

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Democratic illiteracy: A threat to sustainable democracy and peace in Ghana**

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**Following the political instabilities that have characterised Ghana few years after independence from British colonialists, many were those who thought multiparty democratic governance was the surest way to good governance and sustainable human development. The paper argues that citizens' uncooperative attitude in governance issues, and leaders' unpreparedness to be accountable to the citizenry result from lack of democratic acculturation. The way forward to achieving and ensuring good governance and peace in Ghana therefore is an elaborate and sustained democratic education geared toward making democracy a way of life for Ghanaians. The paper is an empirical study founded on current affairs and democratic politics in Ghana. It combines historical and sociological approaches in the interpretation of textual data and empirical observations in the formulation of its reflections. In so doing, it examines what democracy is not, on one hand, and what it is, on the other. Informed-knowledge of these two realities will lead to democratic literacy urgently required for good governance, socio-economic and political development in Ghana.**

**Key words:** Democracy, governance, illiteracy, authoritarianism, dictatorship, responsiveness.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Following the return to constitutional democratic governance 1993, Ghana has become a good reference for many international development partners as a democratic success in West Africa, and for that matter Africa, a continent noted for military and civilian dictatorship. After twenty-two (22) years of democratic experience (1993 - 2015), many are those who are wondering what have been the benefits of democracy for majority of Ghanaians, in the face of numerous socio-economic and political challenges and the dwindling faith in political leadership. This observation is as a result of the inability of the state, state-actors, political actors and the entire citizenry, who led the struggle to return the country to constitutional governance, to bring to fruition

the many socio-economic and political prospects chanted in the advent of democratic governance, following eleven years (11) of military rule under the PNDC administration. This failure is largely due to lack of understanding and knowledge about constitutional democratic governance as codified in the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, or purposeful ignorance of same for selfish political pursuits. This is what this paper calls 'democratic illiteracy' and considers inimical to the sustainability of democratic governance and peace in Ghana. Democratic illiteracy in this paper therefore refers to the absence of knowledge-based behaviour or the display of purposeful ignorance of same, for the effective workings of constitutional democratic institutions.

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The study traces the root of democratic illiteracy in Ghana's democratic governance to some historical and social realities, among which are the fact that: Multiparty democratic governance is alien to Ghanaian culture and realities; the introduction of Western-baked model of multiparty democracy has not been a natural process evolving from the people's desire for such a system at the point of its introduction. It was the fruit of series of agitations led by a section of the Ghanaian middle-class and political elites whose interests do not coincide with that of the ordinary citizens; there had not been any effective political socialization or acculturation of the Ghanaian populace prior to or after the introduction of democratic governance; as a result, majority of the citizens, regardless of their level of formal education, lack clear understanding and knowledge about constitutional democratic governance as codified in the constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, or are purposeful ignorant of same for selfish and parochial political pursuits. Democratic governance in Ghana is therefore characterized by a high level of democratic illiteracy, to the extent that hardly will two Ghanaians drawn at random give a common definition of what "democracy" really is.

Stemming from the root causes of democratic illiteracy, the study will be guided by the following questions: What are the manifestations of democratic illiteracy in Ghana's democratic governance? What impact does democratic illiteracy have on sustainable democratic governance, peace and human development in Ghana? What is democracy not and should not be? What really is democracy and what should it be? How can democratic literacy be attained in order to sustain democratic governance, peace and human development in Ghana?

The study aims at bringing to the fore the issue of democratic illiteracy and highlighting its nature and manifestations so as to draw attention to its nefarious impact on democratic governance and peace in Ghana. It also proffers possible measures towards addressing it, while generating further public discourse on it, in view of finding common grounds for checking its cancerous impact from the democratic dispensation of Ghana in order to give real meaning to democratic governance.

The paper is an empirical study founded on current affairs and observations of democratic politics in Ghana. The study combines historical and social-conflict approaches in the interpretation of textual data and empirical observations in the formulation of its reflections. Whereas the historical approach enables the study to establish general facts and principles on the phenomenon of democratic illiteracy through attention to chronology and to its evolution or historical course, the social-conflict approach helps to reflect on the social inequalities that serve as leitmotiv for it in its various conflict and changes. Taking cognizance of the fact that the cost of every conflict-driven change in human societies is heavier than its benefits, the threats inherent to democracy are a great source of worry.

Democratic illiteracy in this paper therefore refers to the absence of knowledge-based behaviour or the display of purposeful ignorance of same, for the effective workings of constitutional democratic institutions. Considering the fact that according to Marx (1964) *in* Farley (1990: 65), "if people correctly understand their self-interests, their values will reflect this understanding", it is important to establish whether democratic illiteracy resulting from purposeful ignorance is not a reflection of the values of the self-interests of the people vis-à-vis democratic governance. Dalton and Shin (2011), Verba and Almond (1963) and Teorell (2002) argue that the citizens of firm democracies, such as those of Great Britain and the United States of America have formidable 'civic culture', with citizens that are more competent and have a higher level of citizen participation at the local level politically than people in areas with young and fragile democratic systems such as those of Germany, Mexico and Italy. Chen and Rulska (*ibid.*) intimate that Almond and Verba (1963) provide the first comprehensive explanation for understanding the correlation between citizen orientations and democracy. This is what defines what they call "Political Culture", as reiterated in the words of Adatuu (2017), which is synonymous to democratic literacy in this paper. The absence of this culture creates democratic illiteracy at the heart of this paper.

The study identifies and examines behavioural patterns of democratic illiteracy and their nefarious impact on contemporary democratic governance in Ghana. Besides, it highlights what democracy is not and should not be, on one hand; and what democracy is and should be, on the other hand. Furthermore, the study recommends measures towards attaining democratic literacy so as to ensure the sustainability of Ghana's democratic governance, peace, socio-economic and political development. In this pursuit, the fundamental question which requires consideration at this stage of the study is: "what are the manifestations of democratic illiteracy in the Ghanaian society?"

Democracy as a system of government is not a destination; neither is it an event. It is a journey in search of qualitative socio-economic and political life for the attainment of greater prosperity required for sustainable human development, peace and security for the greater number of people in every human society. According to Phillips Shively (2007: 176) "A democracy is a state in which all fully qualified citizens vote at regular intervals to choose, from among alternative candidates, the people who will be in charge of setting the state's policies". This choice should be knowledge-based in order to generate expected benefits for the electorate. Oquaye (2004) stipulates that the term 'democracy' has become a prescriptive phenomenon. It stretches from the boundaries of a goal, a reality to an illusion. Its illusory perspective though intangible has often been invoked as direct government of the masses in whatever forms it is viewed. (p.58). He further intimates that the word democracy

has not been insulated from the conceptual problems surrounding the expression. In contemporary Ghana therefore, one can speak of “grassroots democracy,” “participatory democracy,” “people’s democracy,” “the national democratic revolution” and “economic democracy.” Starr (1992) and Marshall (1997) also argue in line with Oquaye (Ibid.) that the concept of democracy has changed over time and that there are significant differences in the aspects of democracy stressed by different authors. Similarly, Galligan and Clavero (2008) also contend that “democracy is a concept that is highly contested, and therefore, a concept that is not easy to define.” (p. 5). They explain that although there have been endless disputes over its meaning, democracy assessments tend to define the concept in procedural terms, that is, as a political system characterized by the presence of a set of rules and institutional arrangements for arriving at collective decisions. They add that procedural definitions of democracy can be traced back to the influence of Schumpeter’s seminal work, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, in which democracy has been defined as “an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by men as of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” Expanding on that definition, Rakner, Menocal and Fritz (2007) present Dahl’s (1973) seven key criteria that are essential for democracy: control over governmental decisions about policy constitutionally vested in elected officials; relatively frequent, fair and free elections; universal adult suffrage; the right to run for public office; freedom of expression; access to alternative sources of information that are not monopolised by either the government or any other single group; and freedom of association (that is, the right to form and join autonomous associations such as political parties and interest groups). Kabagambe (2006) however, states that the number of variables put forward by Dahl (1973) is eight (8) although he falls short of enumerating and elucidating on them. Dahl’s definition of formal democracy includes the basic civil liberties that should, in principle, guarantee that the democratic process is inclusive, free of repression and enables citizens to participate in an informed and autonomous manner. Mazrui (2002), on his part, states that the most fundamental of the goals of democracy are probably four. Firstly, to make rulers accountable and answerable for their actions and policies; secondly, to make citizens effective participants in choosing rulers and in regulating their actions; thirdly, to make society as open and the economy as transparent as possible; and fourthly, to make the social order fundamentally just and equitable to the greatest number possible. For others like Walby (2008) and Onuoha (n.d), democracy, which is predicated on the principle of majority rule, offers a window of opportunity for marginalized groups to participate in shaping policies and decisions that affect their lives. Onuoha (2009) states that embedded in this understanding

is the belief that democratic governance should aim at providing equal opportunities and improving the socio-economic conditions of the people irrespective of ethnicity, religion, age, sex or gender. From the aforementioned analysis, scholars, authors, or even politicians remain in a conceptual quicksand about exactly what the word democracy denotes. Some go as far as possible to argue that democracy is merely accepting democratic norms, while others are of the opinion that having electoral freedom is democracy. Dahl (1971) even argues that democracy has not yet been reached by any society, and that the closest we can see at present is a ‘polyarchy’, a system that exhibits many of the features of democracy, but has not quite reached full democratization. In all these instances, what is to be emphasized is that democracy requires a certain level of political culture which provides a solid knowledge-based choice of rulers for its effectiveness and efficiency. This knowledge-based choice defines the essence of democratic literacy. This, however, is not the case in many developing democracies, including Ghana, where majority of the citizenry are democratically illiterate, irrespective of the level of their formal education or socialization.

In Ghana, because democracy is not the fruit of the citizens’ natural desire for greater participation into the governance process of their country as responsible citizens, but that of a struggle for access and control of state resources and political power by an ideologically alienated, estranged and self-serving middle-class and political elites, democratic values have failed to be rooted to shape the character and destiny of the people so as to become a way of life required for the evolvement of strong institutions, rather than strong men, to ensure sustainable democratic development and peace. Political socialisation whose principal emphasis, according to Johari (2009: 211), “is on the transmission of political values from one generation to another” has not taken place in Ghana with the introduction Western-type of political organisation and governance. As Jahari (ibid.) vividly puts it:

The stability of a social or political system depends on the political socialization of its members on account of the fact that a well-functioning citizen is one who accepts (internalises) society’s political norms and who will then transmit them to future generations.

As an example, Jahari further writes:

“the members of a stable democratic system as operating in Britain are trained and made habitual of adopting constitutional means to affect changes rather than resorting to the techniques of taking the matters to the streets or creating conditions of violent upheaval.”

Obviously this has not been and is still not the case with

democratic experience in Ghana. It appears to be operating on the principle of “trial and error”, hence the numerous misconceptions and misconducts characterizing its evolvement. Just as, in the words of Kourouma (1981: 14), “After the suns of politics, Independence fell upon Africa like a swarm of grasshoppers”, so has democracy fallen on Ghana after the numerous agitations against the Provisional National Defence Council PNDC military cum civilian regime led by the then Flight lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, following the coming into force of the fourth republican constitution on the 7th January 1993. As a result, there had not been time and space for any meaningful political or democratic socialisation “to so train or develop individuals that they become well-functioning members of the political society” (Sigel, 1965: 2).

The entire concept of democracy has been bastardized and narrowly pinned down to one of its cardinal principles or tenets: “Freedom of speech”. This is a clear manifestation of democratic illiteracy. The Ghanaian media, civil society, academia, state-actors and political actors alike, have all consciously or inadvertently contributed in many ways to the entrenchment of this nefarious phenomenon called “democratic illiteracy” in the Ghanaian democratic body-politic through the tacit acceptance of the erroneous definition of the concept of democracy for that matter, democratic governance, narrowed down to “freedom of speech”.

The principle of “Freedom of speech” has been defined as “*ka be ma men ka be*” in Akan. This translation can be loosely translated as “Say it. Let me say it” or “say something, let me say something” in English. The import of this translation is that, democracy is about the primacy of “verbal exchange”. The emphasis is not on the quality of the exchange but rather on just the freedom to vent one’s thoughts, damned the consequences; hence, the verbal abuses that characterise media discussions and even parliamentary deliberations under the current democratic dispensation in the country. For many Ghanaians, therefore, democracy, far from being a way of life, is a means to an end. Belonging to a political party or being sympathetic to its cause is enough a credential for one to be above the law. This appears to be a license for lawlessness and unfettered access to state resources for selfish gains when one’s party is in power. This stand is amply demonstrated in the activities of foot-soldiers following the leadership changes which occurred after the 2000 and 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. Considering the tacit public support given to the so-called party faithful or “foot-soldiers” in their nefarious activities by the media and opposition elements on public platforms, the practice becomes entrenched.

These are clear manifestations of democratic illiteracy. At this point, the study examines its impact as a threat to sustainable democratic governance and peace in Ghana.

Lack of adequate knowledge on democratic principles and conscious adherence to same in Ghana’s democratic

dispensation are at the heart of the potential threats to its sustainability. Unsustainable democratic governance resulting from the ills of democratic illiteracy has serious implications for human development, peace and national security. Many are therefore the nefarious impact of democratic illiteracy on the constitutional democratic governance system of Ghana, which if not checked in time could inevitably derail the socio-economic and political gains of the country following the coming into force of the 1992 constitution on January 7, 1993. Key among these are: patronage, nepotism, cronyism and corruption; political blackmail and manipulation; irrational partisanship fuelled by parochial self and unionised-group interest at the expense of the general/public/national interest; balkanization of the state [polarisation along ethnic, religious, regional and political party lines]; lack of national cohesion and consensus building required for effective implementation of national development programme [parliament divided against itself; Majority vs. Minority; Legislature vs. Executive; Executive vs. Judiciary; Media divided along political parties and actively involved in the manipulation, misinformation and distortion of information along political lines]; media terrorism [defamation of political figures through publication of concocted libellous stories and radio and television discussions in the name of freedom of speech]. This is largely the result of the over-liberalization of the airwaves and the proliferation of private media houses, mostly owned by political actors whose agenda are clearly defined and vigorously pursued by their assigns in the name of democratic freedom. Reflecting the role of Corporate TV’s threat to democracy, Mazzocco (1994: 8) writes:

*Anonymous (and largely unaccountable) corporate media insiders survive only through the single-minded pursuit of power and profit. Their success has little to do with empowering citizens to remove political, economic, or social injustices and imbalances. Democracy remains an illusion for many in the United States and throughout the world. Control of the media must be returned to the average people for genuine democracy to thrive.*

This statement, though relating to the United States, is as relevant to the Ghanaian context as the Gospel. Depending on which political party is in power and who owns the radio or television stations, the news contents, discussions, the nature of panel members at any given time are determined in the pursuit of a single motive or agendum: to dwindle or enhance the fortunes of government (in this case the President and his/her ministers) and the ruling party. In this “single-minded pursuit of power and profit”, purposeful ignorance becomes the driving force and the people’s mandate is sacrificed on the altar of political expedience and parochial selfish interest of the few.

This situation invariably has created intense media

subjectivity in the name of 'agenda setting'. Fortunately or unfortunately, the politically bias 'agenda setting' project of the politically bias Ghanaian media appears unattractive to Ghanaian voters, judging from the results of all the presidential and parliamentary elections run in the country since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1992. It further leads to the absence of qualitative dialogue and discussions required for consensus building toward sustainable democratic governance; peace and human development.

Democratic illiteracy has also led to the upsurge of paternalistic dependency. The State is projected as the sole provider of all the needs of every citizen. The president, the ministers and every person heading any public institution are presented, in the media and public discussions especially, as having unfretted right over the resources of the State which they can dissipate at will without recourse to lay-down procedure and regulation in the running of the country. These people invariably end up seeing the citizens as their children who have no right and brain to feign for themselves. Thus, the prevalence of phrases such "Father of the nation", "Father for all"; "Y[ papa Rawlings"; "Y[ papa Kufuor"; "Y[ papa Atta Mills"; "Y[ papa John Mahama"; "Your Excellence X" and "Honourable Y" in reference to past and present presidents of the Republic, ambassadors, members of parliament and local assemblies, respectively. As "fathers" indeed, they consequently decide what should be the needs of their children, just as biological fathers do for their progenies]. Sadly, in most cases those who call such public figures "father" are by far older than them. Citizens eventually lose moral authority to check elected-officers having sold their constitutional rights to do so by accepting monetary or material inducement in exchange for their votes to those they end up worshipping and deifying. This situation creates room for unaccountable governance and misrule. Resulting from this state of affairs are defective and deficient democratic governance institutions. This is also a fertile ground for systemic institutional corruption leading to the absolute desecration and defamation of the state.

Democratic illiteracy has created the ground for running political rather than ethical economics. Policies and programmes are formulated and implemented just to enhance one's prospect of winning elections or maintaining political power. These are done without regards to cost benefit analysis and due diligence. Besides, there is no state control over the pricing of goods and services for political reasons, liberalization and free-market. This situation has led to high cost of living, uncontrollable inflation, and general economic malaise over the years.

Democratic illiteracy has equally given way to an upsurge of partisan civil society organisations, pressure groups and think-tanks; and trading of insults; accusations and counter-accusations of corruption, drug trafficking; money laundry; etc., among political figures and their cohorts,

"serial callers", social commentators, etc., in the media on daily basis. In all this cacophonous situation, what is obvious is that the various actors are either ill-informed about the issues at stake or they are purposefully ignorant, hence their selfish and parochial posturing.

Considering the derailing socio-economic and political consequences of the aforementioned nefarious impact of democratic illiteracy on Ghana's democratic governance and peace, it is significant to critically reflect on what democracy is not and should not be.

## WHAT DEMOCRACY IS NOT AND SHOULD NOT BE!

According to Buah (2005: 17-18),

*There have been, in many countries, evil practices which denied individuals or groups of people of their rights to equal treatment with their fellows, one of the cardinal requirements of true democracy. These practices included racism, ethnic favouritism, nepotism, undue leader-worship, and the tyranny of the majority over minorities in a community.*

Buah names these evils of democratic practices "anti-democratic practices" (p. 17). Almost all these practices and many others have been identified in this paper as nefarious impact of democratic illiteracy on Ghana's democratic governance and sustainable socio-economic and human development. It is therefore expedient to highlight at this stage of the study what democracy defined by Abraham Lincoln (1862) as "government of the people, by the people, for the people".

Democracy is not and should not be misconstrued for lawlessness in the name of freedom of speech and human rights. The essence of human rights as captured in the United Nations Universal Declarations on Human Rights is to ensure greater and active participation of every human being in all the processes which effect and define his or her welfare and well-being.

Democracy is not and should not be synonymous to media terrorism, supremacy of civil society and pressure groups over the State. Neither is it and should be an institutionalization of nepotism, capital cronyism and political patronage, as tacitly promoted by political parties for their survival in the public sphere.

Democracy is not and should not be a centralization of power or state authority on or around elected or appointed officials, or an executive president whose functions are clearly defined in Schedules 57 (1 - 6), 58 (1 - 5) and 59 of the constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, respectively. Besides, the constitution prescribes decentralisation and local government system of governance for Ghana under Schedule 240 (1). It states: "Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized". The Article 240 (2) (a - e) specifies the

features of the system of decentralized local government and the responsibilities of each arm of government and the people in ensuring accountability and effective citizen participation in their governance. Schedules 241 - 256 provide further details on the workings of the system of decentralized local governance. However, a cursory observation of events in the public sphere does not give credence to the fact that citizens are aware of these constitutional provisions. Writing about corporate governance many years ago, Robert Brand (1946) as quoted in Chomsky (1996: 71) states:

*Within the corporation, all policies emanate from the aforementioned control. In the union of this power to determine policy with the execution thereof, all authority necessarily proceeds from the top to the bottom and all responsibility from the bottom to the top. This is, of course, the inverse of "democratic" control; it follows the structural conditions of dictatorial power.*

Those words of Brand forcefully bring to the fore the potency of decentralization to democratic governance.

Constitutional separation of powers (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary) for the attainment of greater efficiency and accountability is not and should not be misconstrued for segregation of powers resulting in unhealthy rivalry among the main arms of government leading to institutional paralysis and dysfunction.

Democratic governance is not theocracy. Government or public officials are not God's elect or God's chosen-ones to be worshiped and glorified, as they are expected to perform miracles in addressing all the needs of the electorate. They are mere servants of the people who elect them or on whose behalf the executive president appoints them. The democratically elected president and his appointees are indeed employees' of the people to whom they must be accountable through the effective provision of general goods and welfare in their daily activities.

Democracy as a system of socio-political engineering towards the realisation of greater prosperity for the greater majority of the citizens is not and should not be defined as mere organisation of periodic elections of an executive president and parliamentarians for the country's legislature. It is a serious undertaking and a covenant with the electorate which calls for commitment to service, dedication, greater transparency and accountability from both public officials and the sovereign people on whose behalf executive power is exercised.

Democracy is not and should not be about the supremacy of the will of the individual but rather that of the collective – the people. Indeed, the choice of constitutional democratic governance over all other forms of governance systems is not and should not be for the triumph of the rule of man. On this position, Aristotle, according to Joseph Maingot and Dehler (2010: 4), "held that absolute monarchy or the arbitrary rule of sovereign

is contrary to nature and that the rule of law is preferable to that of an individual". They therefore conclude that "Aristotle's contrast between the rule of law as reason and the "rule of man" as passion has endured through the ages".

Under a democratic dispensation, the idea of providential State is null and void, if corruption is to be eschewed. Considering the nefarious impact of democratic illiteracy and in the light of what democracy is not and should not be, it is natural to consider what democracy is and should be.

## **WHAT DEMOCRACY IS AND SHOULD BE!**

Democracy is and should be at variance with the phenomenon of "whom you know" – favouritism – in the allocation of public resources by public official. It is at variance with selective application of the laws of the State. Democracy is and should be about citizens' responsibilities in ensuring the attainment of greater happiness for all. It is and should be about citizens demanding knowledge-based accountability from elected and appointed public officials and all the other arms of government, and also from themselves in their daily dealings, both in private and in public.

Democracy is and should be about the supremacy of the law across board. Indeed, it is the legal system that defines the democratic way of life for the citizens. This is spelt out in the constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992. Under a democratic dispensation, the law is no respecter of persons. The principle of "equality before the law" must be upheld and enforced at all times to ensure law and order which lead to justice and sustainable peace and development. Democracy entails practical actions jointly thought through and executed by the democratically literate citizens and their elected representatives. It empowers the people to be assertive and responsive in their quest for the creation and efficient management of resources and provision of services to ensure qualitative living standard for all.

Democracy is and should be about respect for law and order. It abhors lawlessness and disorder which are associated with autocratic and anarchical States. It calls for mutual respect, tolerance, accommodation and collaboration. It goes beyond mere freedom of speech. Democracy calls for responsible speech, geared towards the promotion of the general good, social cohesion, peace and sustainable human development. Democratic freedom is actually a regulated freedom, in that it is defined by the supreme law of the land – the constitution of the Republic of Ghana. For this reason, a citizen can seek legal remedy in the event of this legally defined right being violated by the State or any other citizen or group of citizens.

Democracy is and should be the surest way to achieving greater participation of the people in their own

affairs. For the people to meaningfully and effectively participate in the provision of the general good, they must be knowledgeable in democratic principles, rights and responsibilities, and then be committed to putting same into effective practice.

Democracy is and should be about building strong institutions which guarantee the sustainability of the State beyond individuals, political parties and regimes. At the heart of democratic governance is and should be the sense of collective responsibility where leaders are just first among equals and not demigods to be worshipped and glorified as monarchs. It eschews blame games which are marks of irresponsibility and unaccountability on the part of citizens and public officials.

Democracy is and should be a process of social engineering towards the attainment of qualitative and sustainable development. It is therefore not a perfect situation or an end in itself. It is dynamic in its manifestation as it provides an elastic framework for shaping opinions and characters as well as mobilizing and harmonizing the best human resources for greater productivity and development.

Having stated what democracy is and should be, the study now reflects on the way forward to ensure democratic literacy for sustainable democratic governance and peace in Ghana in the subsequent paragraphs of the paper.

## **TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC LITERACY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PEACE**

Considering the destructive nature of illiteracy in general, and that of democratic illiteracy in particular, there is an urgent need for the deployment of concerted efforts and deployment of resources towards a democratic literacy programme for the Ghanaian populace. Taking cognizance of the political bastardization of the work of the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) over the years by self-seeking politicians and their followers disguised as social commentators, it is obvious that its effectiveness has been compromised. As a result, it would be prudent to design a democratic educational curriculum to be used in schools, colleges and universities. In the case of the universities, this can be made one of the university-wide courses taken by all students in the first and second years.

The various constitutional and professional bodies associated with media practices should be called upon to live up to their mandate by calling miscreants in the media profession to order or by designing effective ways of purging the profession of such “undesirable” elements before they plunge the nation into chaos.

Radio and television hosts should themselves get foreknowledge about issues they table for discussion on their shows in order to prevent discussants from unduly misinforming the listening and viewing public. Well

informed and un-bias citizens should be empanelled on such programmes so that issues can be qualitatively discussed and useful suggestions made to aid public policy formulation and implementation for sustainable democratic growth.

Political parties should be made to understand that they are not bona fides owners of the corporate Ghana. They are citizens first and foremost. Having been offered the privilege to congregate themselves in political parties for electioneering purposes does not make of them first class citizens and a law unto themselves. They are not sovereign entities, but subservient to the constitution of the Republic of Ghana which vest sovereignty in the people of Ghana and not in political parties, as they want Ghanaians to believe.

In the words of Phillips (2007: 176):

Democracy requires an implicit agreement by conflicting groups in a state to accept the possibility that they will lose out in the making of policy. In effect, it requires an agreement among labor unions, corporations, farm groups, environmentalists, vegetarians, motorcycle enthusiasts, and all other groups to take their chances on the outcome of process of policy making in which the population as a whole gets the deciding voice. Each group accepts that it must abide by the end result and hopes that it will be able to get enough of what it wants out of the process. This is the “democratic bargain”. The reality of the “democratic bargain” appears alien in Ghana’s democratic dispensation, although the constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992) implicitly points to this in its preamble in the following words:

*In the name of the Almighty God*

*We the people of Ghana*

*In exercise of our natural and inalienable right to establish a framework of government which shall secure for ourselves and posterity the blessings of liberty, equality of opportunity and prosperity;*

*In the spirit of friendship and peace with all peoples of the world;*

*And in solemn declaration and affirmation of our commitment to Freedom, Justice, Probity, and Accountability;*

*The principle that all powers of Government spring from the Sovereign Will of the People;*

*The principle of Universal Adult Suffrage;*

*The rule of Law;*

*The protection and preservation of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, Unity and Stability for our Nation;*  
*Do hereby Adopt, Enact and Give to Ourselves this Constitution.*

Besides, Article 35 (1) stipulates that: “Ghana shall be a democratic state dedicated to the realization of freedom and justice; and accordingly, sovereignty resides in the people of Ghana from whom government derives all powers and authority through this constitution”. Going by the contents of these quotations, it is obvious that the

competition involved in the democratic processes calls for dialogues, compromises and concessions among various political actors and with the electorate. These are indeed the indices of “democratic bargain” Phillips (2007) referred to. The appreciation and application of democratic bargain in the Ghanaian democratic dispensation can be achieved only through democratic literacy programmes devoid of partisan considerations and political party colouring. The driving force behind this democratic literacy programme can be found in the building of strong democratic institutions, as suggested by President Barack Obama during his visit to Ghana in 2009.

Strong democratic institutions serve as a melting-pot for harmonized divergent views and ideas harnessed from qualitative constructive public debates and expert discussions across the nation. They are not products of chance but that of conscious and concerted efforts guided by an unflinching desire to build a nation rather than self. This unflinching desire is undoubtedly the fruit of painstaking processes of socialization which include democratic literacy. In the absence of this, however, democratic governance in Ghana will not inure to the benefit of the citizenry.

The disappointment of people in their socio-economic and political aspirations in such circumstances, if not properly managed, can lead to social strife and anarchy. The fixation on the President and Ministers of State [The Executive arm of Government] as the sole providers of the public goods is a fallacious posturing alien to multiparty democratic governance and the very spirit and letter of the constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992 which unambiguously spells out the rights and responsibilities of the three main arms of government namely: the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. They are to work separately but complementarily in the provision of the public goods to ensure the welfare and happiness of all the citizenry. In doing so, members of the first two arms, The Executive and the Legislature, albeit members of divergent political parties, must see themselves first and foremost as privileged Ghanaians in the service of the people rather than that of their respective political parties. Collaboration and cooperation beyond partisan interests should therefore be the watch word in this symbiotic relationship for the strengthening and sustainability of the institutions of State. After all, no political party pays the salaries and benefits of its members in parliament, whether in majority or in minority. The state does. It is therefore an affront to democratic governance practice for any of such persons to be seen as purposefully working against the interest of the State, for that matter that of the citizenry, in an attempt to unduly project and protect partisan interests.

## CONCLUSION

When the concept of democracy is understood as a means to an end and not an end in itself, democratic

actors would see the need to respect its principles and tenets. It is only then that the pursuit of the public goods would be prioritized over that of selfish individual interests, which are inimical to the course of democracy, peace and sustainable human development in Ghana.

Democratic rights go hand-in-hand with democratic responsibilities. Strictly speaking, the enjoyment of democratic rights emanates from responsible democratic living which in turn requires democratic education, acculturation and knowledge. The essence of freedom of speech is to foster qualitative dialogue and exchange of ideas which would result into qualitative decisions based on consensus building for qualitative national development. This is missing from the Ghanaian body-politic as a result of the misinformation inherent to the bastardized definition of democracy as “freedom of speech”.

In summary, it is imperative for every serious-minded every African who really cares about the present and future of the African continent as a democratic entity to pause for a while and to ask himself or herself the following questions: What is democratic governance? What is in for me? What are my rights and responsibilities? Do I really understand them? And if I do, how am I effectively giving meaning to them for the realization of the common good? If these questions are objectively thought through and knowledgeably answered by every individual, he or she would have obtained democratic literacy and begun to do things in a different way to make democracy meaningful and fruitful. Failure to do so, democracy becomes a mere institutionalisation of blatant human exploitation and slavery by a presumed ‘majority’ in the name of the rule of law and constitutionalism. This situation poses a great threat to sustainable democracy and peace, not only in Ghana, but across all African countries aspiring to be democratic. Democratic illiteracy, wherever it is allowed to thrive, is a grave menace to the growth of democratic culture, good democratic governance, peace and sustainable human development. It must therefore be fought through concerted efforts deployed by citizens who, in most cases, are victims of its ills. This is because it is in the best interest of political actors and their cohorts to keep the people illiterate, hence vulnerable for effective exploitation.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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