



## Democracy, Governance and the Challenges of Development in Africa

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### Abstract

This paper examines African states' proclivities towards democracy in their search for development and offers a comparative analysis of regional democracy and its impact on development in Africa. It highlights the importance of democracy as a process and development as an outcome whilst accesses the linkages that exist between them. While this paper argues that the universal features that define democracy are requisite for development anywhere, there are however some peculiar factors that stringently inhibit the manifestation of this relationship in Africa. These factors, in their internal and external forms, are epitomized by leadership failures and mismanagement across the continent, posing enormous threats to the development aspirations of the people. These failures account for the ignorant acceptance of the neo-imperialistic assumptions smuggled into the definition of democracy. It accounts for the inability to provide the basic needs of the people in spite of huge resources, both material and human. The paper thus concludes that Africa can achieve a sustainable, human-centered development only through the development and practice of democratic governance.

**Key words:** Democracy; Development; Governance; Leadership failures; Mismanagement

### Introduction

Africa is one of the continents of the world that has embraced the democratization process. In the last century when the rest of the world moved towards democracy and development, Africa remained a predominantly military or semi-military controlled continent ruled mostly by non-democratic and dictatorial governments. The effect of this undemocratic government in the continent is poverty. According to recent statistics, the quality of life for most people in Africa appears to have either not improved or only done so marginally. This situation arose from the early misrule of early leaders most of whom spearheaded the struggle for independence. In the early 1960s soon after independence, they settled down to rule their people as though they were inheritors of the erstwhile colonial authority. The leaders separated themselves from the suffering people, engaged themselves in self aggrandizement and became insensitive to the yearnings of their people for basic economic and social amenities. This state of affairs led to untold devastation of economies in the continent. People had to live below the poverty line with little or no food, no shelter to accommodate them and no medical or educational facilities to give them some hope for the future. In each case, the oppressive conditions in which they lived led these people to evolve gradually into a class of disgruntled citizens desperate for change to alleviate their suffering. In almost all cases, the military provided the answer by way of coup d'état that toppled these political overlords. Usually, such military governments professed to have come in as corrective regimes that would stay for only brief periods within which they would put things in order before handing over to duly elect democratic governments. But, because absolute power corrupts absolutely, these military governments often ended up entrenching themselves in power. Infact, most of them exhibited all the traits of the much vilified early leaders and even more (Ikpi, 1997: 18).

To correct this ill, some civilians and the military resort to rebellion which in most cases led to civil wars. This was the case of countries such as Sierra-Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Civil wars in Africa have killed a lot of people, depriving the continent of critical labour resources. These wars have led to the neglect of education and in some cases; school facilities are destroyed or converted into military use. Young adults or children are forcefully drafted into the army on the side of the government or that of the rebels. Military spending is so high that in some countries, the military budget tops the list and there is evidence that African



leaders either borrow huge sums of money or use foreign development assistance to finance domestic wars. Civil wars in Africa undermine the continent's productive capacity, destroy or severely weaken social structures, distort economic policy, pollute the value-systems of the people and perpetuate prolong poverty (Elu 2000: 60).

It is evident that Africa is the poorest continent in the world and the present situation shows backward movement into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century while others are already in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It has now become clear, even to obstinate and recalcitrant policy makers, that unless drastic measures are taken, living conditions for most people in this continent will continue to fall (Elu, 2000: 60). Today, it is evident that the most popular form of government in the world is democracy, judging by its wide acceptance and pretensions to it by those who in reality are averse to its tenets. The reason for this lies in the fact that being democratic today now signifies being good and admissible into the comity of nations as opposed to the isolation meted out to regimes considered to be despotic. Governance and democracy have become widely recognized as prerequisites for sustained development (Johnson 1982; White and Wade 1988). Democratic governance fosters transparency, accountability, the rule of law, respect for human rights, civic participation, and civic inclusiveness – all of which are necessary for securing economic productivity, equitable distribution of resources and state legitimacy. African States therefore have a role to play in the development process by ensuring that democratic governance is institutionalized in order to provide routine instrumentalities for peace and stability and to enhance the attainment of regional integration and human-centered development. To this end therefore, this paper examines the institutionalization of democracy within the context of African value system, analyzes the continent standard of democracy, its associated problems and its impacts on African development.

### The Concept of Development

To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to note that the term 'development' has been adapted to mean many things. More often than not, the term has been confusingly used in literature, that its true meaning has become problematic. It has been used interchangeably with synonyms or adjectives like 'transformation', 'growth', 'modernization', 'advancement', etc. More so, as articulated by Walter Rodney (1974), 'development in human society is a many-sided process':

- At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.
- At the level of social groups, therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Development in the past has always meant the increase in the ability to guard the independence of the social group and indeed to infringe upon the freedom of others – something that often came about irrespective of the will of the person within the societies involved.
- More often than not, the term 'development' is used in an exclusive economic sense – the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features.
- He then concludes that 'development is universal because the conditions leading to economic expansion are universal'.

Therefore, 'development is a term which is used so loosely and freely that it has little precise meaning' (McCarthy, 1994). This paper shall however give some scholarly and working definitions of development. According to Cowen and Shenton (1996) development refers to the 'remedies for the shortcomings and maladies of progress'. Pieterse Jan Nederveen (2001) defined development as 'the organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement'. He stated further that 'what constitutes improvement and what is appropriate intervention obviously vary according to class, culture, historical context and relations of power'.

In the Human Development Reports of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), development was defined as 'the enlargement of people's choices'. Development was further explained by Everest Roger (1969) as 'a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capita income and levels of living through modern production methods and improved social organization'. In Claude Ake's book on 'Democracy and



Development in Africa' (1995) he defined development as "the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choice and values".

From the above analysis, we can safely agree that 'real development involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, polity and culture of a country that permits the self-generating and self-perpetuating use and development of the people's potentials' (Nkrumah, 1965). The rate of development of any particular society is influenced by so many variables such as the political culture, leadership, natural resources and the level of education of the entire people of a particular country. Although 'development has been taken to mean growth, economic development, industrialization, economic growth, modernization and nation-building... it serves as a mirror of changing economic and social capacities, priorities and choices' (Pieterse 2001: 7).

The issue of democracy and development leaves us with one controversial question: 'Does political democracy lead to economic development? In trying to analyze this question, it is necessary to examine the relationship that exists between democracy and development.

### **Democracy and Development: An Interactive Relationship**

Democracy and development are complementary, and they reinforce each other. The link between them is all the stronger because democracy originates in the aspirations of individuals and peoples and in the rights they enjoy. Indeed, history shows that cases where democracy and development have been dissociated have mostly resulted in failure. Conversely, 'the interlinking of democratization and development helps both of them to take root durably' (Boutros-Ghali, 2003). For if political democracy, in order to consolidate itself, needs to be complemented by economic and social measures that encourage development, similarly any development strategy needs to be ratified and reinforced by democratic participation in order to be implemented. Democracy and development can together contribute to the consolidation of peace. Most of the time democracies settle their domestic disputes by peaceful means. Moreover, in addition to this preventive role, the democratic framework has often proved effective in settling international conflicts peacefully. Democracy is a factor of peace and therefore encourages development, which itself tends to consolidate the state of domestic peace and, consequently, international peace, since many wars originate from domestic conflicts.

The impact of economic development on the transformation of political systems has long been thought to be direct and positive. Sustained economic development is supposed to lead to the emergence of democratic institutions and, eventually, democracy through a combination of factors produced by such development. First and most important, economic development will transform social structure and create a large enough middle class as the social basis of democracy. Second, economic development may, as its by-product, lead to the emergence of new political values (such as enhanced sense of individuality, personal autonomy, and value of personal freedom and choice) that support democratic institutions and practices. Third, a direct effect of economic development is the increase in the level of education. An educated citizenry is likely to be more knowledgeable about the political process and aware of their rights. Such a citizenry is more vigilant in defending its rights and possesses more effective means of doing so. Fourth, successful development will generate more economic wealth, which allows private-sector actors to accumulate resources and enhance their independence from the state, thus strengthening civil society as a counterweight to the state. Another beneficial effect of wealth is the increased possibility of resolving redistribution conflicts. Fifth, as successful development is more likely to occur in an open economy, such development may, in the process, promote extensive social, cultural, and political linkages with the international community. These linkages act to facilitate the flow of information (which undermines authoritarian rule) and constrain (through various external pressures) autocratic rulers.

The relationship between democracy and development is far more contentious. The question of whether political regimes affect economic growth was raised many years and remains unanswered. The idea that autocratic regimes have an advantage in economic development, although no longer taken seriously, was once quite fashionable. The advantages of autocratic regimes, to be sure, were not



intrinsically derived. Rather, these regimes were supposed to have an edge in development mainly because they were said to lack the same disadvantages often associated with democracy. More specifically, these disadvantages include (1) insecure property rights of the wealthy (as a result of the enfranchisement of the poor, who are expected to use their voting power to redistribute wealth), (2) high propensity to consume (as a result of electoral politics and meeting voters' short-term demands), (3) rent-seeking by special interest groups that penetrate the open political process and use their influence to produce socially inefficient policies. As a theory, autocracy-good-for-development was thus extremely weak. 'While open political processes under democracy may lead to the above-described problems, there is nothing intrinsic to autocracy that would convince adequately that the same problems would not exist under autocratic rule' (Diamond et al, 1999). Property rights are by no means secure in an autocracy whose rulers are immune from institutional constraints (such as an independent judiciary or parliamentary competition). The case that democracy promotes development rests on the central idea that the political institutions critical to economic development are more likely to exist and function effectively under democratic rule. These institutions include the rule of law which protects property rights, individual liberties which foster creativity and entrepreneurship, the freedom of expression which ensures the production and unimpeded flow of information, and institutional checks and balances that prevent massive theft of public wealth often observed in autocracies.

Economic historians have persuasively demonstrated that secure property rights constitute the institutional foundations of sustained economic development. The rule of law generally understood to mean the supremacy of legal norms and codes enforced by an independent judiciary has proved to be the most important institution that can protect property rights. The relationship between the rule of law and property rights is now so uncontroversial that the two concepts have almost become interchangeable when used in the context of economic development. But the relationship between the rule of law and political regimes is far more complex. 'Intuitively, democracy in general, and democratic institutions such as multi-party systems, competitive elections, and a free press in particular, should be viewed as part of the political foundations of the rule of law because the functioning of these institutions ensure that the rule of law will have its defenders (parties, candidates, and the media)' (Diamond et al, 1999). More importantly, the competitive nature of democracy ensures that no single individual or political force will acquire so much political power as to overwhelm all other forces, which means that no individual or entity will be above the law or threaten the rule of law. Conversely, the rule of law has been thought as such an inseparable part of democracy that it is difficult to imagine a democracy without the rule of law.

'The rule of law is the thread that can link the construction and consolidation of democracy to the construction and consolidation of development, as well as consolidating their common bedrock: the respect of human rights' (Boutros-Ghali, 2003). It is a fact that, if human rights are to be guaranteed and if democracy is to work, communities and individuals, both men and women, needs not only to have access to justice but also, before that, to be aware of the law, to understand it and the practice of democracy should be within their value system. Similarly, the lack of justice directly compromises development, first because it encourages mismanagement and corruption, and second because it discourages investment and economic exchanges. There can be no development in a context of arbitrariness or in the absence of the rule of law. In order to construct and to institutionalize, there needs to be a minimum degree of certainty: one needs to know what rule is applicable and how it is applied. It should be pointed out that the notion of the rule of law or the primacy of law has wider implications than the much more concrete notion of rule by the law, which refers to the authorities' daily enforcement of the existing laws, whether they be good or bad, just or unjust. The rule of law, on the other hand, which is the contrary of arbitrariness, is based on the reign of the general principles of the law and on the concept of justice in society, hence its importance in relation to a democratic government. The rule of law entails three basic components: legitimacy, transparency and accountability. These three elements, which underpin the rule of law, are vital for both the democratic process and the process of development.

The direct and positive relationship that exists between political democracy and economic development perhaps explains why nations that have well established democratic structures within the



context of their culture experience wide-paced development as compared to those that frequently experience political toggles and instability. This is the case of democratically developed countries like USA, Sweden, Norway, Great Britain, France, Netherlands, Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Canada, Switzerland and Luxembourg, as compared to autocratically developed and pseudo democratic ones like Zimbabwe, Chad, North Korea, Libya, DRC, Gabon, Sudan, Rwanda and Iran.

### Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The importance of theoretical framework in research cannot be over-emphasized. Nachmias and Nachmias (1981) stated that a theory is a logical deductive statements consisting of a set of interrelated concepts from which testable propositions can be derived. In their own submission, White and Clark (1990:31) conceive a theory as “a set of proposed explanations logically or systematically related to each other that seek to explain or predict a phenomenon”. It is in the light of the above, that this paper has adopted both the dependency theory and African renaissance theory as our combined theoretical framework of analysis.

Dependency theory in this regard, is apt in explaining the problems that militated against the governance in Africa from living up to their responsibilities of facilitating development within the context of Africa people as was obtainable before the advent of colonialism. The theory, therefore, is of the view that Africa and indeed Nigeria's underdevelopment and by extension the failure of institutions like the traditional institutions was as a result of the integration and incorporation of the continent and indeed the country into the periphery of global capitalist system to play subservient role to international capital (Nweke, 2012). The proponents of this theory have argued that the issues that border on the failure of Africa as a continent and Nigeria as a country can only be explained within the context of bourgeois hangover of colonialism and imperialism. An extrapolation of classical Marxist theory, dependency theory is espoused in the works of Lenin and Luxemburg in the 1910's and 1920's (Lee, 1983 cited in Onah & Nyewusira, 2006:59). Lenin and Luxemburg have argued that what today is known as “underdevelopped” countries can only be explained within the framework of the influences on production relations and capital formation process in the so-called “advanced world”. According to Nweke and Nyewusira (2009), dependency theory was propounded by Third World scholars and put together in the sixties by eminent writers such as Luxemburg (1964), Frank (1969), Santo (1970), Cockroft et al (1972), Rodney (1972), Samir Amin (1976), Cardoso and Faletto (1979), Offiong (1980), Ake (1981), Ndoh (1995) and the like.

There is a strong contention by the dependency theorists that Africa has continued to be dominated economically as well as politically by external centres of power. Most noticeable is economic, political and cultural dependence of the continent upon America and Europe (Matunhu, 2011:68). In his own submission, Rodney (1972) has argued that the political independence of Africa from colonialism did not alter the dependency arrangement rather it deepened it. He said the end of colonialism has not deterred the imperialists from dominating Africa. Akani (2010:124) further adds that it is plausible for one to argue that the intractable problems in Africa of late are a precipitate of the merciless looting, imposition of assumed complex and disorientation of the continent. African political institutions in this regard were not left out as part of the institutions destroyed by imperialism and colonialism. Matunhu (2011:69) has also lent credence to the foregoing, when he stated that:

To succeed in the improvement operation, the metropolis destroyed the traditional, pre-capitalist structures of Africa in order to pave the way for super exploitation and appropriation of surplus value. Mission education curriculum was the main instrument used to destroy the pre-capitalist social structures in Africa (Matunhu, 2011:69).

Matunhu (2011) has further argued that the educational system brought about mental impoverishment of Africans by emphasizing the importance of African value and culture at the same time while glorifying those of the whites. There is no doubt, therefore, that dependency theory in this respect becomes apt in explaining that imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism led to the destruction of



existing political institutions in Africa which brought about the failure of the institutions in living up their responsibilities of facilitating development within the context of their culture.

African renaissance theory on its own offers a complimentary role in the explanation of the way out of the problem posed by neocolonialism in Africa and indeed in Nigeria as held by dependency theorists. Writing on African renaissance theory, Matuhun (2011:71) has opined that the theory is founded on African values and norms which are the very building blocks of African life. The strength of this argument lies in its ability to be adaptable to change and innovations provided they are initiated within the social and value systems of the average African. Unity, communalism and shared purpose for Africa become the basis for thinking of a true African life. His proposition remains that removing Africa from the apron of poverty and underdevelopment must be informed and embroiled in the African values like 'Ubuntu in South Africa, 'Humwe' in Zimbabwe, 'Harambee' in Kenya and 'Ujamaa' in Tanzania. He contended that the model rejects the main stream growth (modernity) and dependency paradigms because they exacerbate poverty and fail to appeal the African value system. According to him, like other alternative models, it emphasizes a social force that opposes and transcends the growth and dependency paradigms. He further argues that "Africans had their own way of dealing with crime, deviance and conflict ... in the name of modernizing Africa, the people of the continent lost their identity and development path".

The African renaissance theory is a social movement built on the pursuit of the issue of injustice, inequality and sustainability from a collective or communal approach. It is all about redeeming Africa's past identity and values with a view to bringing about the continent going back to chart a new course to its greatness. The theory mainly advocates for local solutions, pluralism, community-based solutions and reliance on local resources (Matuhun, 2011). Contributing to this theory, Korten (1990:4) has said that 'transformation' for future depends on achieving the transformation of institutions, technology, values and behaviour consistent with ecological and social realities in Africa.

The combined theoretical underpinnings adopted in this paper offer better explanations to the issues raised that Africa's integration and incorporation into the periphery of global capitalism politicised and hence weakened the African institutions of governance in living up to their responsibilities of developing their values as was obtainable in the pre-colonial societies (dependency theory). Moreover, to get Africa to the part of prosperity, there is therefore the need to think of local solutions based on collective communal approach in managing her own affairs (African renaissance theory). Nweke (2012) believes that both theories of dependency and African renaissance are quite apt in explaining both the failure in the role of African institutions of governance in managing development issues and the need for a reinvigoration and restoration of African values with a view to bringing back local or community-based approaches to African development in the face of globalization challenges.

### **Institutionalization of Underdevelopment in Africa: An Explorative Discourse**

The issue of underdevelopment status in Africa underscores the implications of the form and intent of Africa's early interactions and relationships with foreigners from Europe and America in the areas of economy, politics and religion. This dates back to the era of slave trading. There were some socio-cultural and economic issues that consequently led to slave trading. Underdevelopment in Africa is traced to the era when Africans sold or exchanged their brothers and sisters for foreign goods, political and economic power, security, self aggrandizement etc. Africans sold their relations to the white explorers because they perceived them to be enemies, oppositions, for material and wealth acquisition and source of income. In some cases, these brothers were seen as weaklings and insolvent and were best gotten rid of by selling them off, giving them out to the colonial explorers as servants and or allowing them to go to missionary or colonial schools since they were of no consequences or perceived to be of no contribution to the development of the society (see Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*).

Fortunately, some of these sold slaves became the first crop of civil servants and educated elite in the struggle for independence in Africa. Slave trading had deleterious effects on human capital and economic development in Africa. The human resources that could have been harnessed and crystallized for economic and leadership development in Africa were sold off to Europe and America



where they were deployed, under inhuman treatment and strict supervision, in plantations and other artisan works (Frank, 1966; Rodney, 1972; Eke, 1983; Emeagwali, 2004, Ogunbamila, 2005). Consequently, Africa was denied of the labour and entrepreneurship of the slaves. What became a woe to Africa was a delight to the foreign explorers. Some of the slaves were also deployed in some mines in Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa etc, for gold mining and plantation farms (Shaw, 1976).

In a related case to slave trading, there is the understanding that Africans, in the early rise of civilization, did not understand other races as they should. They took these other races just like themselves. No wonder the whites were able, not just with their might in technology, but through knowledge, craft and ingenuity, crept right into the hearts of Africa and upturned their institutional structures, values and customs. Africans were unnecessarily open-armed and even exposed their secrets, identity, customs, traditional technology, crafts etc, to the visitors thinking they were harmless. This back-fired in no distant time; though, it became late when it was realized. Probably, Africans did this ignorantly and as a result of the enthusiasm of seeing a white - coloured man in African soil. African naivety was explored and exploited by the visitors to their own advantage. This is a source of underdevelopment in Africa (Iheriohanma and Oguoma, 2010).

In another instance, the exploration of Africa's underdevelopment status observes that Africans did not take seriously the solution to certain clandestinely detrimental problems that arose from their societies. The issues of criminals and banishment or ostracism of criminals and perceived oppositions, and in addition those perceived to be insolvent such as the *osu* in Igboland, south east of Nigeria, indicate that Africans did not realize the implications of their actions and the disregard and neglect for rehabilitation and provision of secured places for those banished or sold off. Probably, these were done out of their psychological dictates and necessity of getting rid of the criminals and oppositions as immediate solution to the excruciating problems of security, instability and governance. Most African traditional rulers did this ignorantly and on the advice of colonial masters who adopted the divide and rule system. It is argued here that placing monetary values on criminals, banishment of criminals and opposition etc. indicated the low respect and disregard for the dignity and sacrosanct of the human person. Yet Africans were regarded as 'their brothers' keepers'. Placing monetary value on criminals etc. also accounted, in part, for the institution of slave trading and consequent underdevelopment in Africa; if not for anything but for depopulation, decimation, denial and loss of entrepreneurship, human capital development, status inconsistencies and disregard to the dignity of human person in the eyes of the visitors (Iheriohanma and Oguoma, 2010). The indigenes and foreign partners in the slave trade only involved themselves to the extent that they gained from the interaction and ignorance of the indigenes. It is argued here that the psychological act and fear of insecurity in African societies of old are still manifest in modern-day African politics and governance of divide and rule and compradorship. There is insecurity, political instability, intolerance of oppositions and parallel political parties in the land. The situations in Robert Mugabe's and Morgan Tsvangirai's Zimbabwe, South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) in - fighting and allegations concerning Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, etc., Sudanese's government / ethnic Militia of Janjaweed and Southern Sudan, Darfur (Likoti, 2007) substantiate this claim.

This is also observed in almost all government relationship with some developmental institutions such as labour unions. The receipt of indiscriminate and anonymous death threats on his mobile phone by the president of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), Willie Madisha allegedly from ruling African National Congress (ANC) over disagreement on 'Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) Strategy' (Forrest, 2004) is an indication of African governments' intolerance of opposition and allergy to constructive criticisms. The intolerance and allergy are now rampant in spheres of politics, religion, public offices, institutions of learning, etc. These are isolated cases, not to mention insecurity in Nigeria with respect to kidnapping, Niger Delta militant and Boko Haram. These are all elements of underdevelopment characteristic of a people still in the process of search for identity and rediscovering themselves decades after the shift of power from the colonial masters to indigenous African leadership.

It is also argued that the institutionalization of underdevelopment in Africa is traced to the regional economic alignment and attachment of African 'independent' nations to their original (masters) states.



These states continue to direct affairs and influence economic and political processes in their former colonies because of lingering appendages of the colonial interaction.

## Conclusion

So far, this paper has examined democracy and its undeniably delicate complexities. It has made efforts to show that no form of government comes without challenges, but that democracy as of yet, has the best of prospects in strive for development; more so for a continent like Africa ravaged by hunger, diseases and ignorance. It has equally shown that democracy can only be meaningful if anchored on a leadership with the requisite character and competence to deal with the continent's teething problems. This in turn can be easily achieved when the people are allowed to have inputs into the emergence and direction of leadership, when the rule of law is firmly established to ensure justice, fairness and equality, and when democratic structures are institutionalized and made to function accordingly.

As a form of government that embraces diversity and plurality in the society, guaranteeing equality of the citizens and their involvement in how they are governed, democracy remains the best system which accommodates development. Democracy has its own problems, but society must not relent at improving on them. Here, the famous saying that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" becomes highly apposite. The entrenchment and sustenance of democracy is thus a 21<sup>st</sup> century imperative for African development.

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