

The African Emergency ; *let's change the growth model !*

Kako Nubukpo

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Professor Kako Nubukpo is an economist (with a sensitive historian's tropism) and a renowned academic. He was Minister in charge of Prospective and Evaluation of Public Policies in Togo (2013-2015).

His past experiences and a certain disenchantment inspired his recent book « L'Urgence africaine; changeons le modèle de croissance! » (The African Emergency; let's change the growth model!) which has an energetic tone, since the first page of the introduction states that Africa is the guinea pig continent on which all the neo-liberal vultures of the planet will fall, but is also the « mother » continent on which no less than the destiny of the "finished" world is at stake, to use an expression apparently coined by Paul Valéry.

One would be tempted to fear that the author would then hesitate between furious despair and foolish hope, on a sometimes rather polemical background note... Of this apparently great gap - and which invites us to read - let us see its significant constituents.

In spite of a few stylistic breaks and a certain recourse to shock formulas, Kako Nubukpo's work is a pleasant and « dynamic » reading; it presents itself as a critical and resolute review of a set of questions that challenge not only Africanists but a vast, sensitive and curious readership around a continent that remains, in spite of everything, an enigma. However, this work - not offering a bibliography and documented in a sometimes insufficient or dated manner - will not be able to fully satisfy academic circles. However, the author was certainly not primarily aimed at this audience.

In fact, his main intention was to sound the alarm on several important subjects, by pointing out the evils affecting Africa and thinking about possible avenues leading to solutions. But while it is often relatively easy to take stock of the situation, it is of course much more difficult to make truly effective recommendations...

The introduction recalls some major realities (Africa is not a homogenous and undifferentiated continent; in 2050, more than 25% of the world's population will be African, etc.). The introduction recalls some major realities (Africa is not a homogenous and undifferentiated continent; in 2050, more than 25% of the world's population will be African, etc.), lists the problems dealt with and already gives the author's general position on these subjects (beware of the almost puerile alternation of excessive Afro-pessimism and excessive Afro-optimism; rethink overall relations with France and the major instruments attached to it; give politics its full place; develop endogenous African forces, etc.).

We open on « Africa, laboratory of neo-liberalism », with a set of political and economic considerations on the deleterious effects of the large-scale application of liberal dogmas on economies and political situations that did not meet the initial conditions sufficient for the success of applied medicine. Already, what can be observed is that Africa's misfortunes linked to this phenomenon are not peculiar to it but are widely observed in other countries or continents! This being the case, one will not contradict the alarmist and

dismayed remarks of Professor Kako Nubukpo on the coldly applied Structural Adjustment Programmes, but one hopes that the alternative to Bretton Woods will not consist in throwing oneself into the arms of Marx... Of course, one can only be in tune with the affirmation that the three pillars of African life are "reciprocity, redistribution and exchange", but how can one give flesh to these beautiful principles?

« The pretense of *émergence* » has the support of the reader. The temptation is great and dangerous - as in other parts of the world once again - to opt for development without democracy. But how can populations really participate in a world where economic and even political driving indicators are dictated from the outside (the famous SDOs - Sustainable Development Goals) with complicit leaders, where the lack of reliable statistics biases all decision-making and where the "anthropological factor" is often ignored?

« Can African agriculture survive? ». The question is relevant but, curiously, the author focuses on a few subjects, certainly emblematic (cotton, the predation of agricultural land in favour of uranium and gold mining in Niger, the fall in prices, etc.), while we would like more structured developments on major issues, which the author evokes or touches on but which are, for their part, absolutely central: (i) how to give a deliberately "local" response to the danger of no longer having an agriculture whose main purpose is still to feed an increasingly numerous and increasingly urbanized population (and not, as a priority, to supply an export market). In this respect, more detailed reflection on village/family farming for vital self-consumption, which is still very much alive but is becoming more fragile, is desirable; concomitantly, (ii) the exponential urbanization of African countries, the difficult land issue, and the multiple environmental degradation that penalizes the rural world so much are subjects that are becoming significant and deserve to be addressed.

The unavoidable subject of "Demography and migration: the fear of the "Black"? "rigorously enumerates some useful truths: poverty is not the driving force behind migration; development aid is ultimately of little use in a number of areas; the impact of remittances is real and much greater than that of development aid, it seems...

Furthermore, the author is right to point out that the 2050 projections of Africa's working-age population and employment prospects « pose an unprecedented employment challenge and current responses do not appear to be in line with the volume and quality of jobs required by the demographic situation ». And he surely discerns that one must be wary of the dangerous concept of the « demographic dividend », which borders on deception when it is brandished as an almost magical exit solution to all the problems brought about by the staggering increase in the share of youth in Africa's population. A hot topic that so few leaders are yet really addressing...

The « myth of the large African market » raises with relevance the question of resources - numerous and fruitful for the States - coming from customs and the existence of strict borders. This shows the difficulty of achieving a truly open African market at the same time as free trade is becoming an unavoidable issue due to the now official launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA).

And the vast subject of the « CFA franc, last days of a condemned man » will certainly not be closed any time soon! Here, moreover, we are once again entering a particularly controversial area.

Only one question, only one real problem: how to ensure the credibility and therefore the convertibility of a new purely African currency? What is more, in the perspective, for example, of a West African currency that would be that of a massive country like Nigeria ? It would perhaps be a shame to replace the supposed

tutelage of France with the overwhelming power of Nigeria... And besides, is Nigeria ready to enter a vast monetary zone? Remember, all the same, that Nigeria is, once again, Africa's leading economy (ahead of South Africa) with a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of nearly 450 billion US dollars!

Crucial question that « Structural transformation: towards a rainbow economy in Africa? » « is a crucial question, as it opens up to the more precise and less graphic question: "What kind of industrialization, and, moreover, is industrialization indispensable? ».

Beware of the incantations around the "digital marvel", but this is an area where young Africa can emerge powerfully.

We end with the inevitable « France-Afrique: is there an economist in the room? » where a certain anger against the President of France may come as a surprise and may diminish the scope of the remarks made. Of course, France has made mistakes and, indeed, mistakes. But, finally, how can we fail to recognize that it is still a country that is well "policed" and benevolent compared to many others?

In conclusion, we can only hope that Africa will have pragmatic leaders who are concerned about the common good and courageous so that this continent can "impose itself" in a natural way.

Professor Kako Nubukpo's book is a useful reference point for outstanding issues, without claiming to provide, in all the areas explored, absolute answers to the problems of the moment. Of course, this general overview does not cover all topics. However, the liveliness of the comments requires reflection and exchange (even healthy controversy!).

This text is written by Jean-Pierre Listre.