Asian Tigers, African Lions
Comparing the Development Performance of Southeast Asia and Africa

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Introduction

The linkage between governance and economic growth is an increasingly important focus of scholars studying the political economy of developing countries. Analysing how and why government elites took certain economic policy choices has drawn the attention of many recent studies to explain policy outcomes and impact. The politics underlying policy choices and management of intense competition by political groups for limited economic resources have a critical impact on the selection and effectiveness of the implementation of development policies. According to the neoclassical political-economy tradition, any interest the political elite may have in promoting long-term growth is conditioned by its own interest in accumulation and its obligation to adjudicate competing demands for economic resources (O’Connell, 2008: 6). Examining the environment as such is imperative in a consideration of the allocation of resources, as they determine policy choices and outcomes and, unsurprisingly, economic growth. Resource allocation is particularly complex in many developing countries, where political decisions can have a critical impact on the realization of the full potential of development policies.

Malaysia and Kenya offer interesting case studies for an examination of the impact of the politics of policy on agricultural and rural development outcomes. By the end of the 1960s, the World Bank economic reports connected positively about Kenya’s “remarkable achievements” and held...