Review

Competent governance for sustainable development in Africa: A philosophical reflection

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Africa has been known to be the bedrock of numerous natural resources. However, it seems to be the home of the poorest of the poor in the world. Much of the situation is pathetically characterized by hunger, extreme poverty, corruption, and insecurity. All of these offer the greatest compromise to any hope of change. Aware of this scenario, this paper delves into the issue of governance as one of the crucial factors in the search for a positive change and sustainable development in Africa. It employs a conceptual approach in its critical inquiry into these issues. With illustrative examples, practical reflections are made on the essential elements of governance and how they are co-related to development. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn on two grounds. First, there is need to re-examine Africa's internal structures and systems. Nevertheless, there should also be openness to point out and radically depart from detrimental structures. Secondly, in addressing the question of governance for sustainable development, Africa must be vigilant in distinguishing between destructive and constructive external influences in her policy formulation and implementation.

Key words: Governance, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The question of governance in the context of the African experience is often discussed within the purview of explaining Africa's development crisis. To this extent, it has become exceedingly imperative that the secret towards the maintenance of sustainable development depends on the quality of national governance. However, the kind of external supervision over the process and, or nature of governance in Africa may offer conflicting indicators that result in a dilemma over the same. These and other similar issues related to governance transcend mere empirical contentions and investigations, though not excluded. Besides and adding to the wealth of empirical findings, this paper proposes and employs a philosophical approach to the question of governance. Using a critical analytical method, the symbiotic relationship between good governance and the overall pace of development is presented. Critical analytical method is used by philosophers to clarify concepts, principles,

ideas, and theories. It was found necessary to use this procedure in order to clarify the concept of governance and development.

Defining the concept of good governance in Africa

The need for good governance in Africa is generally seen from two unrelated perspectives. First, there is the trend which seeks to explain governance for its own internal (Africa's) good and secondly, for the good of external investment. The first trend looks at Africa at the dawn of independence. Africa's immense confidence in asserting her worth aimed at actualizing her dreams in the light of socio-political and economic progress. Instead, down the decades of independence, these hopes remain unfulfilled, at least to the standards expected. Hence, this trend is discussed by Africa's insiders who look at good

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governance as the key to unlock Africa's untapped potentials. Such potentials include the mobilization of internal organizational structures that will bring about the realization of the original hopes at independence.

On the other hand, governance in Africa has also been discussed, especially in international development consortiums as a precondition for giving donor aid. This is the perspective taken by most of Africa's development partners. According to this view, "good governance" is understood in the extent to which it is able to attract either a "carrot or stick" from the donor community. Thus, such discussions on governance are all cantered on what the rich nations of the north (rich donor communities) describe it to be.

In this regard, emphasis is placed on external categories, coupled with what can be described as "aid-related decisions on governance". Thus, good governance tends to be defined in the context of a relationship between aid givers and aid seekers. This finally ends up in a patronized definition of good governance.

As rightly observed by Nyerere (1998), such a trend makes the notion of "good governance" sound "like a tool for neo-colonialism". Nevertheless, whether interpreted in the light of the first or the second trend, the necessity of good governance in Africa remains an ever-pressing need that is required more urgently. This urgency is reinforced by the need to "enable our people to build real freedom and real development for themselves and their countries" (loc.cit.) This must remain the true meaning and explanation for good governance in Africa.

On the over-all, the term governance seems to be drawn from the term, "government". The latter refers to the legitimate executive authority by which a state bears the final responsibility over a nation. Governance, therefore refers to the nature of dispensing this responsibility, and depends on a myriad of factors. It has to do with the appropriation of power and authority, coupled with their inherent aspect of arbitrariness. When this arbitrariness of power and authority is rationally appropriated in the direction which guarantees and ensures the common good of the entire society (nation), then we talk of good governance; otherwise it is not.

As cited by Kempe (2003):

…governance has to do with the manner in which responsibility is discharged. Such a responsibility may be acquired through election, appointment or delegation in the public domain or in the area of commerce – corporate governance. Therefore, good governance is taken here to mean a condition whereby such responsibility is discharged in an effective, transparent, and accountable manner while bad governance is associated with maladministration in the discharge of responsibility. good governance entails the existence of efficient and accountable institutions- political, judicial, administrative, economic, corporate – and entrenched rules that promote development, protect human rights, and respect the rule of law, and ensure that the people are free to participate in, and be heard on, decisions that affect their lives.

Good governance encompasses the consolidation of legitimate authority and state power in an effort to bring all structures under the instrumentation that enables peace, security and stability – thus leading to socio-political and economic prosperity (Bio-Tchané, 2002).

Governance in crisis in Africa

As already indicated, the crisis of governance in Africa is quickly identified with the apparently failing socio-political and economic structures. Various explanations have come up to explain this scenario. It is astonishing to note that among these is the contention of pre-mature independence. It is alleged that, had the colonial masters stayed a bit longer, Africa's development record would be slightly better. South Africa is often cited as a back up to such arguments. It may as well imply that re-colonization may seem to be a recipe for Africa's governance crisis, which is being likened to a kind of pre-colonial anarchy (Obadina, 2004).

Closely connected to this theory, is an attempt to explain Africa's crisis on the basis of a continued anarchy that seems to derail the reality of democratic governance. All these two positions seek for the solutions for this scenario in western tutelage over Africa's –political and economic structures. Hence, Africa has experienced a continuous inflow of expatriates even in areas where she has the capacity to perform better than the expatriates have. Similarly, strict recommendations from IMF, World Bank and other donor communities towards sustainable development are often to be understood within this perspective.

No doubt that many of the failures have been blamed on the lack of democracy. Indeed good governance promotes democracy, which in turn promotes sustainable development. Furthermore, the fact of Africa's struggling democracies is almost an evident scenario. But what kind of democracy is required in Africa or can the failing democratic structures be san evidence that Africans are intrinsically alien to democracy? Attempt to enforce democracy as it exists in the West (which is even not similar among all European nations) has often proved to be counter-productive. The result is the temptation to conclude that democracy is unworkable in Africa.

Nevertheless, the solution is not to go defensive, but to try to explain this seeming failure of democracy. Let us start by trying to understand the essence of democracy. It is not a mere search for consensus among citizens or even the majority vote. All these can still be obtained even by force in an otherwise undemocratic society. It is not even an issue of having everybody express or even have his/her will heard, for what will be the ultimate destiny of such "individualized wills". Democracy, though

including all these, is more than all of these. It gains specific understanding with specific existential contexts.

In the words of Julius Nyerere, democracy can be defined as a machinery, or structure through which a government stays "close" (or closely united) to the people and the people equally remaining close to their government. Such a machinery "will differ according to the history, the demographic distribution, the traditional culture (or cultures), and the prevailing international political and economic environment in which it has to operate" (Nyerere, 1998). These structures must finally be assessed on the content to which they serve to create and enhance, or encourage the elements of peace, justice and people's well-being and development. The challenges to democratic governance in Africa is partly due to an attempt to artificially graft borrowed western democratic categories, values and ideas in Africa without paying due attention to the local factors that are listed above (Popoola, 2004)

In other words, there cannot be universal structures or dictations as to how this machinery "MUST" be assembled. It all depends on the dictates of place and time while putting into consideration a people's uniqueness and the awareness that democracy must continue to grow gradually. However, all these expressions of uniqueness must find their manifestation in legal structures with the power to bind all within given national boundaries. This explains the necessity of constitutionalism and the rule of law as the bedrock for democracy. Again, this offers a new challenge. For instance, to what extent do constitutions in Africa practically or factually represent the majority will of the people? To what extent have the people of Africa been genuinely involved in the process of making their constitution far away from being mere documents produced by a clique of elites and the bourgeoisie ruling class? All these issues exert a significant impact on the extent to which constitutionalism is likely to be upheld.

In Africa constitutionalism is often met with numerous hurdles. For example, heads of government/ states raise themselves above the law with a disguised intention to supervise the rule of law. Soon or latter, they raise their cronies and friend (who could be numerous) with themselves above the law. Thus, a clique finds itself above the law leading to a constitutional anarchy. This finally ends up with the collapse of the rule of law.

On the other hand, leaders in government may attempt to create a constitutional amendment or alterations from time to time to favour their own egoistic interests in governance. Such may include structures that will guarantee their re-lection, or alter constitutional terms of office. All such issues pose grievous challenges to constitutionalism as a crucial pillar of democratic governance.

Meanwhile, structures of democracy are not without a cost. Their effectiveness relies "heavily upon the existence of a politically conscious civil society, which is active, organized, and alert" (Nyerere, 1998). Democracy thrives only with good administrators, but also with a civil society which is well informed, vibrant, and equipped to handle and enhance democratic demands of good governance. It is on this basis that the socio-economic structures within a given civil society become an important catalyst in determining the democratic principles prevalent in any nation. Often than not, the level of democracy can be understood to be a function of the level of socio-economic empowerment of a people; or at least they closely co-relate. Hence, the negative impact of poverty on democratic governance in Africa cannot be overlooked.

Rampant unemployment and poor remuneration of workers among other factors that enhance poverty are likely to cause socio-political instability. The latter is likely to increase as it incenses corruption in high places and is in turn incensed by the same. Thus poverty increases. Although it is indeed true that: "good wages and salaries will not stop bad people from being corrupt… Miserable wages and salaries are not conducive to (socio-political) rectitude. Political instability, real or imagined can be a source and is often used as an excuse, for bad governance" (Nyerere, 1998).

This in turn leads to misplaced priorities in national governance. For instance, expenditures on internal security, whether real or imagined becomes an imminent problem as those in government struggle to protect themselves. The dilemma is that leaders in government end up mounting protective security around themselves against their own people whom they are supposed to protect. This in turn drains seriously the national treasury.

The lack of socio-political and economic empowerment becomes therefore a fundamental factor in the discussions on good governance in the light of democracy in Africa. Whereas, it can be agreed that democracy as conceived in the West goes hand in hand with a certain minimal level of socio-economic structures, it is often claimed and demanded by the same donor communities as a pre-condition for socio-economic development. To what extent then can the required levels of democratic governance be realized in the seemingly calculated and jealously guarded structures of poverty in Africa? These structures of poverty require urgent response if good governance is to be sustained. In the meantime, we need the same good governance to mount up an effective assault against poverty.

But we cannot wait until such a scenario is fully realized in order to be democratic. A country need not be rich in order to be democratic in the strict sense of the term. However, certain levels of resource availability and distribution are required. Once again it is emphasized that the most fundamental aspect or criteria of democracy is the closeness of the governed to their government and vice versa

African nations must therefore embark on programs that will bring their governments close to their people as

well as attracting the people to their governments. This is the essence of building genuine patriotism. To this extent, African nations must try to eradicate ailments such as diseases and poverty within the prevailing limits as they continue to struggle with a practical resolve to do it even better. For instance, whereas we cannot pay our teachers, legislators and nurses among others, as such are paid in the West (so as to eradicate), we can agree that we can easily do it better than we are doing it now. Whereas we cannot remunerate our farmers as farmers in the West are, we can similarly do it slightly better. We may not even be able to treat all the sophisticated diseases as may be required, but still we can work to provide good basic health-care to our people in a better way than we are doing it now. All these resolutions largely depends on the idea of making our priorities right that will cultivate the growth of a democratic society.

In the final analysis, this "better way of doing things" and always striving to do them even better, is the indicator of advancing steps on the path of democracy. The civil society will always recognize such efforts by the government and will seek to support it. Deviations and deceptions such as unjust priorities which include hefty salary increments for state cronies plus other injustices will similarly be quickly recognized and resisted.

HINDRANCES TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The issues discussed thus far, are not foreign to governance in Africa. However, they only describe the manifestation of the governance crisis without addressing the core issue(s) that account for the same. So then, what constitutes the core of the problem? Three important factors can be singled out for redress; namely state structures, leadership quality and finally the governed (citizens).

First and foremost, in order for a government to dispense adequate responsibility over a nation, there is a need to have a strong state structure. A weak state will similarly be weak in mobilizing efforts towards effective service delivery.

In the midst of a capitalistic world economy of competition for survival, a state may drastically be weakened by the so-called free market forces. Likewise, the so-called donor community plus the world multinational satellites does play a big role in weakening of the African states. A case in point is the rising debt burden coupled with both internal debtor structures and external forces, which continually make it impossible to settle the debts. Another example is the reality of externally instigated civil crisis such as civil strife and ethnic guerrilla wars that bring about state instability.

The need for a strong state is underscored by the urgency for it to have the "power to act on behalf of the people in accordance with their wishes…no state is really strong unless its government has the full consent of at

least the majority of its people: and it is difficult to envisage how their consent can b obtained outside democracy" (Nyerere, 1998). The strength of a state is further indicated by its practical ability to be responsive to the plight of the people. It is this responsiveness that is stifled by both internal and externally calculated forces.

Factually, we cannot conceive the reality of good governance in the context of weakened state machinery. Hence, priority number one should be that of strengthening the African state as a moral responsibility of both the internal forces and Africa's development partners.

Leadership is yet another area which needs critical investment. This is one of the most unresolved governance issues in Africa. Many hindrances to sustainable development have been blamed on poor and, or corrupt leadership, which is insensitive to the needs of the people. Thus, it is easy to suggest a need to replace such leaders (and leadership) as the most sufficient way to arrest the crisis. Such thinking has always resulted in mass revolutions, assassinations, and "over throws" of legitimate governments. Consequences of these have however been often detrimental. Sometimes dictators have enthroned themselves and at times leadership has been ceded to the military, away from civilian governance. This has brought about more complications.

Critically reflecting on the question of leadership, it becomes clear that even a mere change in leaders in Africa may not suffice to correct the crisis of governance. In many parts of Africa, changes of government have not produced a remedy for corruption and socio-economic ineffectiveness. For instance, the Kenya socio-political and economic over the period of single party to multiparty democracy up to and including the reign of NARC (as from 2003) has not resolved the problem of mal-administration.

Very often, we find personalities who consistently present themselves in public as genuine socio-political redeemers of their nations. The citizens get convinced to vote them into leadership on the basis of their promising adherence to the rule of law. However, they depart from these commitments once elected to office. Hence, more inquiries must be made into leadership crisis away from its mere change.

Another way is to look at the governance crisis from the point of view of ignorance on the part of the leaders. Such a perspective is likely to suggest the need for some form of foreign tutelage of our elected leaders. It is also pegged on an assumption that our leaders are drawn from the category of poorly trained manpower.

Again, this view is found not to offer a satisfactory explanation for African's governance problem. It is indeed true that most of our leaders, especially executive officials are found to be among the elites and well trained in various fields of human development. This is in the light of not only the local leaders, but also international standards. Hence, it is similarly not the mere lack of

capacity if this can be understood to refer to the professionalism of the human resource. The problem with the leadership is not therefore the lack of knowledge or even a mere need for change. Rather the problem seems to lie in the character of the ruling class that seems to effectively control power and authority for egoistic interests.

Quite convincingly, if leadership is the problem in Africa, then leaders are not the problem *per se*. The crisis is likely to be emanating from the masses from which leaders will be drawn from time to time. Good governance depends on both the governed as well as the governors. The former can exert imminence influence on their leaders. Given the slow, but gradual growth of professionalism largely among the citizens, the present governance challenge has to do with having services delivered professionally. Hence, instead of focusing on central governance (though quite important), delegated services delivery has to ensure the proper functioning of the diverse sectors of the nation. This is the most efficient way to ensure good governance. The crucial problem in this case therefore concerns the summoning of strategies that will put in place disciplined institutional structures for good governance.

Once again, it becomes clear that the issue is not merely the lack of knowledge or capacity. Perhaps the lack of the compelling drive to do what is known to be for the common good is the most pressing problem. It is this drive that needs to be revitalized as a lasting attempt to restore and maintain sound sustainable governance in Africa.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As Africa continues to grapple with the crisis of development, the problems of poverty and insecurity remain central to this crisis. No doubt, there should be every attempt to address these issues if Africa has propelled to a brighter future. It is in this regard that this paper has examined the core factors that bring about this situation. Governance has been pointed out as the single most elements that need to be addressed continuously.

Among other factors, good governance helps a nation to be more focused to its fundamental issues of development. Citizens are enabled to concentrate their energies to positively creative activities. This maximizes their struggle for better living standards, which are often accompanied by the creation, multiplication, and conservation of wealth at individual, societal, and even national level.

Furthermore, good governance is a fundamental recipe for foreign investments, whose role cannot be overlooked as core to socio-economic and political growth in Africa. Good governance enhances peace, improved life expectations, and thus, development. Against such a background, there is a more compelling need for Africa to make greater investments in good governance for sustainable development. Thus, the following recommendations are vital:

i)   African states must foster democratic governance. This does not however mean that they are currently foreign to democracy. It does also not imply a mere imposition of western democratic structures. Rather, there is a need for the institution of a more responsive government structures that will be conducive to the needs of the populace. For this reason, leaders must attempt to rediscover traditional values that can become the foundation of workable democracy. Such include the rediscovery of an African egalitarian spirit that is firmly rooted in African humanism and communalism. The spirit of family hood as opposed to capitalist individualism ought to be fostered in both socio-economic and political spheres. It must however be emphasized that this rediscovery is not supposed to be anthropological but ontological in nature.

ii)   Africa must speedy rediscover the value of her people. There must be a deliberate resolve to invest in people as an ultimate resource for development. For instance, the diverse cultures in Africa must be harnessed as strength and not a weakness. Thus, the need for one another (communalism) should be fostered over and beyond the boundaries of cultural nations. Meanwhile, with increasing brain drain, Africa's development faces serious threats, as natural resources remain underexploited. It is a fact that the ever-increasing brain drain serves to a greater deal to nourish foreign lands. There is therefore a need to formulate policies that will lead to this brain retention. Such includes favourable remuneration policies among other incentives.

iii)   Similarly, there is an ever-growing need to foster a greater sense of accountability. This should be enhanced at both personal and collective level.

iv)   Finally and most importantly, is the fact that the future of a society lies in its educational structures. Education is the most effective means to remould a society. Through education, Africa must promote a sense of patriotism in her learners. Besides this, by focusing on the kind of society that is envisaged, education can be used to change and even determine a people's habits of thinking and willing, and thus, bring about an immense influence on their actions. Education can indeed become an effective way of addressing the crucial problem of good governance by enhancing the promotion of a responsible civil society.

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