

Restraining the Developmental State? A Comparative Institutional Study of Botswana and Namibia By Kudzai Tamuka Moyo

Abstract

Natural resources can be a solution to the capital deficit in sub Saharan Africa. As such, resource rich countries have to avoid plundering and wastage of the resource rents. However, the nature of politics in the region points to the fact that plundering of resource rents is inevitable because most resource rich sub Saharan African countries have been prone to elite capture and bad governance. This entails that national resources are “privatised” in the sense that they are directed towards enrichment of a few. In addition, governments in resource rich countries tend to allocate resource rents inefficiently. Thus, resources do not contribute towards sustainable and long-term development. To avoid plundering and wastage, a set of institutions can be put in place that can assist in managing resource rents. These are institutions that can restrain ruling elites from capturing the resource rents for private use and the state from inefficiently allocating rents through policies. Most scholars argue that a democratic system, through frequent elections and its attendant institutions such as the rule of law, accountability and transparency allows effective and efficient management resource rents and the economy in general. This is a good starting point in conceptualising institutions of restraint. However, this study seeks to broaden our understanding of institutions of restraint by providing an alternative approach.

Using Botswana and Namibia as case studies this study seeks to reconceptualise institutions of restraint without rejecting the importance of democratic institutions. The study considers the hypothesis that the success in management of resource rents, particularly in Botswana, can be explained by a combination of democratic institutions and what can be termed centralised development planning institutions. The premise of this proposition is that democratic institutions are inadequate in restraining elites or the state. Therefore, they need to be complemented by centralised development planning institutions. Working in tandem, democratic institutions and centralised development planning institutions have the capacity to adequately provide the necessary restraints in resource driven economies. In line with this, the study argues that the degree or level of restraints in a political system is essential for successful management of resource rents.