The Unfinished Continent

How African Minds Must Lead the Next Civilizational Leap

By

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This book is dedicated to Kou Amelia Paye.

Table of Contents

Part II: Breaking the Old Traps

Part III: Building Audacity

Preface

This book is a rejection letter—to every blueprint, forecast, and polite instruction that insists Africa's destiny is to "catch up." For too long, we have been urged to dream big while being handed rulers too short to measure our own possibilities. We have been praised for "resilience" when what we needed was justice. We have been invited to the global table, only to find the menu written elsewhere.

In the language of global development, Africa has rarely been allowed to exist in its own voice. Our economies are judged by indices that flatten our realities into numbers intelligible only in Washington or Paris. Our leaders are commended for reforms that win donor applause but mortgage future horizons. Our innovators are celebrated when they mimic Silicon Valley but doubted when they attempt something original. This is not ambition; it is obedience disguised as pragmatism.

The Unfinished Continent refuses this obedience. It argues that Africa's renaissance will not come from perfecting imitation, but from practicing mutation—leaps in governance, economics, culture, and imagination so original that the world must redraw its maps to recognize them. The unfinishedness of Africa is not a verdict of failure; it is a vantage point, a frontier from which entirely new civilizational experiments can begin.

This book is written for the restless:

- For the policymaker who refuses to see their nation reduced to a donor spreadsheet.

- For the entrepreneur who rejects being labeled a "risk profile" in a Geneva report.

- For the citizen who knows that "being like Europe" is not progress but a poverty of imagination.

- For the young African who senses that patience has become a prison and that the future will belong to those bold enough to build it now.

What follows is both critique and construction. The chapters dismantle the dominant traps that hold Africa captive: the ideology of "development" as mimicry, the uncritical importation of Western management systems, the monopoly of external expertise, the seductive language of "resilience," and the political weaponization of hope. But each chapter also points toward another path: one that reclaims epistemic sovereignty, restores conceptual confidence, and highlights the examples of African innovation that already hint at a different trajectory.

This journey unfolds in three parts:

- **Part I – Rethinking Africa's Trajectory** interrogates the tyranny of "development," explores African philosophies of management, and challenges the cult of the imported expert. Here we lay the groundwork for rejecting low ambition and reclaiming the authority to think on our own terms.

- **Part II – Breaking the Old Traps** confronts the idols that have sedated us: resilience that glorifies suffering, markets that masquerade as benevolent, patience that becomes paralysis, and hope that anesthetizes action. Each chapter asks: what if the very virtues we have been praised for are shackles in disguise?

- **Part III – Building Audacity** proposes courage as Africa's most abundant and renewable resource. It introduces the *Calculus of Courage*, explores how audacity can be institutionalized into governance and markets, and tests these ideas

through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a laboratory for continental risk-taking. It ends with a call to abandon deferred dreams and to author history anew.

Throughout, this book insists on one radical proposition: Africa does not need to catch up; it must mutate. Civilizations do not leap when they are ready; they leap when they are restless. And Africa's restlessness is long overdue.

If you are content with small dreams, this book is not for you. But if you believe that courage—measurable, institutionalized, and contagious—can become the bloodstream of Africa's politics, economics, and culture, then you hold in your hands not just a book, but a manifesto.

Because the question before us is not whether Africa can rise. The question is whether we will rise on our own terms—and whether the world is ready to follow.

Introduction:
The Arrogance of Low Ambition

There is a peculiar violence in urging a people to "dream big" while quietly handing them a ruler too short to measure their own possibilities. Africa has endured this violence for centuries—not the crude violence of chains and bayonets, but the subtler brutality of diminished horizons. It is a violence embedded in the architecture of our institutions, woven into the language of our aspirations, and reinforced by the polite tyranny of global metrics.

Our leaders, schools, and partnerships often echo the borrowed cadences of other civilizations: "be the next Singapore," "the Dubai of Africa," "a better Europe." This mimicry is not ambition—it is obedience. And yet, acts of defiance break through daily. Nigeria's tech founders built Flutterwave and Paystack into billion-dollar platforms on their own terms. Dakar designed a transit system for its own urban chaos, not as a copy of Paris. Kenya's M-Pesa rewrote the rules of finance, leapfrogging global orthodoxy. Ethiopia financed a dam through domestic means, defying both donors and neighbors. Rwanda institutionalized drone delivery before the United States or Germany dared to. These are not anomalies. They are harbingers of an Africa that refuses to wait for permission.

As Frantz Fanon warned, the colonized mind rarely dreams in its own colors. Even after independence, Africa's horizons are too often drawn elsewhere: our economic targets measured by foreign rubrics, our progress applauded in distant boardrooms. The result is an obedience that disguises itself as realism, and an ambition that never outgrows imitation.

This book begins by refusing small dreams. It calls for an epistemic revolution: a reclamation of the right to define our own futures, to design systems from our realities, and to set ambitions so large that the world must adjust to accommodate them. The argument is simple but radical: Africa does not need to "catch up"; it must mutate.

Civilizations leap not when they are "ready," but when they are restless. And Africa's restlessness is long overdue.

How This Book is Structured

The Unfinished Continent is divided into three major movements, each dismantling inherited traps and constructing pathways toward an audacious future:

Part I – Rethinking Africa's Trajectory

These chapters expose the intellectual prisons that bind Africa.

- **Chapter 1** challenges the ideology of "development" itself, showing why Africa is not a "latecomer" but a site of civilizational mutation.

- **Chapter 2** examines African philosophies of management as acts of resistance and resurrection, offering models rooted in indigenous practice rather than imported systems.

- **Chapter 3** dismantles the cult of the "expert" and reclaims the authority of local genius.

- **Chapter 4** critiques the tyranny of "resilience," showing why Africa needs structural audacity, not endurance.

Part II – Breaking the Old Traps

This section interrogates the deeper myths that keep Africa waiting.

- **Chapter 5** introduces the "Calculus of Courage" as a way to measure Africa's audacity.

- **Chapter 6** dismantles the illusion of global market fairness, exposing how Africa is trapped by economic mythologies.

- **Chapter 7** warns against the tyranny of patience—arguing that deferral is itself a form of captivity.

- **Chapter 8** critiques hope as a political shackle, showing how it sedates rather than mobilizes.

Part III – Building Audacity

Here, the book shifts from critique to construction.

- **Chapter 9** and **Chapter 10** formalize courage as a strategic variable and propose architectures for institutionalizing audacity.

- **Chapter 11** frames the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a living laboratory for continental courage.

- **Chapter 12** and **Chapter 13** examine the price of timidity, offering pathways to overcome Africa's courage deficit.

- **Chapter 14 (Conclusion)** calls for the courage to end history as it has been imposed and begin it anew, abandoning hope as sedation and embracing audacity as a political, economic, and cultural imperative.

Why This Book Matters

This book is written for the restless:

- For the policymaker unwilling to reduce their nation to a donor spreadsheet.

- For the entrepreneur who refuses to be defined as a "risk profile" in a Geneva report.

- For the citizen who knows that "being like Europe" is not progress but a poverty of imagination.

It is also written for ordinary Africans—students, workers, parents—who sense that their daily improvisations and collective solidarities already carry within them the seeds of another future.

What You Should Expect

Expect provocation. These pages are a rejection letter to every polite blueprint, every well-meaning forecast, every donor roadmap that insists Africa's destiny is to "catch up." Expect discomfort. The arguments here will unsettle both policymakers who cling to orthodoxies and citizens who have been taught that patience is a virtue. Expect, too, a radical hope of a different kind—not the hope that postpones action, but the conviction that Africa's audacity is both possible and necessary.

If you are content with small dreams, this book is not for you. If you believe Africa's role is to follow, these chapters will disturb you. But if you suspect—even faintly—that Africa's destiny lies in audacity, and that it can build systems so original the world must learn from them, then read on.

Because the question is no longer how Africa can catch up. It is how Africa can lead.

Part I

Rethinking Africa's Trajectory

Chapter 1

We Are Not Developing, We Are Mutating

The modern African state exists under a tyranny of metaphors, none more pervasive or insidious than "development." The term saturates policy discourse, slipping into speeches, reports, and headlines with such ease that it masquerades as common sense. Politicians unveil "national development plans" with fanfare, multilateral agencies churn out "development indicators" with clinical precision, and journalists chronicle Africa's "development challenges" with ritualistic monotony. The word is wielded as if it were neutral, as if "development" were an uncontested good—a universal aspiration stripped of history or ideology. Yet development is no innocent descriptor. It is an ideological project, its roots sunk deep in colonial soil, designed to bind Africa to a script that was never written for its own liberation.

Frantz Fanon, in The Wretched of the Earth (1963), exposed the enduring grip of colonial psychology, where even after political independence, the colonized mind remains captive to the conceptual architecture of its former masters. This psychology operates not through overt domination but through the internalization of the colonizer's standards. The formerly colonized, Fanon argues, learn to measure their worth by borrowed yardsticks, aspiring to "become like" the colonizer, as if dignity were a prize awarded for proximity to someone else's civilization. The tragedy is not merely the act of imitation—it is the foreclosure of imagination, the inability to dream futures that do not resemble Europe or its offshoots. This is the tragedy of the development paradigm in Africa today: it chains our ambitions to a mimicry of histories not our own, rendering our potential legible only through the lens of someone else's triumph.

Achille Mbembe, in On the Postcolony (2001), deepens this critique, describing postcolonial Africa as ensnared in "postcolonial entrapment"—a condition where the continent remains tethered to temporalities it did not author. Our futures are plotted on timelines drawn in distant capitals, marked by milestones we did not choose: GDP growth targets, donor-driven reform cycles, trade liberalization schedules, and poverty alleviation metrics crafted in offices thousands of miles away. In this schema, "progress" is not an expression of African agency but a performance staged for external approval. Development becomes less a journey of self-determined evolution than a race on a track designed by others, complete with starting blocks, lane assignments, and a finish line that leads not to emancipation but to someone else's stadium. To run this race is to accept a premise that Africa's destiny is to follow, forever catching up to a world that defines itself as the standard.

Yet Africa's realities persistently defy these scripts. Across the continent, systems and practices are emerging that cannot be contained within the linear, Eurocentric logic of development. Consider the rise of mobile money in Kenya, epitomized by M-Pesa. What began as a modest tool for micro-transfers has mutated into a national financial infrastructure, bypassing conventional banking systems entirely (Jack & Suri, 2011). From the perspective of orthodox development theory, this trajectory is an anomaly—a deviation from the expected sequence of financial formalization. But from the perspective of mutation, it is a revelation: a system that evolved not by imitating Western banking but by responding to African realities—low banking penetration, widespread mobile access, and a need for rapid, low-cost transactions. M-Pesa is not an African version of Western finance; it is a new paradigm, one that has reshaped global conversations about financial inclusion.

This is where the concept of "mutation" becomes vital. Drawing on postcolonial theory and evolutionary metaphors, we can reframe Africa not as a "latecomer" to modernity but as a crucible for alternative modernities—civilizational experiments that unfold outside the linear sequence of industrialization, urbanization, and mass consumer capitalism. As Kwasi Wiredu (1998) argues in his call for "conceptual decolonization," the categories we inherit from the West are not neutral tools. They are laden with histories, assumptions, and teleologies that often clash with African realities. To speak of "development" is to accept a framework that positions Africa as perpetually behind, striving to replicate a model that emerged from specific historical conditions—conditions that do not and cannot fully map onto our own. To speak of "mutation," by contrast, is to assert Africa's capacity to generate forms—economic, political, epistemic—that defy the scripts of global modernity and invent something the world has not yet seen.

To see Africa as "mutating" rather than "developing" is to reject the arrogance of low ambition. It is to refuse the assumption that our task is to retrace the paths of Europe or Asia, climbing their ladder of progress rung by rung. Instead, it is to claim epistemic sovereignty: the right to define our own metrics, design our own temporalities, and invent our own civilizational endpoints. This is not a rejection of progress but a redefinition of it—a recognition that progress need not mean convergence with the West but can mean divergence into forms of life that are distinctly ours.

The development paradigm, rooted in mid-20th-century modernization theory, assumes a universal path to prosperity: agrarian reform, industrial revolution, urban migration, service-sector expansion, and eventual ascension into a high-consumption society (Rostow, 1960). This model is not merely an economic prescription; it is a philosophical assertion about the nature of history, one that positions Western

modernity as the inevitable endpoint for all humanity. It presumes that Africa's destiny is to replicate this trajectory, differing only in speed or efficiency. But Africa is not a blank slate onto which industrial capitalism can be stamped. It is a continent with its own epistemologies, rhythms, and histories of innovation, which demand to be taken seriously as sources of civilizational design. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argued in Decolonising the Mind, true liberation requires freeing ourselves from the linguistic and conceptual frameworks that render our realities intelligible only when they mirror the West. Development discourse often functions as such a framework, translating Africa into an "incomplete Europe" rather than an autonomous force capable of redefining what progress means.

1.1 The Myth of the Linear Path

One of the most insidious aspects of developmentalist thinking is its linearity. The injunction to "catch up" implies a singular ladder of progress, with Europe and North America perched at the top. This mindset, as Achille Mbembe (2001) observes, produces a "narrow bandwidth of political imagination," where the future is always derivative and the present is always deficient. African societies are cast as trapped in a perpetual prelude, always "about to" become something but never already being something of their own. This framing erases the richness of what already exists—complex systems of trade, governance, and social organization that thrive outside Western templates—and dismisses the possibility that Africa's present might already contain the seeds of futures the world has yet to imagine.

Mutation, by contrast, is not linear. It disrupts the script. It bends timelines, fuses categories, and produces forms that have no precedent. In biology, mutation is not merely an error but a generative deviation—a source of novel traits that enable adaptation in unforeseen ways. Applied to political economy, mutation is the capacity to invent

institutions, markets, and technologies that defy the neat progression imagined by modernization theorists. It is the recognition that Africa's path need not follow the industrial revolutions of Manchester or the tech booms of Silicon Valley but can instead forge systems that respond to our own contexts: urban sprawl without formal zoning, digital economies without legacy infrastructure, governance without centralized bureaucracy.

1.1.1 Case Study: Informal Economies as Civilizational Labs

The informal economy, often framed by institutions like the World Bank as a "challenge" or an "obstacle to formalization" (Benjamin & Mbaye, 2014), is better understood as a laboratory for adaptive mutation. Street markets in Lagos, boda-boda motorcycle networks in Kampala, and artisanal mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, yet they sustain millions of livelihoods and exhibit organizational sophistication that rivals formal enterprises. These systems are not chaotic; they are ecosystems with their own rules, risk management strategies, and innovation pathways. Far from being a stage to be "outgrown," informality represents a distinct mode of economic life—one that decentralizes decision-making, lowers barriers to entry, and embeds commerce within dense social networks.

Take Lagos's Alaba International Market, a sprawling hub of electronics trade that operates with minimal state oversight yet generates billions in revenue annually. Its traders have developed intricate systems of trust-based credit, cross-border supply chains, and dispute resolution that function without formal contracts or legal enforcement. This is not a failure of formalization but a triumph of mutation—a system that has evolved to meet the needs of a volatile, resource-scarce environment in ways that rigid corporate structures cannot. To dismiss informality as "backward" is to miss its generative

potential: it is a civilizational laboratory, producing economic forms that may prove more resilient and adaptive than the standardized models of global capitalism.

1.2 Time and the Politics of Pace

Mutation also demands a rethinking of time. John Mbiti (1969), in African Religions and Philosophy, observed that African conceptions of time are often event-based rather than abstractly linear. Time is not an empty container to be filled with productivity, but a rhythm shaped by significant occurrences—harvests, rituals, communal decisions. This temporal logic challenges Western management models, which are obsessed with quarterly growth targets, annual reports, and the relentless acceleration of output. Development discourse imposes a universal clock, demanding that Africa synchronize its pace with global markets. But mutation requires a different temporality—one that prioritizes strategic patience over frantic compliance.

Consider Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Its financing model, heavily reliant on domestic bonds and public contributions, stretched the project's timeline far beyond what Western investors might tolerate. Construction began in 2011, and completion remains a moving target, yet this patience—rooted in a vision of sovereignty over the Nile's resources—enabled Ethiopia to resist geopolitical pressure and retain control over a project that symbolizes national ambition. The GERD is not merely an infrastructure project; it is a temporal rebellion, a refusal to let external timelines dictate the pace of progress. Mutation here is not about speed but about recalibrating time to align with strategic priorities, proving that sovereignty includes the right to move at one's own rhythm.

1.3 Epistemic Sovereignty and Conceptual Design

At the heart of mutation lies epistemic sovereignty—the right to design concepts that originate from African realities. Kwasi Wiredu's (1998) call for "conceptual decolonization" is a clarion call to reject inherited categories and forge new ones: notions of value, risk, efficiency, and governance that reflect our lived experiences rather than imported ideals. Without this, African economies and societies will remain "imitative systems," trapped in what Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) calls "contaminated universals"—ideas presented as universally valid but shaped by specific Western histories.

This requires a new lexicon. Instead of "developed" and "developing," we might speak of "emergent" and "mutant" systems, emphasizing creativity over hierarchy. Instead of "formalization," we might speak of "network densification," capturing the strengthening of informal trade webs and social infrastructures. Instead of "poverty reduction," we might adopt Amartya Sen's (1999) language of "capability expansion," focusing on the range of life paths open to individuals and communities rather than their proximity to Western consumption patterns. These are not mere semantic shifts; they are acts of epistemic rebellion, reclaiming the power to name our realities and define our aspirations.

1.4 From Survival to Becoming

Colonial trauma and postcolonial misrule have trapped much of Africa in survival thinking—a reactive, short-term, scarcity-driven mode of decision-making. Policies are crafted to stabilize, to mitigate, to manage crises rather than to transcend them. Mutation demands something bolder: strategic transcendence. This is the deliberate practice of managing not just for immediate survival but for civilizational becoming. It is the willingness to invest in systems whose benefits

may emerge only across generations, to cultivate cultural and intellectual capital that cannot be quantified in GDP reports, and to prioritize dignity over donor approval.

Strategic transcendence means embracing the messiness of mutation. It means accepting that to create something truly new, Africa must depart so radically from precedent that its path may appear illegible to those still reading from the old maps. It means recognizing that the informal vendor in Accra, the tech innovator in Nairobi, and the community organizer in Dakar are not just solving local problems—they are prototyping systems that could redefine global paradigms of commerce, technology, and governance. To mutate is to reject the arrogance of low ambition, to refuse the role of eternal apprentice, and to claim the right to architect futures that the world has yet to imagine.

The choice before Africa is stark. We can continue to chase a slightly better ranking on someone else's development index, tweaking policies to win the approval of global institutions. Or we can embrace the radical uncertainty of mutation, forging paths that disrupt the global script and establish Africa as a source of civilizational innovation. To choose mutation is to wager on our own genius—to believe that Africa's future lies not in catching up but in redefining what it means to lead.

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Chapter 2

African Management as Resistance and Resurrection

Management is never a neutral toolkit of processes, metrics, and techniques; it is an ontology—a way of defining reality, structuring human relations, organizing time, and mobilizing resources (Klikauer, 2013). What presents itself in mainstream discourse as "universal management science" is in fact the crystallization of particular historical and cultural trajectories. Western management thought, shaped by Max Weber's bureaucratic rationalism, Frederick Taylor's scientific management, and Peter Drucker's strategic optimization, is less a timeless science than a historically situated ideology (Weber, 1978; Taylor, 1911/1998; Drucker, 1954/1993). It emerged from the peculiar conditions of European and North American modernity: the discipline required by industrial capitalism, the Enlightenment's obsession with rational order, and the hierarchical legacies of militarism and empire (Grey, 2005; Adler, 2009).

Within this paradigm, humans are frequently reduced to "human capital," time is commodified into linear units of productivity, and natural resources are reconceived as inputs for exploitation (Foucault, 1977; Hoskin & Macve, 1986). Such assumptions often stand in tension with African philosophical traditions that foreground interdependence, reciprocity, and collective flourishing (Mbiti, 1969; Wiredu, 1998).

The transplantation of Western management frameworks into African contexts has rarely been a neutral process. Instead, it has frequently operated as a form of institutional imposition, embedding external priorities into local organizations and displacing indigenous episte-

mologies of organization (Nkomo, 2011; Jackson, 2012). The result is a structural tension: African firms and governments are often compelled to perform modernity according to foreign scripts, even when those scripts undermine local modes of cooperation, leadership, and accountability.

This chapter proposes to reframe African management not as the passive reception of external systems but as a site of insurrection and reclamation. On one hand, it is an act of resistance against imported frameworks that present themselves as universal while embodying Eurocentric values. On the other hand, it is a recovery of indigenous paradigms of organization that have long offered rigorous, coherent, and contextually grounded alternatives. Philosophical traditions such as Ubuntu—which emphasizes personhood through others (Ramose, 2002)—Harambee in Kenya, with its ethic of collective mobilization (Wairimu, 2016), the kgotla in Botswana as a forum for participatory governance (Sharma, 2010), and the palaver traditions of West Africa as dialogical forms of consensus (Wiredu, 1998), provide not only cultural resources but systematic models of management.

Far from being "traditional residues," these paradigms demonstrate Africa's capacity to contribute original organizational logics to the global conversation. If Weberian rationalism reduced management to hierarchy and efficiency, African philosophies remind us that management can also be about belonging, relationality, and the ethical co-creation of flourishing communities.

2.1 The Ontological Roots of African Management

African philosophical traditions offer radically different starting points for management, grounded in ontologies that prioritize interdependence over individualism and communal harmony over competitive extraction. Mogobe Ramose (1999), in African Philosophy Through

Ubuntu, articulates Ubuntu not as a mere ethic of kindness but as an ontological claim: "a person is a person through other persons." This principle rejects the atomistic individualism that underpins Western management theory, where individuals are reduced to autonomous units of productivity— "human capital" to be optimized for profit. In an Ubuntu-informed framework, organizational success is measured not solely by output or shareholder value but by the capacity to sustain communal life, uphold dignity, and foster mutual flourishing. Leadership, in this context, is not a privilege to be wielded but a responsibility to nurture the web of relationships that constitutes the organization.

Similarly, Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) argues that in African thought, personhood is not an inherent status but a moral achievement, earned through active participation in the community. Unlike the Western model, where leadership is often tied to positional authority or technical expertise, African ontologies see leadership as a role conferred through service, integrity, and the enhancement of collective well-being. A manager, in this sense, is not a detached overseer but an embedded participant, accountable to the community they serve. These ontologies are not relics of a pre-modern past; they are living resources, capable of informing management systems that resist the alienation and extractive logic of imported models while offering pathways to organizational forms that are uniquely African.

This ontological grounding extends to how African traditions conceptualize time and resources. In many African cultures, time is not a linear commodity to be "spent" or "saved" but a cyclical and relational phenomenon, tied to seasons, rituals, and community milestones. For instance, among the Akan of Ghana, time is understood through adaduanan—a 42-day cycle that integrates social, spiritual, and economic activities (Gyekye, 1996). This contrasts sharply with the Western management obsession with linear timelines, deadlines,

and quarterly reports, which fragment time into discrete, measurable units. Similarly, resources in African ontologies are not merely raw materials for exploitation but are imbued with social and spiritual significance. Land, for example, is not just a factor of production but a communal inheritance, held in trust for past and future generations. Management informed by these principles prioritizes stewardship over extraction, ensuring that resources are used in ways that sustain both the environment and the community.

2.2 Management as Resistance

To manage in ways that honor African ontologies is itself an act of resistance—an intellectual and practical refusal to allow external frameworks to dictate the terms of collective life. It is resistance against the reduction of persons to "human capital," a phrase that smuggles the commodification of human beings into the language of economic progress (Becker, 1994). It is resistance against the fetishization of quarterly profits, which fractures time into narrow windows too short to contain civilizational vision (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002). And it is resistance against authoritarian, top-down structures inherited from colonial bureaucracies and perpetuated by postcolonial elites, who too often mimic the command-and-control models of their former rulers (Mamdani, 1996; Nkomo, 2011).

This resistance does not always manifest as overt political confrontation. Often, it emerges in quieter, everyday practices that refuse to let imported efficiency metrics erode the social fabric. In Ghana, for instance, *susu* savings schemes—rotating credit associations based on trust and reciprocal obligation—have endured for centuries. They operate outside the logic of collateral and credit scores, sustaining millions of livelihoods where conventional banking has failed (Ardener & Burman, 1995; Aryeetey, 1994). These systems are not "primitive" or "informal inefficiencies" awaiting modernization;