

## BOOK REVIEW

**Title:** Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty  
**Authors:** Daron Acemoglu & James A. Robinson  
**Place of Publication:** New York  
**Publishers:** Crown Business  
**Year of Publication:** 2012  
**Number of pages:** 529  
**Reviewer:** Audu N. Gambu, PhD  
*Professor of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Department of Political Science, University of Jos, Jos- Nigeria*

The ground breaking piece titled *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. contains 15 chapters dealing with a wide range of critical issues such as So close and yet So Different, Theories that Don't Work, The Making of Prosperity and Poverty, Small Differences and Critical Junctures: The Weight of History, I have seen the Future and it Works: Growth under Extractive Institutions, Drifting Apart, The Turning Point, Not on our Turf: Barriers to Development, Reversing Development, The Diffusion of Prosperity, The Virtuous Cycle, The Vicious Cycle, Why Nations Fail Today, Breaking the Mold and Understanding Prosperity and Poverty. The book generally interrogates the conventional explanations usually advanced by scholars for why some societies are developed and others are not. Using a critical scholarship perspective, the authors contend with considerable vehemence and persuasion that the development of any country is not necessarily a function of its rich natural resources endowment or geography, but more of its unique ability to design and construct some institutions that could generate robust socio-cultural, economic and political environment suitable for optimizing the productive capacities of the citizenry. Implicit in the views of the authors is the core issue of stability as a precondition for any meaningful development to take place. Examples are cited with some Third World countries such as Egypt,

North Korea, Niger Republic, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe listed as countries that are almost perennially mired in intense instability which threatens in a fundamental sense efforts mobilized towards boosting citizens' industry.

The book further contends that far more important than the often cited factors of resource scarcity and poor work ethic in Third World countries, is the issue of leadership which more often than not suffers from poverty of vision and exemplary conduct. Many political leaders of countries in the Third World have remained uninspiring due to the widespread tendency of pursuing sectional agenda that may negate the popular developmental aspirations of the citizenry. This tendency often cultivates in the citizenry a sense of alienation, despondency, exclusion and helplessness. Consequently, citizens develop the attitude of apathy towards public activities aimed at expanding the frontiers of socio-economic and political development. The book underscores the point that when the phenomenon of inequality in the society becomes so pronounced, it undermines citizens' sense of industry especially when those that are climbing the socio-economic and political ladder are widely believed to be doing so with scant respect for ethical considerations. When corruption enriches the few elite at the expense of the vast majority, a sense of despair begins to grow among those that are victims of the corrupt behaviour of the elite.

The general argument repeatedly canvassed by the book is the apparent weak normative foundation which characterizes most Third World countries and is upheld as one of the fundamental explanations for their persistent underdevelopment. Values of discipline, honesty, patriotism, industry, trust, dignity of labour and a host of others are said to be almost lacking and where they are present, are so weak that they are hardly effective in the building of a just, decent, fair and egalitarian society. For instance, the kind of anarchy that is observed on the highway of some Third World countries is practical evidence of the poverty of some of the aforementioned normative values that are critical to the enterprise of development.

The book also emphasizes the need for strong political and economic institutions that should determine policy direction for the

society towards the attainment of the goal of development. It notes that very few Third World countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and a host of others have been able to establish strong and enduring political and economic institutions that drive their economies. Majority of the Third World countries have not been successful in putting in place such institutions. This, according to the book, is largely responsible for the persistent failure of these countries to clearly articulate policy direction and work diligently towards meeting targets. Development does not simply happen without a clearly defined roadmap expressed in policy direction.

As trenchant and pungent the arguments of this scintillating piece on *Why Nations Fail*, a critical reader can identify some salient factors which were deliberately overlooked to suit some ideological preferences. In doing a comprehensive evaluation of the development effort of Third World countries and why some have failed to boost prosperity, the historical experiences of these countries cannot but be explicitly stressed. Their colonial and neo-colonial experiences must be underscored for a good comprehension of forces behind their underdevelopment. Although it may sound outlandish to purpose an argument that colonial and neo-colonial factors could still be held partly accountable for the underdevelopment of some Third World countries, the hard fact remains that these twin evils laid the foundation for the underdevelopment of some of these countries. While some Third World countries have successfully put behind them these ugly historical experiences, some are still contending with the negative effects. The forces of globalization that have been let loose are worsening the conditions of some Third World countries.

By and large, the book is a painstaking survey of the socio-economic and political conditions of Third World countries written in a lucid and comprehensible style. Both descriptive and analytical approach were carefully employed in conveying the message. It is a worthwhile volume for scholars and students of development studies. It is strongly recommended for Third World scholars interested in unveiling some indigenous forces that have conspired to keep some countries in a place of repeated failure to foster the deepest socio-economic and political aspirations of some Third world countries.

## GUIDES TO AUTHORS

Contributors are advised to be guided by the following:

- Each contribution should be typed double-line spacing (including references), with normal border margin of 1" all around.
- Only the first page should reflect the name(s) of the author(s) for purpose of blind review.
- The language of the journal is English.
- An abstract of not more than 200 words should precede the main body of the paper.
- Five keywords for identifying the paper on web search should be supplied immediately below the Abstract.
- The entire manuscript should not be more than 3,500 words inclusive of tables, figures and references. A word count should be supplied below the keywords on the Abstract page.
- Use of tables, figures, graphs, etc. should be kept to the barest minimum. These should be presented on separate pages at the end of the manuscripts while indications of their location within the text should be given.
- *The journal adopts the American Psychological Association (APA) format (6<sup>th</sup> Edition) as its referencing style. Authors are advised to get acquainted with the format which can easily be sourced on the Internet. Manuscripts that fail to use the format may be rejected.*
- Acknowledgements should come at the end of references.
- Two (2) hard copies of the manuscript should be forwarded to Managing Editor, *ASUU Journal of Social Sciences*, c/o ASUU National Secretariat, University of Abuja Main Campus, Gari, Abuja Nigeria. In addition to sending hard copies, however, contributors **must** forward an electronic copy to: [asuujournalofsocialsciences@gmail.com](mailto:asuujournalofsocialsciences@gmail.com)
- Manuscripts submitted must NOT be under consideration for publication in any other research outlet. A declaration to this effect must accompany the submission of every manuscript.
- Only articles that meet the editorial standard of the journal will be published. Authors are advised to do the initial review of their papers before submission. Explanations may not be given for the rejection of sub-standard manuscripts or any paper that does not comply with the journal's guidelines.

*ASUU Journal of Social Sciences* is published by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Nigeria. The peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal aims at promoting scholarship in the interrelated fields of Social Sciences and Social Science Education. Contributions as discursive articles, reports of empirical investigations and position papers are welcome. Also acceptable are papers in the modes of presentation that fit into any of the scholarly traditions in the broad field of social sciences.

**Correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to:**

University of Abuja Main Campus,  
Giri, Abuja, Nigeria.

Or

Dr. Segun Ajiboye  
Managing Editor,  
*ASUU Journal of Social Sciences*,  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Ibadan,  
Ibadan, Nigeria  
josiah.ajiboye@gmail.com

**Electronic mails could also be sent to**

asuujournalofsocialsciences@gmail.com

**Annual Subscription Rate (Plus Postage)**

Individuals within Nigeria	N3,000.00
Individuals within Africa (outside Nigeria)	\$30 USD
Individuals outside Africa	\$50 USD
Institutions within Nigeria	N5,000.00
Institutions within Africa (outside Nigeria)	\$50 USD
Institutions outside Africa	\$100 USD

...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...  
...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...