after independence echoed this state vision. However, the land-strapped Maragoli community was unconvinced that agriculture was the key to its economic and social prosperity. To underscore these contradictions, Saeteurn explores the differing definitions of access to land, agricultural practice, and progress between agrarian developmentalists and Maragoli residents in the late colonial and early independence states. Given inadequate land on which officials expected families to achieve "commercial farming" and therefore progress, some Maragolis responded by either walking away from or modifying the rural "betterment" schemes planned and imposed on them. Those who embraced these initiatives did so on terms suited to their own individual or family agendas.

For Saeteurn, land and agriculture were central to the political economy of Kenya's transition from colonialism to independence, and they strongly influenced how development was deployed in Maragoli. Late colonial development initiatives focused on transforming African agriculture through programs such as land consolidation, agricultural intensification, and "progressive" agriculture, all of which constituted marks of decolonization in Kenya. Kenyatta's government sustained this developmentalist agenda, albeit with modifications, but with similar results. Thus, developing agriculture "off the ground" failed for some Kenyans because it failed to account for local interests (31). Only a small, privileged, educated, smallholder farming class with financial resources reaped benefits from the land settlement schemes, a subject which Moskowitz has ably outlined in detail with regard to Uasin Gishu. These development initiatives created massive inequalities between the few wealthy Kenyans, while marginalizing many poor and landless families in areas such as Maragoli where the "agricultural revolution" was undermined by systemic land shortages. Land shortage in Maragoli resulted from high population densities and the restriction of communities into the reserves, all of which arrested agricultural progress. While all this is true, population trends in the area could have been enriched by having the author cite the roles of improved diet and health infrastructure, the later being introduced by the Friends Africa Industrial Mission (FAIM) Christian missionaries who are central to the book's discussion. A discussion of the debate in the 1950s between state officials and the local community on the economic salvation for Maragoli's land dilemma could have been further helpful to the author's discussion of the agricultural question in Maragoli. Government proposals to default the region into a labor-exporting zone, encourage out-migration, promote selective coffee cultivation, or transform Maragoli into an industrial manufacturing zone might have enriched the discussion.

Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, Saeteurn succeeds at identifying the Western scientific, moral, and economic rationales of developmentalism of the second colonial occupation, and later, of the decolonization projects of the early 1960s that were aided by the International Cooperation Administration and USAID (50). These were negated by nagging land scarcity.

As noted earlier, Decker and McMahon's *The Idea of Development* considers Western education a key means by which colonial states sought to deploy the development episteme. This perspective is well developed by Saeteurn, who uses the establishment in 1959 of Chavakali, a prominent secondary school in Maragoli, to show competing visions between state officials and foreign developmentalists on one hand, and Maragoli residents on the other, regarding the role of agriculture in the land-starved community. For colonial developmentalists, Chavakali needed to emphasize agricultural education, which would boost community participation in "productive" or commercial agriculture, solve youth unemployment, and contribute to Kenya's economic development (58, 64). This thinking complemented that of Kenya's Western development allies linked to the school's foundation and mission, particularly Quaker missionaries, and USAID, both of whom espoused the virtues of modernization. But Maragoli families with limited land resources hoped and pushed hard for Chavakali to offer students from the community an academic education geared toward professional jobs outside of farming, such as clerical jobs in urban areas. Unfazed by this pushback, national and international developmentalists promoted such programs as 4K farmers' clubs among the children who attended the Chavakali school. In this manner, nationalist leaders and their British and American development advisers hoped to inculcate an intensive agricultural ethic among Maragoli youth, who were intended to be cogs in national economic development. Saeteurn reveals the irony bred by the program; the youth enrolled in 4Ks were less interested in using the clubs as steppingstones to lucrative agricultural careers than as a means to achieving economic and financial independence from their parents. They considered the project a nefarious government-sponsored rural development scheme designed to scuttle their aspirations for better, off-farm jobs (78). Thus, this development program, channeled through a school institution, proved incompatible with the realities and motivations of the Maragoli community in the densely populated rural area, and ended in failure.

These contradictions and subsequent failures were replicated in FAIM's Stewardship Rural Service Program, which was aimed at training the Maragoli Quaker faithful in skills for socioeconomic progress. A signature component of the program was the "Lord's Acre Project," which required households to dedicate an acre of their already diminished farms to crops to be donated to the local church. Saeteurn demonstrates how and why most faithful only paid lip service to the program. Inadequate farms and FAIM's deference to international "experts" to run the program rather than incorporating local African church leaders induced resentment from the Maragoli residents. The local community perceived irony in the management of local

agricultural projects at a critical time of decolonization and Africanization of state institutions across Kenya. “Put simply,” Saeteurn writes, “the [Maragoli] Yearly Meeting leadership did not see a real purpose in allowing a mzungu (white man/foreigner) to initiate and direct an ambitious rural development program during a time when the missionaries were supposed to be ‘Kenyanizing’ the church” (111). Sooner rather than later, the program ceased being a priority in FAIM’s rural activities in Maragoli, attesting to the failure of externally imposed development in late colonial Kenya.

Part of the government solution to Maragoli’s land problem was in the national land settlement schemes which commenced shortly before independence to address landlessness in Kenya, a subject that is also key in Moskowitz’s book regarding Uasin Gishu. In fact, surplus population from Maragoli (and the neighboring Bunyore location) would be settled in the Lugari settlement scheme in Uasin Gishu, which Moskowitz discusses at length in her work. Just as in the Uasin Gishu case, this resettlement failed to alleviate landlessness and poverty in Maragoli. This was partly because of the questionable vetting process for those seeking land in Lugari, which prioritized agricultural knowledge in agricultural productivity rather than landlessness as the basis for qualification (137–38). The plan was undermined by the strict requirements for applying for land in the Lugari settlement scheme. Those who succeeded were subjected to strict land-use requirements and required to focus on farming and not seek off-farm employment. The few who were accepted into the scheme, mainly well-off families, became successful farmers but mainly due to their own initiatives, with no tangible government assistance. Thus, Saeteurn confirms Moskowitz’s conclusions about the failed role of land settlement projects in advancing national and international development visions in rural Kenya in the late colonial and early postcolonial periods.

Saeteurn’s book confirms the sustained arguments advanced by Wiemers, Moskowitz, and Decker and McMahon: the failure of the designers and managers of contemporary development in Africa to understand and incorporate the motivations of local communities in development schemes. Like Moskowitz and Wiemers, Saeteurn’s *Cultivating Their Own* contributes to Africa’s development historiography by shifting attention away from the developmental state, the elite, and their international backers, to local men and women whose decisions and actions shaped the design and outcome of development practice. By doing so, Saeteurn draws our attention to the invasive and condescending nature of modern development practice for its failure to capture the action, thinking, and aspirations of rural populations.

Overall, the four books share more in common than they have differences. Wiemers, Moskowitz, and Saeteurn validate the imposing characteristics of the development episteme outlined in Decker and McMahon’s *The Idea of Development in Africa*. All of them reinforce the dominant roles of international state and non-state actors in Africa’s twentieth century development experience, and the extent to which African colonial and post-colonial

states have been uncompromising surrogates in fostering the development episteme among African communities. Crucially, these authors challenge the ways we have come to understand the role of the state in development. The assertion that the vision of the state and of other progenitors of development has often spawned contradictions in the quest for “progress” in Africa is sustained throughout the four books. Moskowitz and Saeteurn are particularly clear that while the state may fashion certain rules of engagement relating to development and public expectations, these can be upended by the African community when societal needs are not met. Consequently, the public—in this case, Uasin Gishu and Maragoli residents—fashioned the means to pursue those needs outside of state parameters, especially accessing critical resources. In this way, the developmental state ceases to be hegemonic, thereby challenging our previous understanding of development practice as what Moskowitz describes as a dualistic, rudimentary narrative that perceives states as merely impinging on “impotent citizens” (9).

Part of the reason why recipients have challenged the African state’s hegemonic presence in development design and practice is the inherent shortcomings within the development episteme. The authors consistently demonstrate this fact within their respective works, and also offer it as a rationale that has forced African communities to innovate in order to adapt to or change the rules of engagement in conventional development practice. Wiemers, Moskowitz, and Saeteurn successfully demonstrate that rural African communities have not been mere recipients of national and international developmentalist visions. Instead, as groups, families, or individuals, rural residents in Kpasenkpe, Uasin Gishu, and Maragoli have shaped the rules of engagement with state and external development actors to affect development outcomes, thereby successfully contesting the underlying marginality of their concerns. For example, Wiemers notes that “In Kpasenkpe, residents and leaders made space for both continuity and local innovation” (4), as villagers and their leaders embraced development suitable to their needs. In the process, well-placed individuals such as chiefs negotiated with the authors of state development initiatives to deliver labor for development in the name of “native custom,” but more as a means to enhance their own largesse and power (31). This allowed the state to depend on chiefs for development projects, thereby enhancing the latter’s power, wealth, and social status. With regard to Maragoli, Saeteurn emphasizes that the Maragoli, as with many Kenyans, were unpersuaded by the state’s push for rural farming as key to economic prosperity; rather, as “pragmatists,” recipients of the rural “betterment” programs had their own notions of what constituted a “developed” life in the *uhuru* era and thus what it meant to be a Kenyan citizen (2). These local innovations were evident in Uasin Gishu where, as Moskowitz elaborates, Uasin Gishu residents determined the outcomes of development interventions to contrast the prerogatives of “experts” and political leaders based afar—in Nairobi, London, Geneva, and Washington—with the realities of ordinary rural inhabitants (3). Moskowitz describes these denizens as “new citizens,” given their propensity to obstruct the

implementation of state and international programs while constructing and revising the meaning of development and local and national political identities.


Common reflections on local innovations reveal another shared perspective by the authors regarding African interactions with development. This relates to development as self-help, a theme that is evident in *Village Work*, *Seeing Like a Citizen*, and *Cultivating Their Own*. Wiemers demonstrates how Kpasenkpe residents in northern Ghana, led by “new organizers,” resorted to their own “self-help” labor to build local infrastructure rather than depending on chiefs, local politicians, or the central government (110–11). In Uasin Gishu, Moskowitz reveals how “self-help” was an outcome of the official premise to initiate “development” led by the local community but managed by the central administration, inasmuch as this strategy proved untenable, if not contradictory. Despite the contradiction, self-help was a form of “incipient civic life” aimed at creating or advancing national and local development (169). In any event, self-help was the most vivid African expression of innovation within the opportunities offered by Western development in rural Africa. All the works reviewed here recognize the overarching roles of NGOs in advancing self-help in rural Africa, especially in times of state “roll-back” or withdrawal from spaces where development should have been improving human conditions.

Except for *The Idea of Development in Africa* which is continental in scope, the other three volumes are micro-histories that adopt the “African village” as a unit or frame of analysis for threshing out rich histories of development in Africa. The authors are masterful at demonstrating how localized rural experiences can offer mediums for unpacking the historical complexities of development, particularly when international agencies are involved. To this extent, Wiemers reminds us that the African rural village is useful for analyzing and understanding the long-term behavior of development stakeholders within local, regional, national, and international contexts. As with the case of Kpasenkpe, the African villages are not simple, less malleable, undifferentiated contexts onto which to impose external development; rather, as Wiemers explains, the village is composed of complex ancestral sites of intricate and layered histories regarding belonging and identity. Conventional development projects often fall short for their lack of recognition of this reality. Furthermore, the African village has for generations been defined by land-based forms of production that have shaped the politics, economies, and social identities of rural communities. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that these micro-histories of Kpasenkpe, Uasin Gishu, and Maragoli evolved around the agrarian sector and related institutions such as labor, technologies, cooperatives, and land.

In conclusion, reading these four books together was revealing and refreshing. The works are strikingly similar in many respects, and complement each other extremely well. They remind us that while the development episteme is foreign to Africa, its propensity to hegemony in African lives has been compromised over time by African initiatives to re-shape its mission.

They also refute the supposed hegemonic nature of development over African communities. This explains why the major contribution of these books is to help unpack how African initiatives have shaped this development. They have done so by ascribing historical agency to the ordinary Africans, many of them operating within socially ruptured rural communities in which history, tradition, genealogy, colonial intrusion, class, power, gender, and labor have intersected to ensure that development is not a heterogenous or a powerful, independent process. These four works remind us that development practice in Africa remains a rich topic for research.

The Idea of Development in Africa is set to remain a classic concise history of development practice in Africa that was long overdue. Its critique of the trajectory of modern development in Africa revitalizes our understanding of the history of that process and what it means for Africa and Africans. Scholars and students of African studies as well as development practitioners will find the book extremely rewarding. For their part, *Village Work*, *Seeing Like a Citizen*, and *Cultivating Their Own* are likewise overdue publications that offer the best historical analysis of the failures of top-down development, while using a bottom-up perspective to understand this failure. There can be no better way to offer lessons for development practitioners currently involved with development in Africa today and in the future.

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Note

1. These studies are numerous, covering continental, regional, or national development trends in Africa, as well as diverse historical periods. Examples include Ambeh Njoh, *Tradition, Culture, and Development in Africa: Historical Lessons for Modern Development Planning* (Ashgate, 2006); Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Ohio University Press, 2007); Fredrick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy" (*African Studies Review* 24 [2/3]: 1–86); Toyin Falola, *Development Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria* (University Press of Florida, 1996); Robert Shenton, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria* (Toronto University Press, 1986); and Emmanuel Akyeampong et al., eds., *Africa's Development in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).