

## FOREIGN DESK

### New approach

While many questions about the suitability of the developmental state concept in Africa go unanswered, it is worth exploring the positive effect it could have on the continent.  
By BHEKINKOSI MOYO



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**Almost all of the major premier institutions** in Africa and beyond have latched on to the notion of creating a developmental state, as many believe it is a way to respond to the persistent and seemingly intransigent challenges facing the continent.

The developmental state concept worked in most parts of East Asia in the late twentieth century and the feeling is that it can also work in Africa. A developmental state is generally defined as a state that has autonomous political power and control over the economy. Some of its features include strong government intervention, extreme regulation and planning.

In Africa, Botswana has since the 1970s been referred to as a developmental state even though this is very much contested. While it may not be a well-known fact or formally recognised, there are other countries in Africa that already have some of the characteristics of a developmental state.

From all angles of analysis, the idea of a developmental state seems well-meaning, but what has not been ascertained is whether Africa needs a developmental or a democratic developmental state as others have argued.

Even though a strong case has not yet been made to convince influential leaders that the democratic developmental state is the answer to many of Africa's challenges, it would need the buy-in of a number of stakeholders to make it work.

An idea alone is useless unless it is accompanied by political willingness and hard evidence of its effectiveness if implemented.

Based on this information, I believe the current interest and discourse on the need for developmental states on the continent should not ignore the matter of political orientation, specifically with regard to those tasked with implementation. This is very important for Africa today as the continent navigates geopolitical and economic relations with different suitors from other parts of the world.

Sure, developmental states can emerge in Africa, but more is needed.

Africa will need development-oriented people to drive the process – key among these is a developmental society and its organisations. Civil society needs to be on board with and share the goals the state hopes to achieve through the introduction of a developmental model.

Further it requires the capacity to forge transformative partnerships with the developmental State in the construction, implementation and monitoring of developmental initiatives.

Africa also needs to establish developmental institutions in education, health, planning, agriculture and technology, among others.

The private sectors throughout the continent too need to be driven to achieve developmental targets as opposed to profit alone.

It is definitely possible for the developmental state concept to be brought to reality, but the first step is to make sure that people open their minds to the notion – that they view their individual and collective responsibilities as contributing towards democratic and developmental governance. **AD**