Concept Note
On
An online lecture series to commemorate Chris Freeman in the 18th year of publication of 'Putting Africa first'

Organised by the South Africa Research Chair Initiative- SARChI & Africa Post-Graduate Academy (APGA), Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

Chris Freeman Centenary Seminar Series
'Putting Africa First - Revisited
Continuing the fond memory of Chris Freeman'

1. Introduction

The Chris Freeman centenary seminar series have been successfully done and achieved with the Centre for Research on Innovation Systems (CRIS) by engaging remarkably all the scholars from all parts of the world.

We would like to follow up the CRIS initiative to continue on 16 August 2021 to remember the time when Chris Freeman left this world. We have decided and agreed to do at least another six seminars weekly from August 16- September 21, 20219.

Chris Freeman wrote the Preface for the book on Putting Africa First: The Making of African Innovation System, Aalborg University Press, 2003. He endorsed Putting Africa First by stating clearly that one put as the last must be put first. His great vision is truly to stand always for justice for the bottom of the pyramid in the world. We invite all of you across the world to participate and contribute with the Putting Africa First: Revisited Initiative to continue fondly the enduring legacy of Chris Freeman to live on the eternal river of time.

2. Background

'The stone that the builders rejected may indeed become the cornerstone of the arch'. Christopher Freeman wrote this concluding line to his preface to '*Putting Africa First: The Making of African Innovation System*', in 2003. In the 18th year of publication of the book, Africa is not the rejected stone anymore as it continues to be coveted by the competing global powers. Coveted for reasons - some in line with Chris's idea of the corner stone of the arch, others not!

The discussion series '*Putting Africa First – Revisited*' takes an introspective retrospection of the ideas on the 'making of the African innovation system' introduced by the book at a time when innovation was still coveted by Africa. There have been initiatives to apply the concept of innovation systems in Africa aimed at discovering the way to do its integrated, smart and sustainable development. Attempts towards developing an inclusive innovation-paradigm connecting states, regions and the continent have not been achieved yet. The lack of evidence-based evaluation and monitoring of the historic evolution of

African innovation & development pathway was the reasons. In this context a re-reading of the *Putting Africa First* book and exploring its journey from 2003-2021 might enable us to envision a new Africa. Time to look for a vision based on sustainable value added extraction of natural resources and intelligent use of technology. Chris' vision of an economics of hope will be particularly useful in this endeavor.

Putting Africa First: The Making of African Innovation System was published in 2003. The idea took shape in 1999 as a discussion between Bengt-Åke Lundvall and Mammo Muchie at Aalborg University.

> ". . . Mammo was attracted by the idea of applying the national innovation system concept on Africa because he was occupied by the needs to create a unification-nation building process in Africa. BengtÅke Lundvall was in the process of working out the Globelics concept (www.globelics.org). Building the first parts of the global network of scholars working on innovation systems together with African colleagues was an attractive idea . . ." (*Foreword by Chris*)

The material for the book was drawn from a conference that took place in March 2001 in Aalborg, titled 'African Systems of Innovation and Competence Building'. Deliberations of the conference was built around the (then) emerging concept of 'national systems of innovation' application, which was still largely confined to Europe or North America and dealt with nation states in these parts of the world. Asia and Latin America were only beginning to catch up, but Africa was completely left out. Chris Freeman saw the book as a good omen. He wrote in the preface:

> ". . . For many reasons, the work on Africa is especially important. No continent has a more complex pattern of national boundaries or of ethnic, religious and tribal subsystems, interacting with sectoral systems. The heritage of colonial exploitation, colonial divisions and colonial rule and the struggles for independence have left behind an extraordinary

legacy, now also overlaid with the operations of multinational corporations and other international organizations as well. To trace and understand these multiple interacting cultural and institutional sub-systems is indeed a huge challenge.

Yet no continent is more in need of the potential benefits, which science and technology can bring, than the African continent. The direst poverty, the cruelest burdens of disease, of armed conflict, and of environmental disasters still ravage Africa. Yet technology cannot yield its potential benefits without appropriate cooperative social initiatives organized by Africans for Africans. Therefore, to understand the patterns of existing innovation systems, and their limitations and to devise ways to deliver much greater benefits to all the peoples of Africa is a fundamental need for the continent . . . at this time of global economic instability, this work is needed more than ever to protect science and education from inept and misdirected programmes of 'structural adjustment' and to 'put the last first' . . ."

Thus, *Putting Africa First* served an important role by bringing the national systems of innovation discourse to the African continent. Systematically analyzing the context in five sections viz. Conceptual Specification and Framework Setting, Adapting the Innovation System Concept to African Development, Regional Innovation Systems and Cross-Regional Experiences, Innovation Systems and the African State and Innovation in African Manufacturing and Services, achieved this. Twenty-six innovation scholars from the Global South and North participated in this work. Aalborg University Press published the book. AfricaLics reported it as one of the most cited books from the African Innovation and Development publications.

In retrospection, it is doubtful, whether the book has been read as deeply and widely as it deserved. One objective of this series is to facilitate a re-reading of the book, especially among new generation innovation scholars in particular from the Global South, to facilitate a new dialogue on what was discussed in the

book in 2003 to explore where we stand now to open the opportunity to make a reality the African national innovation system.

Yet another objective of this series is to initiate a fresh dialogue on Chris Freeman's vision of the Pan African ideal. Chris prescribed a combination of interdependent studies at all levels of society across Africa by harnessing the heritage of existing knowledge through numerous local grassroots projects and institutions, with the support of a continent-wide interchange of ideas. When South Africa created the First White Paper on the national system of innovation, Chris Freeman invited joined and served as a consultant and advisor. South Africa now has done the first innovation System (1996), the second innovation System in (2008) and the third in (2018) and the fourth will follow in (2028). What is missing is the African national system of innovation. How great to do it to realize also Chris's Pan African ideal. Time is ripe for a revisit on this rather Promethean idea.

There is an opportunity to work on the African national innovation system to make scholarly contribution on various modes, systems and models of innovation needed for Africa to realize the goal of AfCFTA.   Africa needs to develop value chains from its rich natural resources to enable the 55 current states to promote inter –African trade   to make   AfCFTA relevant and successful.   A panel can be included in "Putting Africa First –Revisited on the required innovation to implement AfCTA to make Africa achieve the levels Asia and Europe have attained.

Towards fulfilling a third objective, this series would invoke an old yet still relevant association in Freeman's school. Mammo Muchie and Bengt-Åke Lundvall wrote in the foreword to the first edition:

> ". . . One reason that Mammo and Bengt-Åke found together in this project was that both of us belong to the global circle of Christopher Freeman's intellectual 'God children'. A statement from him opened the conference in Aalborg and another opens this book . . . "

The discussion series 'Putting Africa First – Revisited' is conceived also as a reunion of innovation emerging and senior scholars to commemorate the intellectual legacy of Chris, at a time when the entire humanity has faced one of the greatest challenge of continuing healthy existence and survival. Only an economics of hope could restore it back to normalcy. Let us hope for the best!

III: Proposed structure of the series

1. Panel I: Opening inaugural Panel : 16 August, 2021:
        Distinguished Prof. Bengt Ake Lundvall will chair the Inaugural panel
2. Panel II : Innovation System Conceptual Development Specification and Framework Setting: 23 August, 2021
3. Panel III: The Application and Use of the Innovation System Concept to African Sustainable and Integrated Development : August 30, 2021
4. Panel IV: Regional Innovation System and Cross-Regional Experiences
5. Panel V: Innovation System and the African State and AFCFTA: September 6, 2021
6. Panel VI: Innovation in African Agriculture, manufacture and Services in the 4th Industrial Revolution : Closing Panel: September 13,2021

IV: Final Concluding Remarks

Scholars undertaking research on Innovation systems are most welcome. They can go through the Putting Africa First: The Making of African Innovation Book and can use the different chapters and draw insights for further relevant work to innovate fully developed innovative Africa without no more delay. That will be truly what will make the last to be first vision of Chris Freeman to be done as a true reality.

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