

Modernist and Post-Modernist System Thinking Implications: A Learning History Inquiry into Social System Movements, Education Philosophy, and Development Ethics

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Norwich University



Agenda

- Introduction
- Inquiry on Ethiopian Underdevelopment—Initial Research
- Breakout Activity 1
- Inquiry on International Development Practice
- Breakout Activity 2



Introduction

Kal Demerew

- Born in Dallas, TX; Grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; came back to the United States for school
- B.A. with focus in International Politics, Washington University in St. Louis
- MDY with focus in International Commerce, Norwich University
- Thesis Track: topic focused on International Development Approaches in the Ethiopian and African context



Inquiry on Ethiopian Underdevelopment

- Project Overview
 - Basic Research Question: Why is Ethiopia underdeveloped?
 - Why Ethiopia?
 - 1) Lived Experience
 - 2) Never Colonized: Unique Development Variables and Cultural Capital
 - 3) Historic institutional transitions: opportunity to add analytical value
 - 4) Highly misrepresented in media narratives
 - 5) Major recipient of development assistance (\$3 billion a year)



Ethiopian Underdevelopment: Research Findings

➤ Misdiagnosing Underdevelopment

➤ Rejecting Poverty Trap Thesis

Underdevelopment is a product of colonial remnants, lack of 'right' culture, lack of 'right' geography

- doesn't account for Ethiopian independence
- doesn't explain causal links before proposing solutions
- doesn't hold up to Banerjee and Duflo findings]

➤ Roots of Misdiagnosis

- Failure to consider holistic development model and ethics = Modernism?
- Failure to initiate action research for accurate assessment models
- Agenda Driven (The Debate that never happened)



Ethiopian Underdevelopment: Research Findings

- Interventionism as an International Development Approach
 - Debate between Friedrich Hayek and Gunnar Myrdal
 - Easterly's *Tyranny of Experts*--Neocolonialism wins out in the end?
 - Adoption of Interventionism by global development institutions
 - Misdiagnosis leads to misguided approaches

- Records of Interventionism
 - Foreign Aid (Moyo's *Dead Aid* Thesis)
 - The number of people living in poverty has increased since the mid-1960's, even after the infusion of close to \$1 trillion in foreign aid
 - Political and economic conditionalities of aid are often ignored. When implemented, they are unsuccessful [DeSoto also reinforces this point with respect to capital production and property law]
 - Foreign = corruption = inflation
 - Foreign aid = devaluation of domestic production



Ethiopian Underdevelopment: Research Findings

➤ Records of Interventionism (cntd) – Sachs' Millennium Villages Project

- Launched pilot in Kenya and Ethiopia and expanded to 10 countries with a five year and ten year plan, received \$100 million for 'experiment' with goal of procuring \$250 billion a year. Centrally planned, locally executed holistic community interventions in health, water and sanitation, agriculture, etc...
- In 2010, the MVG released a controversial self-congratulatory report claiming dramatic improvements in single-variable outcomes, which led to resignation of lead researcher
- Methodological Errors (empty claims with no baseline comparisons, i.e. assumed the treatment was valid without creating test sites)
- Calculation Errors (Demombynes et al. identified that the 5.9% reduction in infant mortality at MVP project sites was slower than national average of 6.4% for the host countries)
- Cultural mismanagement (e.g. introducing maize to a community with no exposure to the crop / planting a well in a community where women enjoyed taking long communal walks)
- Lack of transparency (refusal to publicize research data, initial defiance by Sachs, then apology, then damage control)
- Lack of accountability (promised a report that would contain an adequacy assessment, impact evaluation, cost assessment, process evaluation, and description of systems design and tools – expected completion December 2016, not yet available)



Ethiopian Underdevelopment: Research Findings

- Failures in International Development
 - Reliance on flawed poverty trap premise – misdiagnosing underdevelopment
 - Inertia of (modernist) interventionist policy despite contrary evidence
 - Failure to initiate action research for accurate assessment models and reliable feedback loops (blind practice)
- Possible Reorientations
 - International Development, Development Ethics, and Good Society (classical model?)
 - Post-modernism? (Subjectivity of truth statements impacts development practice and outcome – Harrison's thesis – unleashing creative potential of maximum number of citizens)
 - Importance of Action Inquiry—Asking the Right Questions



Breakout Discussion 1 – Inquiry Modeling

Background: In light of the failed interventionist approaches to development, the reliance on the flawed poverty trap theory, and policy inertia of interventionism, we need to identify the actual determinants of underdevelopment to initiate appropriate responses.

Research Question: Why is Ethiopia underdeveloped?

Group Tasks (5 minutes): 1) Discuss and list down 3 ‘inquiries’ that will help us glean a better insight into Ethiopian underdevelopment. 2) Use your assigned approach lens to guide your inquiry. 3) Choose a representative to present your inquiries.

- Group 1: Use the Classical Development Ethics Approach
- Group 2: Use the Postmodern ‘creative potential’ approach
- Group 3: Use Modernist ‘technocratic’ Approach



Inquiry Modeling: Ethiopian Underdevelopment

Research Question: Why is Ethiopia underdeveloped?

What inquiries did your group come up with to answer the research question?





Inquiry on Ethiopian Underdevelopment

- Inquiry 1: Why has Ethiopia not capitalized on its independence from European colonialism to leap ahead politically and economically of its African counterparts?
- Inquiry 2: Why does Ethiopia have low quality schools and universities despite having a history of an organically developed classical education system?
- Inquiry 3: What is the relevance of Ethiopia's multi-ethnic composition and Imperial-Marxist transition to modern Ethiopia?



Inquiry on Ethiopian Underdevelopment

- **Goal:** Identify determinant and non-determinant variables of Ethiopian Underdevelopment
- Irrelevant Variables: Colonial history, 'weak' culture, 'bad' geography
- Non-determinant variables: illiteracy, corruption, aid dependency, authoritarianism (lack of democracy), hunger/malnutrition, diseases
- Complicating Variable: Ethnic heterogeneity, globalization

So what are the determinant variables of Ethiopian underdevelopment?



Determinant Variables of Ethiopian Underdevelopment

1) The Violence Trap

- Propensity of Natural States to create 'access rents' to placate actors that threaten the system
- Complicated more by ethnic tensions
- Has a complicating effect on all the other determinant variables

2) The Vicious Circle of Extractive Institutions

- Despite lack of colonial history, extractive institutions set up during Marxist period

3) Primitive Property Arrangements (Land Tenure)

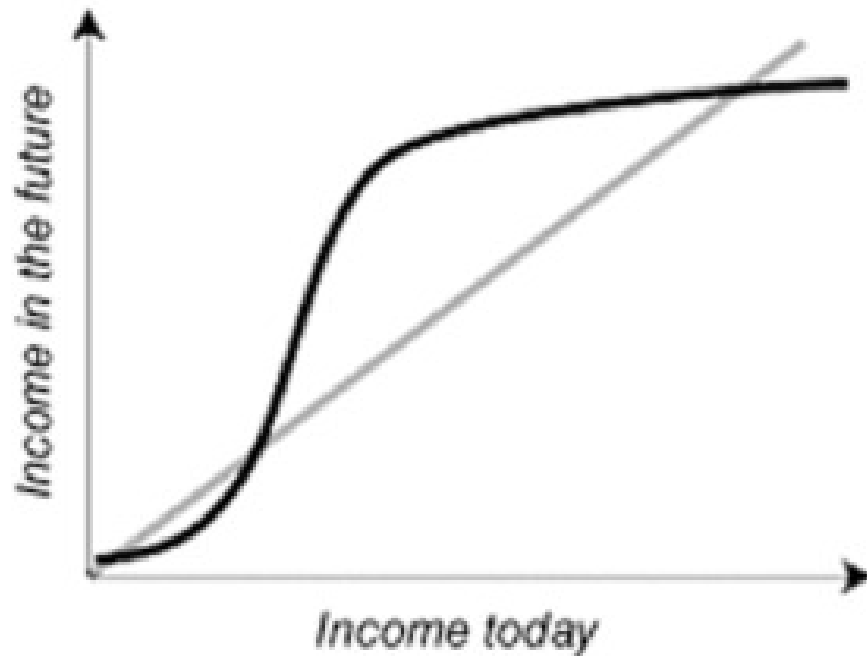
- Land tenure in modern Ethiopia is worse today than it was under the Monarchy

4) Delocalization of Educational Culture

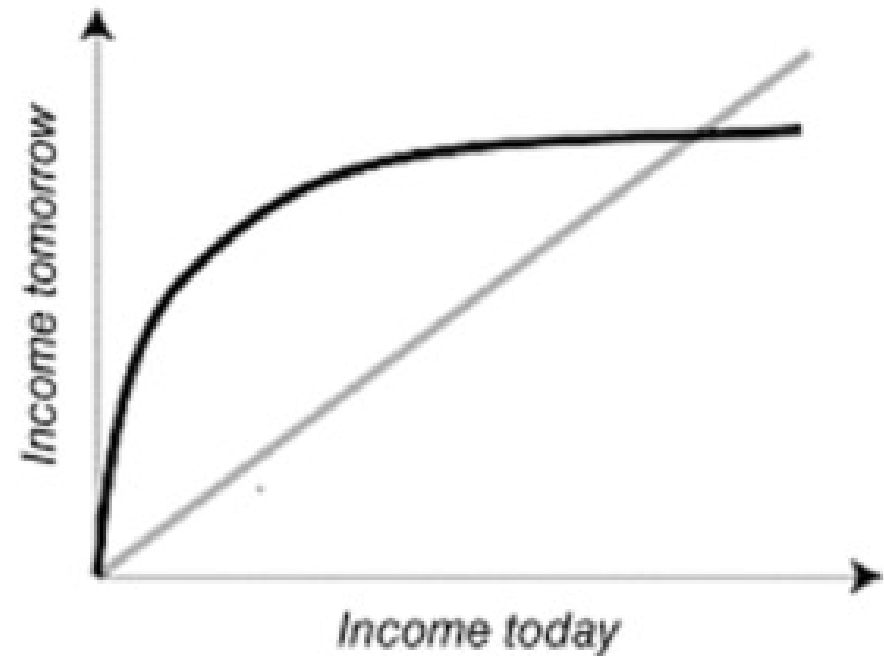
- Standardization of metrics, universalist approach, no competitive advantage

The Poverty Trap Debate – Underdevelopment is a Product of a System

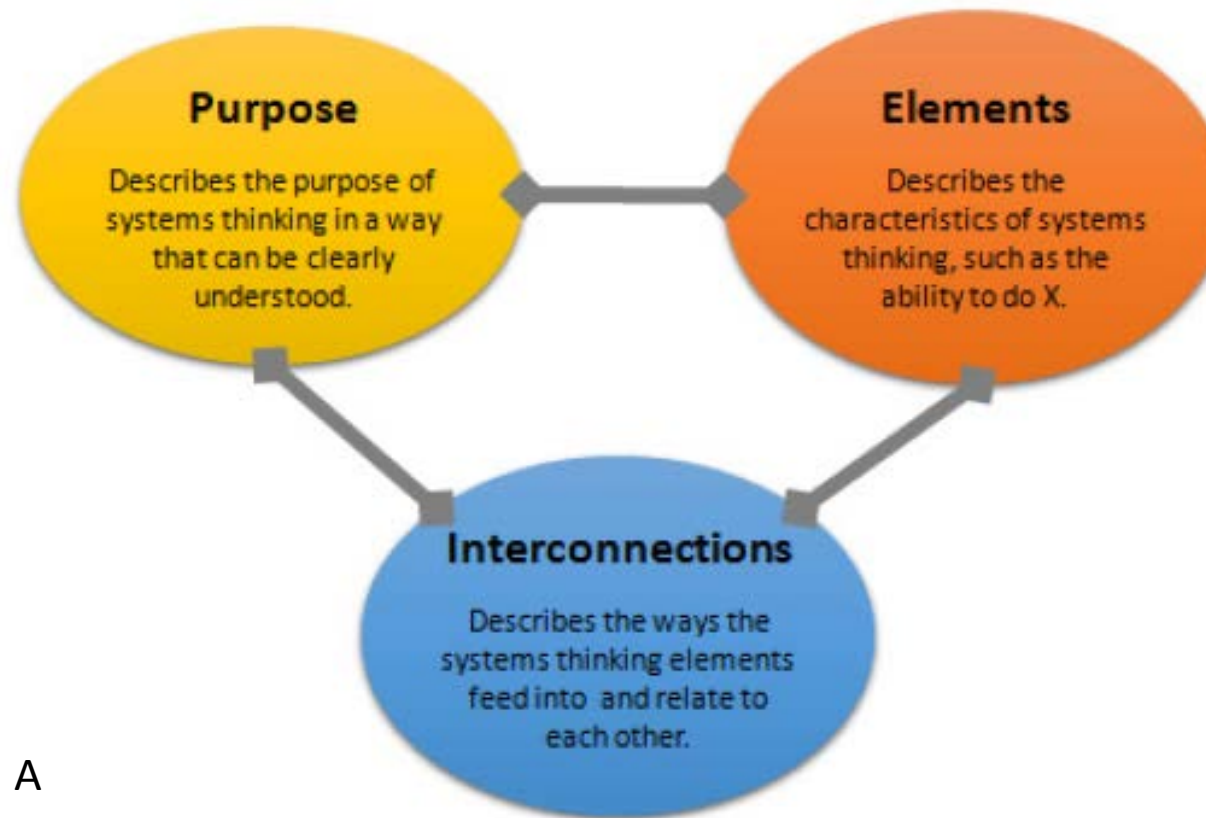
The S-shape curve



The inverted L-shape



Expanding the Research Using System Thinking



Source:
A Definition of Systems Thinking: A
Systems Approach
Ross D. Arnold, Jon P. Wade

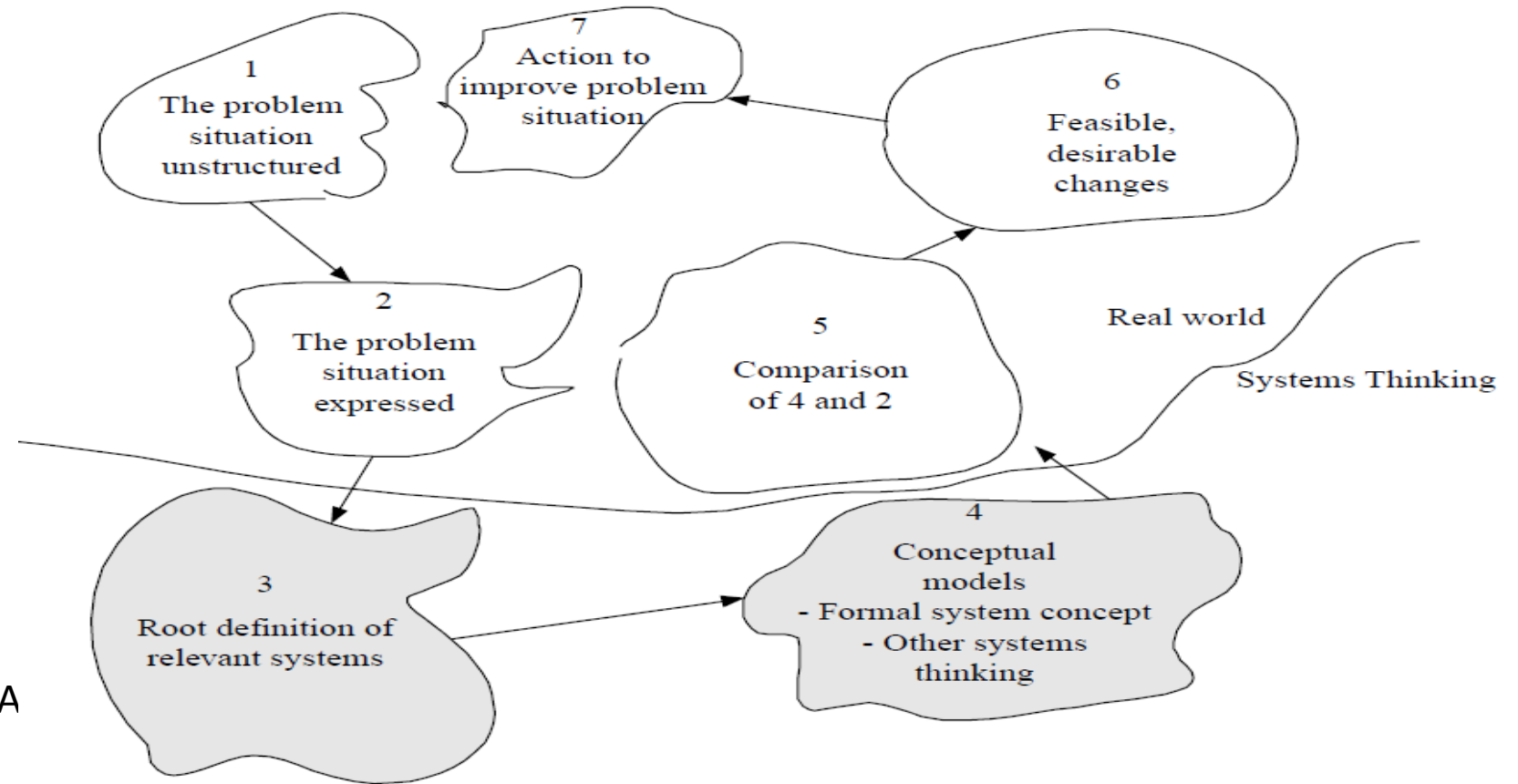
Fig. 1: The System Test

Underdevelopment as a System



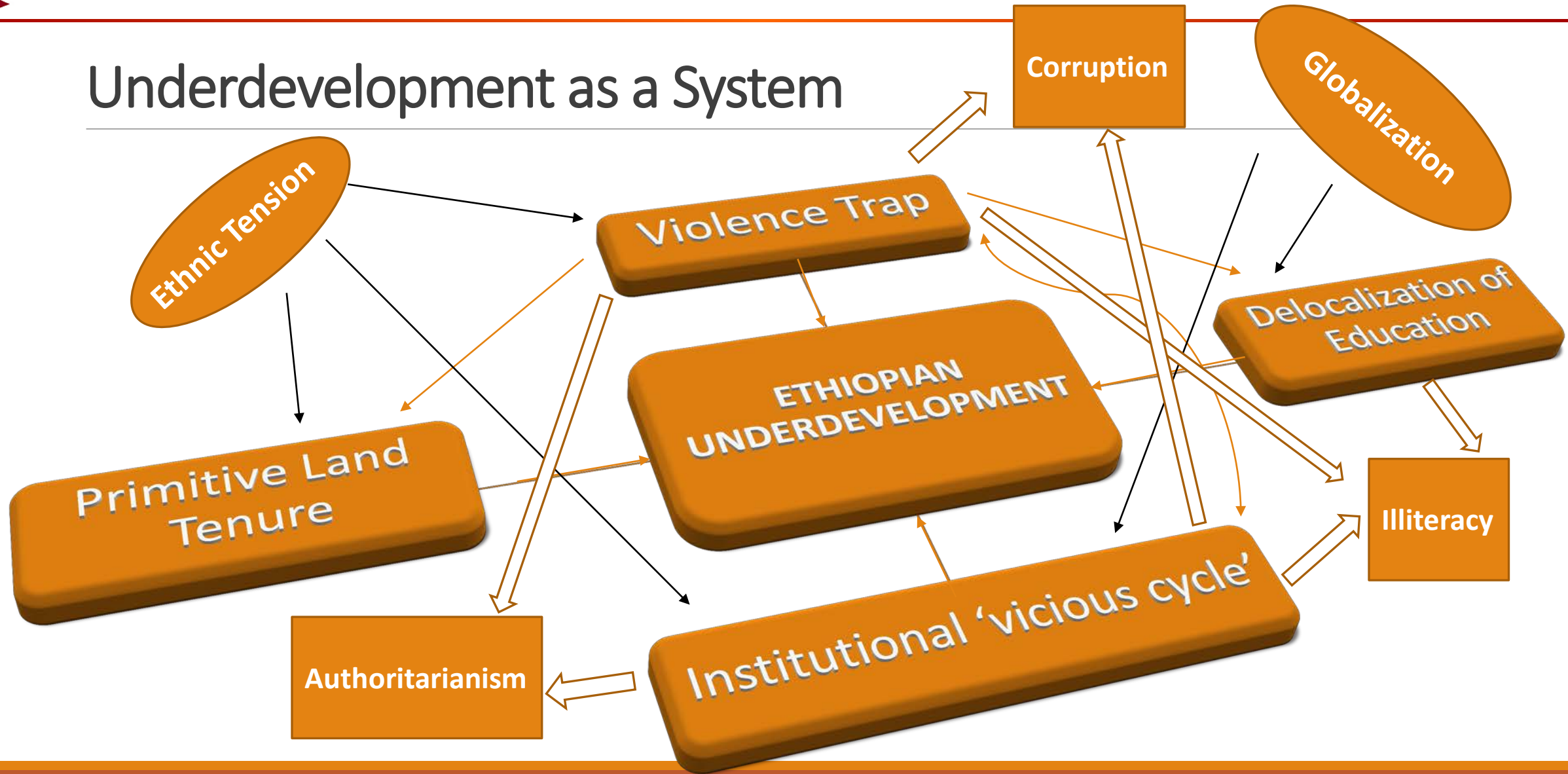


Expanding the Research Using System Thinking (cntd.)



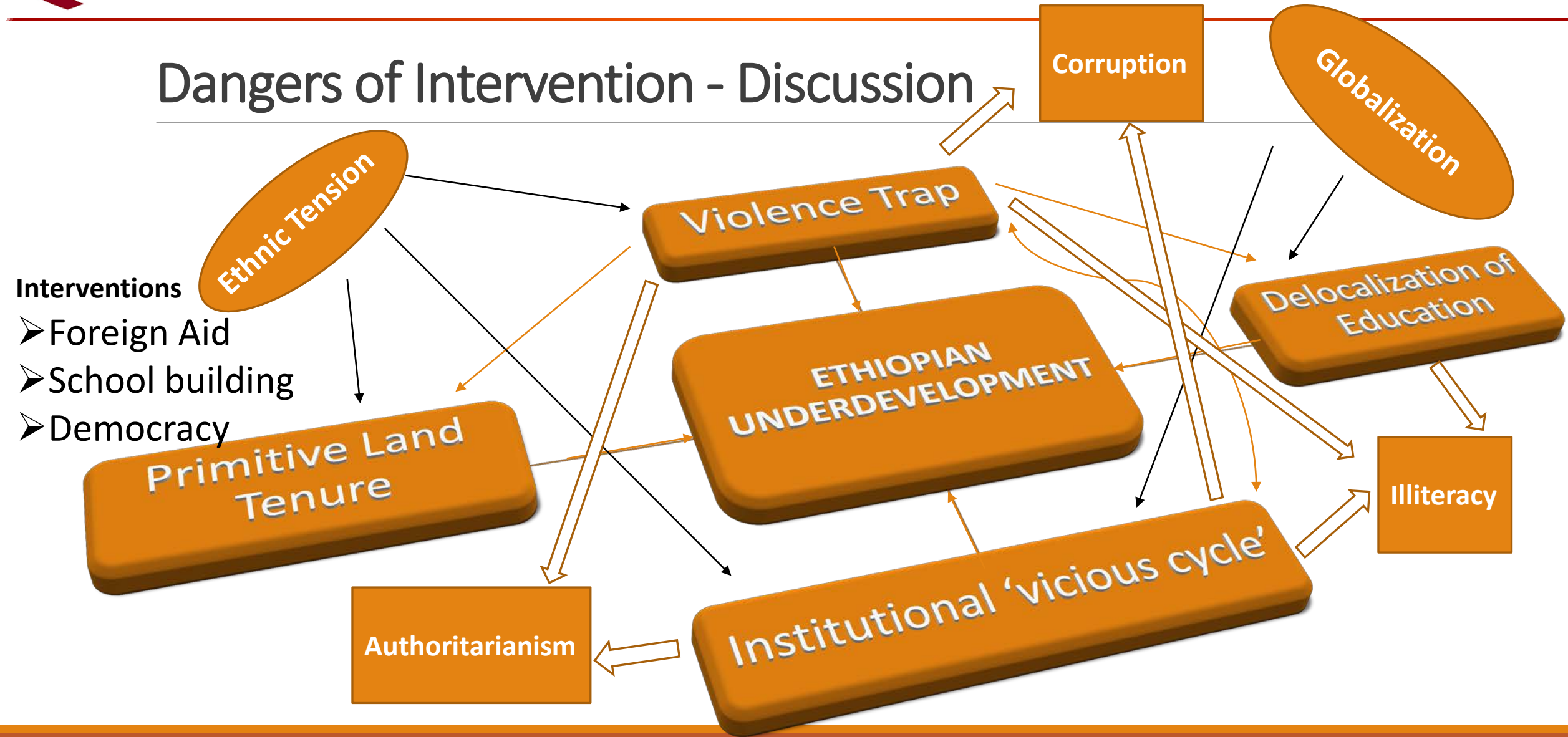
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Underdevelopment as a System





Dangers of Intervention - Discussion





Conclusions – Implications for ID

- A system of underdevelopment can only be reoriented through a holistic, organically rooted approach that encompasses historical-cultural analysis and development ethics.
- There is no single-variable developmental intervention that can effect a single-variable developmental outcome. The key to implementing a genuine developmental philosophy is understanding the political, cultural, and historical developments of a particular locality.
- Development experts, technocrats, and NGO's are not equipped to come up with universally applicable, centrally planned, interventions to reorient the system of underdevelopment in African countries. They can perhaps ask the right questions and use action research to identify the answers.



Breakout Discussion 2: Inquiry Learning

Background: In light of the four determinant variables of underdevelopment in Ethiopia (violence trap, vicious circle of extractive institutions, delocalization of educational culture, primitive land tenure), what questions can we ask to initiate a holistic, organically rooted approach that encompasses historical-cultural analysis and development ethics?

Research Question: How can we reorient development thinking and practice in Ethiopia and the rest of Africa?

Group Tasks (10 minutes): 1) Discuss and list down 3 'inquiries' that will help us systemically reorient development thinking and practice in the Ethiopian context. 2) Use your assigned approach lens to guide your inquiry. 3) Choose a representative to present your inquiries.

- Group 1: Use an academic/educational policy-oriented approach (role – teacher/professor)
- Group 2: Use a political/economic policy-oriented approach (role – government leader)
- Group 3: Use a 'creative destruction' approach (role – social change agent)

Thank you for Attending!

CONTACT

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