

WHAT'S INFORMAL ABOUT THE INFORMAL SECTOR? CULTURE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Development in Sub-Saharan Africa has been constructed from a viewpoint of westernization and modernization. This is mostly the case with the duality or dichotomy between the informal and formal sectors of African production and employment. Informal economic activity is associated with indigenous systems of production and culture and has increasingly been viewed as inferior to formal sector activity which is associated with modern systems of production and European culture. These two sectors are viewed as opposite to each other. Critical assessment of the division between formal and informal sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that such a dichotomy is misplaced. Yet, this division between sectors has been used as the basis for policy formulation. Using wood producers in Kumasi, this paper illustrates that the dichotomy between formal and informal sectors is not based on economics, negates the contribution of indigenous production to development, and stifles growth of production in Sub-Saharan African countries. The paper argues that economies of Sub-Saharan Africa should be viewed in a holistic fashion and culture should be an important consideration in the development debate in the region.

Keywords: formal, informal, culture, development, wood workers, Kumasi, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Academic and professional construction of development and underdevelopment of Sub-Saharan Africa is an important component of the development debate on the region. A vexing part of the debate has been the construction and role of informal sector production and employment in the development process. At its core, this construction reflects the importance of culture in the development process. The ILO (1972) popularized the informal