

Is an African Developmental State Possible? - The South African Case in Comparative Perspective

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This paper analyzes the development of welfare and employment policy in South Africa since 1994 in order to address the question, What are the obstacles to, and possibilities for, an African developmental state? Its argument proceeds in three sections. The first section pinpoints weaknesses in previous discussions of ‘developmental states’ in Africa and elsewhere. The second section distinguishes between ‘sustainable’ and ‘unsustainable’ state-led development, defining the former as a participatory social democracy that emphasizes universal welfare rights together with political rights; and the latter as typically corrupt capital-intensive state-business collaboration. The third section discusses the role of pensions and firm governance in the construction of a developmental state. The conclusion considers the specific challenges posed by the financialization of South Africa’s economy to the goals of sustainable state-led development, outlined above.