

## **Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa.**

### **Introduction**

Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations while addressing a UNDP conference on “Governance for Sustainable Growth and Equity” in New York in July 1997, made a poignant remark about the interface between governance and sustainable development. According to him, good governance and sustainable development are indivisible<sup>1</sup>. Governance, especially when it assumes a normative dimension of being qualified as good, is generally believed to be a basis for the reconstruction of the state, society and polity in Africa. It is a means through which the peoples’ voices and expressions input into their life chances as it avows the principles of dialogue, consultation, consensus, and popular consent in decision-making and public policies. And without the people being the driving force of development, which (good) governance espouse, development can hardly take place and if it does, it cannot be sustainable.

The ubiquity of the governance phenomenon has made most African and indeed, global multilateral organisations, like the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to become “Governance obsessive” by insisting that governance reform is the key to economic growth and development in Africa. The new language of development is that ‘politics matter’, and getting ‘politics right’, is the beginning of ‘economic and social wisdom’ in Africa. This new development thinking in a sense parallels Kwame Nkrumah’s ant-colonial political cliché that

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<sup>1</sup> . See, UNDP, *Governance for Sustainable Development*, Report of International Conference United Nations, New York, 28-30 July 1997. (New York: UNDP, 1997), p. 19.

“Give ye the political kingdom, and every other thing shall follow”. Put differently now, “get politics right” and sustainable development shall follow.

My task in this paper is a simple one. What I seek to do is to provoke thoughts on the Governance-Development issue. I take a very critical view of the two concepts, and argue that while the two projects are organically inter-linked, they may not produce symmetrical results. In other words, while good governance may provide a latent basis for development, it cannot guarantee it. Put differently, there are a host of other factors that impinge on the development project in Africa. These have to be addressed and deconstructed, if governance is to serve a useful link to development and its sustainability.

The paper is organised into three parts. In the first part I address the conceptual issue. What is governance and what is sustainable development. The Second part is on the governance-development linkage and the challenges and the third part is the constraints of the governance-development project in Africa.

## **Governance and Development**

In the last two decades when African and indeed many Third World countries relapsed into deep economic crisis, various ideas, concepts, issues and agendas have been developed especially by the international community that have shown increasing paternal concern over the declining fate and fortune of those countries. First was the structural adjustment programme (SAP), which was considered to be the infallible magic wand for economic reform and prosperity in Africa. When SAP

founded, the concern shifted to political liberalisation and democratisation. Restless political forces hoodwinked SAP, so they say. Those restless forces have to claim ownership of SAP through political means, that is, through the instruments of political liberalisation. At a point, democratisation itself was seen not to be enough to engineer political and economic development in Africa. Governance took the centre-stage, considered to be more inclusive, purposive, and objective oriented. But what does this concept imply? Governance has come to mean different things to different people. Some view it as the act of governing, others draw a corollary between it and the democratisation process, the process of empowering the civil society actors and institutions, and some others view it in a more nuanced form as the problematic relationship between the state and civil society<sup>2</sup>. Civil society in this case also encompasses the private sector. The UNDP along the path of the World Bank define governance as “the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country’s affairs, comprising of the complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences”<sup>3</sup>. The latter definition of governance has become predominant, especially within the international development community. The idea is that through an effective collaboration between the state, civil society and the private sector, based on a participatory principle, there would be development dividend from governance.

Development on the other hand, is also a problematic concept. For some, development is equated with economic growth that is, improvement in

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<sup>2</sup> . See, M.J. Balogun, “The Role of Governance and Civil Society in Africa’s Development: A Critical Review”, *Regional Development Dialogue*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Autumn), 1998, p.33.

<sup>3</sup> . See, UNDP, *The African Governance Forum: Conceptual Framework*. (UNDP, not dated), p. 9.

macro-economic variables. Others have challenged this to say that economic growth and development are not the same. The former is a necessary but not sufficient condition to realise the latter. Development must wear a human face and spin out milk of human kindness. Development is seen as the overall qualitative improvement in the lives of a people or a political community. That is development must address the issues of social welfare, equity, and justice. According to the UNDP, the “central purpose of development should be the creation of an enabling and empowering environment in which all individuals, including the poor and vulnerable can enjoy healthy and creative lives”<sup>4</sup>.

In what effective ways does governance, especially good governance link up with development?

### **Linking Governance with Development.**

The emphasis of the development community on governance and good governance in Africa assumes essential an instrumentalist dimension. The idea is not that good governance is good in itself and deserved being constructed in Africa, but that good governance will have a development spin-off. Good governance engenders participatory democracy, ensures the rule of law, public accountability and creates the requisite state institutions and economic environment that will make the private sector thrive.

But how does good governance serve as a link to development and engender popular participation in the latter? K.Y Amoako, outlined six basic elements that may serve as prerequisite for the good governance

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<sup>4</sup> . See, UNDP, *The African Governance Forum: Conceptual Framework*. (UNDP, not dated), p. 8.

project to provide a thread to sustainable development<sup>5</sup>. The first is the issue of conflict resolution and peace building in Africa. Neither good governance nor development can take place in an atmosphere of chaos and anarchy. Conflicts and wars in Africa have been the major retardant of political progress and economic development. The gradual evolution of good governance should provide a basis for conflict resolution and peace building, conversely, good governance cannot evolve if the political belligerents do not adopt a new culture of civil politics where political differences will be resolved through dialogue and negotiation rather than through force of arms.

The second element is that good governance must incorporate democratic practices. Without democratic values and practices, the people cannot be thrust to the centre-stage of public policies and development processes. The third factor is the involvement of the civil society in political and social processes as part of the baggage of governance. This constitutes an effective way of releasing and tapping the energies of the people, and channelling them to productive endeavours. The fourth element is the issue of improving state capacity in order for it not only to play its “night watch man’s role” in society, but also to deliver public services to the people. And the final issue is about mainstreaming women into the processes of governance and development. A governance project that excludes women can neither be enduring nor produce a self-sustaining development. The rationale is simple. Apart from the demographic strength of women in terms their size in the population of many African countries, they are primary actors in production processes, especially in the rural communities. The cliché of governance and development should

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<sup>5</sup>. See, See, UNDP, *Governance for Sustainable Development*, Report of International Conference United Nations, New York, 28-30 July 1997. (New York: UNDP, 1997), p. 24-5.

be “empower a woman, and you empower the whole nation”. Empowerment in this case is not in terms of gender conflict as being problematised by the western feminists, but one of gender complementarity.

### **Constraints and Obstacles to Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa.**

There are formidable obstacles and constraints to the possibility of good governance producing development in Africa. I will discuss only two of those constraints. The first is the challenge of globalisation. Globalisation presents some opportunities but enormous constraints to development in Africa. The unprecedented revolution in information technology, and flow of goods, services and capital suggests that Africa may also move into the spot light of global interactions, and gradually synchronise itself with the processes of capitalist growth and development. However, globalisation is not an innocuous process driven by capitalist benevolence. It is a game of power-economic and political. With increasing globalisation, resources are getting more skewed, fewer people are controlling and consuming the world’s wealth, while the capacity to govern is fast sleeping off the control of Third World governments. We cannot begin to talk about good governance or development where governments do not govern. This is a major challenge to the good governance-sustainable development agenda of African countries.

The second issue is that of economic crisis management and reform in Africa, which is impeding any meaningful governance project. Most African countries are bogged down in a debt peonage of which they have no possibility of escaping. Worse still, these highly indebted countries

also constitute the bulk of the “wretched of the earth”, where most of the population live below the poverty line of \$1 per day. The response of the international community to the situation has been diversionary, peace meal and inconsequential. The current debt reduction initiative of the World Bank and the G-7 countries for highly indebted countries, of which African countries are the principal recipients, is too small and too slow to make a difference. What Africa need to spin-off good governance and development is not half measures and charity, but a new partnership that takes a sober look at the African predicament and a viable way of restoring hope and self-sustaining capacity to govern and develop their environment.

**The third issue is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is literally destroying societies and countries – Botswana is said to have reached the unthinkable negative population growth, while Zimbabwe is expected to have a zero population growth rate by next year – both cases because of the HIV/AIDS phenomenon. Zambia is in a similar position. What kind of development can be expected from such countries, which are already highly indebted? And it is now abundantly clear that African countries do not have the means to solve this problem alone, because:-**

- of the high cost of medicine against HIV/AIDS
- of the destruction, during the last 15 – 20 years of the health systems of all African countries which have been forced to implement SAP
- of WB insistence that the way to tackle HIV/AIDS by African countries is to obtain loans in order to fight the HIV/AIDS, despite bitter protest and complaints by governments and NGOs against this WB policy.

**The fourth issue, which constrains development in Africa, is the way the liberalisation of African economies has been carried out as demanded by the IMF/WB. These two organisations insist on giving priority to foreign investors to buy African productive enterprises, which are privatised, at the expense of African investors/capital – little though this is. The struggle by African countries to develop their own bourgeoisie class which historically have been the engine of growth, is crushed by foreign investors with the support of the WB and IMF.**

African countries are therefore expected to eventually have economies, which are largely owned by foreign investors (and you can guess who these are!), with Africans providing junior managers and labourers.

This, I believe, is the kind of development being fostered and guided by the multilateral organisations – the WB and IMF.

Will such kind of economic growth be sustainable when it hardly touches, let alone benefit, the majority of the African people?

Is governance in Africa an instrument to provide the necessary environment for this kind of economic growth?

The case of the struggle of the Mozambican Government with the WB over several years over its Cashew nut industry is a good example of the role the WB has played to favour foreign investors against local investors even if this bias meant killing the entire industry.<sup>6</sup>

There are of course other constraints to sustainable development – some mainly because of the underdeveloped condition of African societies due to historical causes. We need not go into these – important though they are.

The important and concluding point I want to stress is that we should not fall in the trap of accepting simplistic explanations of the fact that so far Africa has not achieved sustainable development. One such explanation which is often repeated in newspapers, journals etc is that Africa is underdeveloped *because it has bad leaders*.

To give you some idea of the calibre of most African leaders, here is a recent statement by these leaders describing Africa's problems and how to deal with them, issued after their summit meeting early May 2001 in Algiers:-

**INSERT STATEMENT – OBTAIN FROM ESPD – SEE MAO.**

**Bad leaders indeed !**

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<sup>6</sup> Those who are interested in this case study I refer you to a Website address

[www.africapolicy.org](http://www.africapolicy.org)

