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Original Article

Post-Scarcity Development for Emerging Economies: Towards Hybrid Prosperity Systems Beyond Economic Output Measures

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ABSTRACT: *This paper proposes a hybrid model of post-scarcity development for emerging economies that abandons traditional growth-output measures and instead focuses on regenerative socio-ecological capabilities, human flourishing, decentralised technological organisation, and long-term institutional resilience. Existing development models prioritise economic output measures that reduce complex well-being to quantifiable productivity indicators, thereby obscuring structural inequalities, ecological degradation, and human vulnerabilities (Costanza et al., 2014). This paper embeds post-scarcity thinking into African realities through a multi-systemic approach renewable energy networks, digital commons, platform cooperatives, knowledge economies, local autonomy, and innovation diffusion. The argument is supported by empirical research across development studies, ecological economics, political theory, and anthropology. It concludes that post-scarcity development must be neither anti-modern nor anti-market, but rather hybrid, pluriversal and systemic.*

KEYWORDS: *Post-Scarcity, Hybrid Development, Well-Being, Africa, Political Economy, Structural Transformation, Sustainability, Decentralised Innovation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-scarcity development represents a structural shift from traditional economic measurement cultures toward systemic prosperity rooted in real human and ecological capacities. Emerging economies in the Global South face interconnected crises: informal labour dominance, political fragility, ecological vulnerability, and resource dependency. These challenges expose the limitations of reducing development to material production volumes or monetary output. Scholars increasingly argue that development without structural transformation entrenches dependency rather than overcoming it (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Post-scarcity rejects the narrative that development is linear, based solely on industrial expansion or export revenue accumulation. It instead emphasises knowledge creation, renewable infrastructures, collective capabilities, and the dignity of self-organised socio-economic systems. This paper positions emerging economies not as passive recipients of global flows, but as active architects capable of designing new economic realities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic engagement with post-scarcity and heterodox development paradigms has expanded considerably over the past two decades, driven by growing recognition of the ecological, social, and institutional limitations of growth-centred economic models. Post-scarcity thinking emerged initially within ecological economics, a field that fundamentally challenges the assumption that economic systems can expand indefinitely without regard to biophysical constraints. Daly (1996) established that economic activity is embedded within finite ecological systems and that sustainability requires a shift away from throughput maximisation toward qualitative development. This perspective destabilises conventional development theory by redefining prosperity as compatibility with ecological limits rather than continuous expansion.

Building on this ecological critique, Costanza et al. (2014) advance a comprehensive framework for measuring well-being that explicitly rejects production growth as the primary indicator of societal progress. Their approach foregrounds human needs, social cohesion, and environmental integrity, thereby exposing the inadequacy of gross domestic product as a proxy for collective welfare. Rather than treating environmental sustainability as an externality, this body of work integrates ecological health directly into the evaluation of development outcomes.

Parallel to these developments, Sen (1999) introduced the capability approach, which reorients development theory away from material resources toward the substantive freedoms individuals possess. In this framework, development is defined not by the quantity of goods produced or consumed, but by the expansion of people's real opportunities to pursue lives they have reason to value. This conceptual shift is central to post-scarcity thinking because it decouples prosperity from industrial output and reframes it in terms of agency, dignity, and choice.

Raworth (2017) further advances post-scarcity discourse through doughnut economics, which provides an integrative conceptual model combining ecological ceilings with social foundations. By visualising development as bounded by planetary limits and minimum social thresholds, this framework explicitly rejects trade-off logics that have historically justified environmental degradation in the name of growth. It reinforces the proposition that prosperity must be achieved within a safe and just operating space.

Hickel (2020) extends these arguments by demonstrating that improved living standards can be achieved through sufficiency-oriented strategies, redistribution, and renewable energy infrastructures while simultaneously reducing material throughput. His work challenges the assumption that poverty reduction in emerging economies requires high-consumption growth trajectories, instead highlighting structural inequality and unequal access to resources as central constraints. Within African political economy, Mkandawire (2015) provides a critical intervention by arguing that late industrialisation strategies dependent on commodity exports and external capital flows have failed to produce inclusive or sustainable outcomes. He emphasises the importance of democratic capability, domestic knowledge systems, and institutional autonomy, aligning closely with post-scarcity principles.

Despite the depth of these contributions, the literature remains fragmented. Empirical modelling of post-scarcity transitions in African urban contexts is limited, technological commons remain under-theorised within development studies, and few frameworks meaningfully integrate indigenous epistemologies with digital development architectures. These gaps necessitate a hybrid theoretical approach capable of synthesising human capabilities, ecological constraints, and decentralised technological governance.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study develops a hybrid theoretical framework for post-scarcity development by integrating the capability approach, ecological economics, and commons-based decentralisation. The framework moves beyond additive interdisciplinarity toward conceptual synthesis, recognising that no single theoretical tradition adequately captures the complexity of development processes in emerging economies.

The capability approach, derived from Sen (1999), constitutes the normative foundation of the framework. It asserts that development should be evaluated according to the real freedoms individuals possess rather than the accumulation of material resources. From this perspective, investments in education, health systems, social protection, and civic rights are intrinsic components of development rather than secondary outcomes of economic growth. In a post-scarcity context, prosperity is understood as a condition in which individuals and communities possess the institutional and material capacities necessary to exercise agency and participate meaningfully in social and economic life.

Ecological economics forms the second pillar of the framework by establishing the biophysical boundaries within which development must occur. Daly (1996) and Raworth (2017) argue that sustainability cannot be appended to growth-oriented systems through efficiency gains alone. Instead, regenerative processes, circular resource flows, and low-carbon infrastructures must be foundational to economic organisation. Within post-scarcity development, energy transition and ecosystem restoration are therefore treated as structural imperatives rather than policy options.

The third pillar is commons and decentralisation theory, most notably articulated by Ostrom (1990). This body of work demonstrates that communities can manage shared resources effectively when supported by institutional autonomy, participatory governance, and collectively defined rules. In post-scarcity development, commons theory provides the institutional logic for decentralised energy systems, cooperative economic arrangements, and local digital commons, offering an alternative to both market enclosure and state monopolisation.

Together, these theoretical pillars constitute a hybrid development architecture grounded in human autonomy, ecological viability, and technological democratisation. They provide epistemic justification for rejecting output-based measurement cultures and replacing them with multidimensional well-being frameworks that account for social, ecological, and institutional quality.

4. HYBRID POST-SCARCITY DEVELOPMENT AS STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Hybrid post-scarcity development reconceptualises structural transformation as a reconfiguration of value creation systems rather than a linear transition between economic sectors. Conventional development models have equated transformation with industrialisation and export expansion, yet such strategies have often entrenched dependency, environmental degradation, and social exclusion in emerging economies.

In contrast, hybrid post-scarcity development proposes a plural economic architecture integrating renewable manufacturing, decentralised energy grids, open innovation systems, cooperative digital economies, and public knowledge infrastructures. Rather than abandoning economic modernity, this approach redesigns modernity to serve collective flourishing. Technological

advancement is retained, but its orientation is shifted toward meeting fundamental needs through inclusive and sustainable mechanisms.

Empirical developments in African economies illustrate the transformative potential of this model. In Kenya, the expansion of digital payment systems has increased entrepreneurial resilience and social autonomy by reducing transaction costs and enhancing financial inclusion (Jack & Suri, 2014). In Rwanda, digitally coordinated community health systems have significantly reduced mortality rates while maintaining relatively low levels of resource consumption (Binagwaho et al., 2014). These cases demonstrate that post-scarcity development does not imply minimalism or stagnation, but rather a strategic reorientation of innovation toward social provisioning and resilience.

Under the hybrid post-scarcity model, structural transformation prioritises value addition through knowledge ecosystems, renewable resources, and institutional learning rather than extractive expansion. Markets continue to operate, but they are embedded within social and ecological governance frameworks that reduce vulnerability to external shocks and strengthen domestic capabilities. Transformation is thus understood as the expansion of collective capacity and systemic resilience, rather than the maximisation of economic output.

5. POST-SCARCITY, WELL-BEING, AND COLLECTIVE FLOURISHING

Contemporary development research increasingly recognises that well-being cannot be adequately captured through income-based or production-centred indicators alone (Moleka, 2025a-d). Measurement frameworks rooted in psychological, social, and ecological dimensions of life have begun to reshape international development discourse by foregrounding the qualitative conditions that enable human flourishing. Empirical work by Diener et al. (2018) demonstrates that subjective well-being exhibits stronger and more consistent correlations with life expectancy, mental health, environmental quality, and the density of social relationships than with aggregate production volumes. These findings challenge the long-standing assumption that economic output growth reliably translates into improved quality of life.

Within this context, post-scarcity development advances a reconceptualisation of the social contract. Rather than organising social legitimacy around income rankings or consumption capacity, post-scarcity models prioritise universal access to foundational services, including education, healthcare, water, mobility, and digital connectivity. The provision of these services reduces structural vulnerability and diminishes dependence on market-mediated access to basic needs, thereby weakening the mechanisms through which scarcity is socially produced and reproduced.

This approach resonates strongly with African communal philosophies often articulated through Ubuntu thought, in which personhood and dignity are constituted through relational existence rather than individual accumulation. From a post-scarcity perspective, Ubuntu is not treated as a cultural addendum to economic policy, but as a normative logic that aligns with contemporary well-being research. It emphasises reciprocity, care, and collective responsibility as central to prosperity, reinforcing the argument that development outcomes are inseparable from social cohesion and participatory inclusion.

Post-scarcity development therefore necessitates democratic institutional architectures capable of redistributing access to essential services and ensuring equal participation in decision-making processes. Political theories of inclusion and democracy emphasise that justice requires not only formal rights but also institutional arrangements that enable meaningful participation across social groups (Young, 2000). In this sense, collective flourishing becomes both an outcome and a condition of post-scarcity development, linking well-being directly to democratic governance and institutional design.

6. ENERGY, TECHNOLOGY, AND DECENTRALISED INNOVATION SYSTEMS

Energy systems and technological infrastructures constitute the operational core of post-scarcity development, as they directly shape production possibilities, social provisioning, and institutional autonomy. Renewable energy transitions, particularly when decentralised, alter the political economy of development by reducing dependence on imported fuels, lowering exposure to price volatility, and enabling localised productive activity. Sovacool et al. (2020) argue that decentralised renewable energy systems are already reshaping economic landscapes by increasing local autonomy and redistributing control over critical infrastructures.

In post-scarcity frameworks, technology is understood not as a neutral input, but as a socio-political system whose governance determines developmental outcomes. Open technological infrastructures supported by public investment expand access to scientific research, software knowledge, and open data, thereby lowering barriers to innovation and enabling grassroots design. Such ecosystems support local product development and enhance technological sovereignty, allowing emerging economies to retain greater control over value creation processes.

Empirical developments within African contexts illustrate these dynamics. Blockchain-based agricultural platforms have improved transparency in supply chains, reduced information asymmetries, and limited intermediary exploitation, thereby enhancing producer autonomy and income security (Kamilaris et al., 2019). These technological arrangements exemplify how

innovation can be organised as a shared capability rather than as an externally extracted asset. Within post-scarcity development, innovation is thus repositioned as a collectively governed resource that strengthens national and community-level resilience.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR EMERGING ECONOMIES

The adoption of hybrid post-scarcity strategies implies a substantive restructuring of state institutions and policy priorities. Rather than acting primarily as facilitators of growth or market expansion, states are repositioned as architects of long-term civil capabilities. This reorientation requires sustained investment in education systems that cultivate critical knowledge, open science platforms that democratise research, and regional cooperation frameworks that enable shared technological development.

At the same time, post-scarcity transitions demand robust democratic regulatory institutions capable of governing innovation while preventing oligopolistic capture. Political economy research consistently demonstrates that institutional accountability, transparency, and inclusive public bargaining systems are strongly correlated with sustainable development outcomes (North et al., 2009). Without such safeguards, technological transitions risk reproducing existing inequalities through new forms of concentration and exclusion.

Emerging economies therefore face a dual challenge. They must simultaneously accelerate technological and energy transitions while strengthening democratic governance mechanisms to ensure that the benefits of transformation are broadly shared. Anti-corruption measures, participatory policy processes, and citizen oversight are not ancillary concerns, but integral components of post-scarcity development. The legitimacy and durability of hybrid prosperity systems depend on their capacity to distribute access equitably and to embed innovation within accountable institutional frameworks.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is subject to several limitations that point toward a broader research agenda. First, there remains a scarcity of longitudinal empirical data on large-scale post-scarcity transitions within African contexts. Existing case studies provide valuable insights but remain episodic, limiting the ability to draw strong causal conclusions regarding long-term outcomes. Second, although this paper integrates capability theory, ecological economics, and commons-based governance, these traditions have yet to be synthesised into unified quantitative or policy models suitable for governmental planning and evaluation.

Third, the absence of micro-level ethnographic evidence constrains understanding of how post-scarcity transformations are perceived, contested, and negotiated by citizens themselves. Cultural interpretation and everyday experience remain underexplored dimensions of post-scarcity development. Future research should therefore employ mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative indicators with qualitative case studies across urban and rural contexts. Particular attention should be paid to decentralised innovation systems, the interaction between indigenous epistemologies and technological governance, and the risks associated with digital inequality, elite capture, institutional fragility, and climate exposure. A long-term research agenda must ultimately translate post-scarcity theory into actionable policy roadmaps capable of reconciling global technological change with local cultural autonomy. Only through such integrative efforts can post-scarcity development evolve from a conceptual framework into a durable paradigm for emerging economies.

9. CONCLUSION

Hybrid post-scarcity development offers a structural redefinition of prosperity for emerging economies by transcending output-based measurement cultures and reorienting development toward multidimensional well-being. By integrating localised regenerative systems, decentralised technological infrastructures, and democratic institutional design, this approach connects human autonomy with socio-ecological resilience and long-term political stability. Far from being peripheral to global transformation, emerging African economies possess distinctive advantages in the transition toward post-scarcity systems. Their demographic dynamism, cultural traditions of collective organisation, and capacity for technological leapfrogging position them as potential leaders in the design of hybrid prosperity models. Post-scarcity development thus emerges not as a utopian abstraction, but as a pragmatic framework for addressing the intertwined crises of inequality, ecological degradation, and institutional fragility.

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