

TENDERPRENEURSHIP BOOK LAUNCH

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

BEYOND TENDERPRENEURSHIP – RETHINKING BLACK BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

I should start off by welcoming you all, including the Black Management Forum for partnering with us for this launch.

You may ask the question, why is black economic empowerment a theme for current strategic interrogation, given sterling research that has been done on this issue over the years?

All of us agree on a fundamental premise on the South Africa's political economy that socio-economic inequalities are socially and morally reprehensible; they undermine social cohesion within communities and the nation at large.

The democratic government has introduced numerous policies across the socio-economic spectrum. Proceeding from the understanding that distribution of income and assets is fundamental to social transformation, economic redress has been a key part of these post-apartheid policies and programmes. A central pillar of this is Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) in its various dimensions.

Yet, in spite of massive research and the numerous reviews and improvements to BEE policies and programmes, on the continuum between success and failure, the de-racialisation of the South African economy is today, at best, modest. Economic inclusion and exclusion, more than two decades into democracy, largely still reflects the fault-lines of the apartheid era. Progress on Black Economic Empowerment has been accompanied by setbacks, missteps and, in some instances, monumental fiascos.

A unique tendency in recent discourse on economic empowerment is the focus on the phenomenon of neopatrimonialism and extreme manifestations of primitive accumulation. Thus, has emerged the popular notion of 'tenderpreneurship' which, unfortunately, is used to characterise virtually all major efforts at entrepreneurship within the Black community. And so, an image of a Black entrepreneur is painted as one reflected in shiny suits, long pointed shoes, cigar lounges and other elements of conspicuous consumption. There are of course many who have sought to abuse state empowerment programmes. There are many more who have ethically benefitted from these programmes. And there are yet other Black entrepreneurs who have succeeded in spite of BEE policies.

It is in this context that this research project has sought to tackle the issue of Black economic empowerment from a different and unique perspective. The authors interrogate the complex dynamics of class formation, economic empowerment and redress against the backdrop of broader macroeconomic policies.

Most of us take it as a given that social transformation should include the emergence of a cohort of black capitalists. But the authors go beyond this to trace the history of black entrepreneurship and how

deliberate policies under colonialism sought to suppress this impulse. Resistance, adaptation or even collaboration thus characterised the relationships between real or aspirant black capitalists and the colonial state.

The political economy of post-apartheid South Africa has naturally facilitated black capitalist class formation. The fundamental question is whether B-BBEE policies are informed by strategies to change the structure of the economy in terms of a clear industrial policy and the balance, within the economy, among various sectors.

These issues are interrogated against the backdrop of experiences of developmental states and their journeys of industrialisation. Especially in Southeast Asia, they did not just promote the emergence of an indigenous capitalist class. They ensured that this takes place within the context of promoting concrete industrial strategies. There are also interesting technicist approaches to setting and monitoring of empowerment targets which can be gleaned from countries such as India and the United States.

Embracing the notion of 'broad-based' empowerment as an important premise, the authors also examine worker and trade union asset ownership, the organic emergence of a new cohort of entrepreneurs among youth and women, as well as promotion of small and micro enterprises.

Black entrepreneurship journeys in post-apartheid South Africa are many and varied; and there have been stellar performers and abject failures. Through their comprehensive accounts and analyses of the extremes and the grey areas in-between, the authors extract lessons that should stand the country in good stead.

A fundamental challenge that needs to be addressed at the strategic level is one of embedded autonomy on the part of the state in relation to the capitalist class as a whole. Without such autonomy, patronage becomes the stock-in-trade, thus disfiguring a legitimate process of class formation. State capture is an extreme manifestation of this, and it finds expression at national and sub-national spheres of government.

The Mapungubwe Institute hopes that the interventions in this book will generate further strategic debates on the complex question of capitalist class formation in a post-colonial context and encourage more focussed interventions to attain socio-economic redress while at the same time restructuring the South African economy.

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