

AERC Growth Project

General Comments to Case Study Team Members Following the May 2002 Review Workshop

July 2002

To the case study teams:

We wish to share with you some of the ‘general’ comments that pertain to many of the papers presented during the May 2002 workshop of the Growth project. You may have received the more specific comments pertaining to your individual papers. These comments are general observations, and you are advised to see to what extent they pertain to your own case study.

First, we wish to congratulate you all for a job well done so far. This is a very important project – analyzing the economic growth experience of Africa in its first half-century after independence. The work should and will inform future generations as well as contemporary economic policymakers. Furthermore, you are breaking new ground in economics: the heavy emphasis on political economy marks this as a new and exciting departure in our field. The importance of this work, and the significance of its departure from standard economics, mean that special efforts are desirable and necessary for this project to fulfill its potential. In that connection, we highlight some major ‘general’ concerns.

- a. *History matters.* It is important to pay great attention to the history of the country you are analyzing. This helps to put the analysis in ‘context’.
- b. *Other relevant literature on your country matters.* Because of the importance of the study, special steps are required to insure that you read, cite, and use the scholarship on your country. Too often, the papers revealed that major studies had either not been read or used. Other readers will note that. And even should your work be first rate, it will be discounted for having shown a lack of thorough reading and a lack of depth of learning and preparation. Do go to the library, catch up on the works in history, politics, and other fields outside of economics especially as they pertain to your country. Contact the co-coordinators and/or the Secretariat for assistance in obtaining publications you cannot access yourself.
- c. *Pay great attention to the schematic diagram summarizing the ‘analytical framework’ for the study.* This is crucial, especially given the emphasis on the political economy of growth. In that framework, interests and institutions determine policy, while policy and shocks determine growth outcomes. Too often in many of the papers presented at the workshop, things simply happen: the authors record events, policy choices, and significant transitions. But the purpose is not simply to record; it is to EXPLAIN. And

events, policy choices, and turning points therefore need to be taken as objects of analysis. They represent decisions that are taken by actors who have objectives and seek to prevail in the competitive field of politics. If politicians, they probably intend to build political support so that they can compete for or retain political office. If economic interests, they seek favourable policies from government. The strategies pursued by both are shaped by the institutional environment; and they may therefore change when that environment changes (e.g. from a single party to a competitive party system). This kind of analysis is essential to the project. Do go back, review the Bates and Devarajan paper and the Nairobi briefings, and strengthen these aspects of your paper.

- d. *Read the Sudan and Burundi case studies.* Many of the case studies are in very good shape. However, we single out the Sudan and Burundi case studies because of the strong political economy bent (although they still need some work in other aspects). These may motivate you to think of some useful directions to stress in your own case study.
- e. *Finally, please re-read the memo sent by us (O'Connell and Soludo) in July last year entitled "Moving to a Final Report: A Memo to Case Study Teams."*

With best regards,

Stephen A. O'Connell
Charles C. Soludo