Strategic Policy Benchmarking for Technological Development: The IT Cases of Zimbabwe and Botswana

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on Zimbabwe and Botswana, this comparative case study is an application of the developmental state paradigm in relation to IT and other forms of knowledge-based economic development. The first section of the paper provides analyses of key characteristics of developmental states with respect to IT policies and culture. Section two accentuates the imperative and the opportunities for development with broad-based IT adoption. The final section, based on original field research, evaluates governmental, corporate, and civic organizational policies and cultures concerning IT in Zimbabwe and Botswana against those policies and cultures that embody enabling environments in developmental states. In the end, propositions concerning IT and development are stated for refining and testing as well as for informing future public policy in Southern Africa and other underdeveloped regions.

Introduction

This comparative case study has two objectives. First, it seeks to apply the developmental state paradigm to IT development in Zimbabwe and Botswana. The application is carried out by documenting conceptual and measurable characteristics of developmental states and comparing some of their specific policies and aspects of culture, which are considered most relevant to IT, against those of Zimbabwe and Botswana. The study examines combinations of political, economic, and cultural factors to determine what is common and unique about Zimbabwe and Botswana in comparison to developmental states. As for data and insight on strategic IT and science and technology (S&T) policies for evaluation and comparison, the study relies heavily on information ascertained through elite interviewing (i.e., state and IT corporate officials, professors, journalists, and NGO technical staffs) in both countries as well as through official governmental and international orga-

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nizational data. Inferences were also drawn from (1) relevant articulated official pronouncements by and the extended imprimatur of the heads of state and senior officers of telecommunications bureaus and national science and technology offices, as well as (2) governmental priorities concerning IT and S&T as suggested by legislative agenda, regulatory enforcement, and budgets. The study utilizes the qualitative data analysis approach, as associated with the illustrative method and ideal typical analysis. Second, this exploratory research, designed to discover plausible explanations as well as to generate empirical propositions for further refinement, future tests, and application of IT development, uses the developmental state paradigm in Southern Africa and other underdeveloped regions.

**Developmental States**

As opposed to implementing development agendas that are drawn directly from historical cases or deduced from codified grand theories, which was the case in years past, many underdeveloped nations today are proceeding on the basis of grounded empirical evidence of what works. That is, in the absence of grand theoretically informed approaches by which underdeveloped nations can progress with broad human development, some are proceeding from summaries of empirically informed “best practices.” The compilation of case studies and historical-comparative studies of most-similar and most-dissimilar countries has resulted in the emergence of a distinct profile of policies and cultures of those nation-states that have experienced remarkable and relatively sustained expansion of their economies as well as enhanced living standards. Because nations’ historical relationships with significant powers and their roles in the global economy vary widely, it is impossible to conclude that an underdeveloped nation that has experienced less economic, technological, and social progress can simply emulate the policies and cultures of the more successful ones and get the same results. However, it would be equally incorrect if this study failed to distill key strategies and cultural characteristics from successful cases to identify plausibly essential and necessary — albeit insufficient — guides and actions to development. “Successful development” here, using UNDP’s threefold index,\(^2\) denotes high economic growth and social improvement as measured by increased and sustainable performance in meeting material needs and non-material aspirations of the citizenry. Successful development in this sense has been wrought largely by developmental states.\(^3\)

By definition, “A state is developmental when it establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development, understanding by development the combination of steady high rates of economic growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in relationship to the international economy” (Castells 1992:56). The following features empirically distinguishes developmental states from other underdeveloped nation-states: (1)