

## Innovative Governance and What it Means #LSEAfrica Summit

*After attending the opening session of the LSE Africa Summit, LSE's Frances Brill recounts some of the ideas exchanged by academics.*

Governance has a contested meaning and the breadth of topics covered and the angles taken in the LSE Africa Summit was truly illustrative of this.

For me, the most useful and 'innovative' in its own way was Dr Iwowo's link with leadership. In blurring the distinction between the two concepts, if "only for today's purpose" she effectively linked two important components of modern power. Dr Iwowo called for a version of leadership with ethics and responsibility, with a necessary and complimentary follower-ship. She called for understanding governance and leadership in relation to people. Frequently, in discussions of academia we talk about the state or about bottom-up/topdown, we talk about international organisations or NGOs but rarely is the word 'people' used.

Learning from Dr Iwowo's call for governance reform in Nigeria, we need to refocus debate in academia to be about people as well. If we want to have long lasting and measurable impacts on the world we need to recognise problems highlighted and Dr Iwowo's contribution is huge: as in practice, the theory of governance needs to be more aware of people. Then, in reality, by hearing the voice of the people, by understudying what they want and reframing our political rhetoric around it, we can escape from forcing the "commitment to the version of Africa [we] want" and move away from partial visions of a continent. We can examine the underlying differences in places whilst finding common goals to create a leadership worth following.

Professor Chan launched the research conference with an impassioned speech which resonated for me with comparative academia: for the need to recognise our own faults and problems, to be humble and subsequently to recognise the value each place has to offer. "We tend to inflect values" when we impart our knowledge. We measure success by western determined measures. Exemplifying the importance of understanding the place not just the theory, Professor Chan drew on experience as an official observer in Sudanese elections five years ago. In this capacity he saw how the elections were run perfectly, as defined by international organisations. The check-list of what makes 'good' democracy was fulfilled.

Reflecting on this, it is necessary to ask what are the costs of directing attention towards such a list of must-dos? What sacrifices of the country's way of doing things, often highly applicable to their situation, are made in being able to tick all the boxes? Innovative governance requires new approaches but these don't have to come from the west. They can, and they should, be home grown interpretations of the situation which build on the lived experience of citizens to create a voice for the people. We need to address: "what does governance do for people on the wrong side of the tracks, what has governance done?"

At the core of discussions was the necessity of understanding African innovative governance in an African context. The words and concepts which are batted about in academia are socially constructed, they are context dependent and should be treated as such. In light of this, when we use research to create policy and programmes we must understand and use the terms in a context specific way. Echoing the wise words of Professor Chan, Dr Iwowo addressed the need for indigenous knowledge, for an African governance for Africa. In academia and in practice we need to recognise the value of voice of African people.

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**The views expressed in this post are those of the author and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog or the London School of Economics and Political Science.**

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