Leadership and Good Governance in Africa: Is there any Link?

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Abstract
This paper is an analysis on “Leadership and Good Governance in Africa: Is there Any Link? Africa’s failures of good governance and regional development have been largely as a result of leadership failures. These manifest in frequent leadership change, lack of political will, lack of realistic ideology, policy reversal and weak institutions. The paper focuses on selected African countries with more emphasis on Nigeria. Data were generated from secondary sources and analysed using content analysis. The paper reveals that the leadership election processes in the continent takes the imposition pattern and that African leaders have frequently come to their position with different motives instead of the quest to facilitate the delivery of services through good governance. Therefore, leadership failures in the areas of poor policies, policy summersault, indiscipline, corruption and the likes have weakened the system of governance or rather good governance, which affect overall development. Thus, for Africa to overcome the crises of leadership and governance, the leaders should carry out their entrusted obligations with zeal and just. The paper concludes that only leadership that has the people at heart and emerge through free and fair election can be relevant to the regional development of Africa through good governance.

Keywords: Leadership, good, governance, development, Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been an urgent desire among various scholars, practitioners, individuals and governments for prevailing stability and overall national and regional development through competent leadership. There is no gainsaying the fact that the quest for leadership is an undeniable fact in matters relating to the effective management of human, financial and material resources to achieve the goal of development. Thus, it should be noted that the success or otherwise of any country depends on the effectiveness or otherwise of its leaders. This shows that leadership is imperative in any human set-up as it is tantamount to a stable polity, good democratic governance and overall development. Amidst jubilation and hope after gaining their political independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, African countries have embarked on policies and programs of nation building and development. It is therefore the belief of scholars and practitioners that democracy has a role to play in helping to salvage Africa from the challenge of leadership crises.

Unfortunately, in Africa, most of the constituted governments have been undergoing serious and deepening politico-economic crisis. These problems generated by political, social and economic instability call our attention to the problems of leadership and governance in the continent. In other words, the staggering wave of violence, insecurity,
increasing crime wave, economic recession, coupled with the break in law and order are the attributes to the problem of leadership and governance in the continent. Therefore, the quest for good leadership is the fulcrum for governance and sustainable development (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2012). African countries have taken a number of necessary and bold initiatives on governance, as one of the essential factors for sustainable economic growth and development for the alleviation of poverty. But these initiatives are still constrained by a number of critical challenges that need to be tackled to enhance the prospects of governance and development.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Africa has witnessed the continuous struggle for democratization and the quest for good governance. The World Bank emphasised on the significance of good governance in resolving Africa’s leadership and development challenges. It argued that better governance required political renewal which meant concerted efforts against corruption from the highest to the lowest levels by strengthening accountability, encouraging public debate, strengthening the press, empowering women and the poor (The World Bank, 1989) in Poncian & Mgaya (2015). Moreover, governance had been an important feature of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and has been accorded priority by the African Union (AU) which replaced it in 2002. The quest for democracy and good governance in Africa often hinges on factors such as structural problems, corruption and lack of democratic culture. These are all demanding problems that need concerted action (Wani, 2014).

The basic questions are: what efforts have African leaders made in strengthening good governance through effective leadership? What is the nexus between leadership and good governance in Africa? What are the manifestations of leadership and good governance challenges or failures in Africa? What are the ways forward? The specific objectives of the paper are in lines with the research questions raised. Qualitative (secondary source) case study design was employed in this study to explore and analyze data from the existing records which include public records and peer-reviewed journal articles on leadership and good governance in Africa with specific reference to selected African countries (Nigeria inclusive).

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND FRAMEWORK

2.1 Leadership

There is no single sentence definition on what leadership is all about. For instance, one could define it as the ability to inspire confidence and support among those whose competence and commitment determine performance. It has also been referred to as the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts towards goal achievement in a given situation (Alo, 2014). Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals. Organizations whether public or private need strong leadership and management for optimal results. Leaders are needed today to create visions of the future, and inspire organisational or societal members to achieve the visions.

According to Awofese and Odeyemi (2017), leaders essentially direct the workings of the collective towards attaining a jointly shared end. It requires explicit organisational ability, strategic thinking and character based on vision and goodwill. It is then expected that one
who carries the leadership responsibility must, inter alia, possess traits of tact, vision, charisma, character and goodwill as team members expectedly ascribe leadership to individuals they trust in positively shaping the attainment of desired ends. These include people who hold decision-making positions in government, and people who pursue such placements by all means possible. It also includes the elite with the ability to influence the conduct of public affairs from behind the scene. It is the totality of relations and processes that Omole (2014) refers to as “the institutional catalyst required to deliver the promises of development”.

For the purpose of this paper, a leader is a visionary and courageous person who influences (especially political) a group of people towards an effective and efficient result. He is the one saddle with the responsibilities of formulating and executing policies that are reflections of the yearnings and aspirations of the general public or rather electorates under the democratic dispensation.

2.2 Good governance

The concept of “Governance” on the other hand is not new. It has been in both political and academic parlance for a long period. More recently, it has gained particular significance in the literature on Africa development as a result, among other things, of the World Bank (1989) identifying the crisis on the continent as one of governance. More specifically, the Bank refers to such phenomena as the extensive personalization of power, the denial of fundamental human rights, widespread of corruption, and the prevalence of unelected and unaccountable government.

According to Afegbua & Adejuwon (2012), governance is legitimate in a positive sense when the government is installed by the people through institution arrangements that are put in place by the people and when the performance of the ruler is adjude good and accepted by the people and when the people have power to remove the ruler in case of very grievous offence, such a government is legitimate and democratic.

The concept of good governance was once defined by a number of international institutions, including World Bank, IMF, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as the capacity of a country to establish a “framework of order and stability, formulate and implement effective policies and create an environment durable for economic and social development.” The idea of good governance has attracted the attention of most African leaders now (Wani, 2014). However, the concept of good governance in this paper refers to the developmental potentials of the democratic challenge in Africa as accountability, rule of law, freedom of expression and association and public choice of government in order to achieve the desired goal of development. It is the issue of the quality of the public goods supplied at country level that makes good governance such an important concept.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Democratic/participatory leadership style is adopted. The philosophical assumption underlying democratic/participatory leadership style is to foster teamwork, high performance and satisfaction. The emphasis of this leadership style is on performance and people.
The theory is informed by the works of classical and neo-classical theorists such as Aristotle, Plato, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques, etc. It is through participation that individuals (subordinates or followers) contribute ideas towards the solution of problems affecting them. Participation can create an asset in morale so that when necessary orders are given, people will respond more co-operatively because they are participating in the affairs of the organization (Appadorai, 2005). When leaders establish means for obtaining help from subordinates in the making of plans and decisions, they are making them to know that their contributions are sought and appreciated and this creates great benefits and harmony in the organization.

Tannenbanum and Schmidt (1958) describe democratic leadership as one where decision making is decentralized and shared by subordinates. The likelihood for poor decision making and weak execution is, however, significant. The biggest problem with democratic leadership is its underlying assumption that everyone has an equal stake in an outcome as well as shared levels of expertise with regard to decisions, which is rarely the case.

Democratic leadership style focuses more on people and interaction within the group. The leadership functions are shared among members of the group and the leader is part of the team. Based on the theoretical explanation of democratic leadership styles of leadership, the researchers realised that the democratic style of leadership is accomplished with people’s involvement with objectives that are transparently and clearly established with its accompanying performance targets. Other salient elements using democratic style which are also elements of good governance include regular elections that are free and fair, accountability, transparency, rule of law, independent judiciary and strong legal system etc.

3. DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Efforts of Africa towards good governance

There were various measures put in place to strengthen good governance in Africa. The bases of renewal of governance were to be found in a number of instruments, namely:

i. In 2002, the Constitutive Act articulated the guidelines on governance for the continent. It defined the parameters of political, economic, and institutional governance of the continent.

ii. Elaborations were made in the Durban Declaration on Elections, Democracy, Governance, and New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), and the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic, and Corporate Governance.

iii. In the same vein, the Protocol on the Rights of Women and the Algiers Decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (1999) addressed the rights of women and their integration in the development process and the promotion of democratic governance in the continent respectively.

iv. The Lomé Declaration on the framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes in Government (2000) dealt with unconstitutional changes and the need to adhere to the electoral process in governance.
v. The 2000 Solemn Declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and good governance in the continent etc.

Other measures on governance involved the establishment of organs of the (African Union (AU), the Peace and Security Council that deals with conflict prevention, management, and resolution; the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) that engages the participation of civil society, trade unions, and academics in the governance process of the African Union. The Pan-African Parliament is providing the forum for the input of African parliamentarians into AU processes. In addition, the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is an important system for the renewal of governance at the continental level; it is an arrangement facilitating the sharing of experiences in development by African leaders.

Furthermore, UNECA has stressed the relevance of proactive, democratic States in relations to the prospects for Africa’s development and recovery. Also, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), started paying more attention to governance issues which were believed to be significant in making the market work if they were addressed (Bolarinwa, 2013). As a result, IMF started to fund governance programmes in Africa, among others. Good governance became a condition to be fulfilled for African countries to receive grants and loans from the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The main issue here was not achieving good governance for its own and the sake of Africans but for making sure that markets and capital would function properly in Africa. This was part of the reasons for why Africa was forced to liberalise its politics (democratisation) during the early 1990s (Poncian & Mgaya, 2015).

3.2 Nexus and challenges of leadership and good governance in Africa

3.2.1 The nexus between leadership and good governance

There is no gainsaying the fact that leadership is related to the management of human, financial and material resources. Therefore, it should be noted that the success or otherwise of any country in the area of good governance depends on the effectiveness or otherwise of its leaders. This shows that leadership goes in tandem with stable polity, good governance and by extension development. Leadership must be in the hands of qualified, competent, enlightened and honest persons for the overall development of Africa.

Similarly, countries like Indonesia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, Malaysia, Brazil etc. transitioned from small economies with terrible standards of living to big and blooming economies with great macro-economic indices because their leaders demonstrated a high degree of official responsibility with regards to public policy formulation. Some of them were former third world countries and most of them were not identified with the narratives of corruption, mis-governance, mismanagement and gross abuse of power (Umezulike, 2015).

Further, the positive link between leadership and good governance in Africa cannot be over-emphasised. The result of this has been an increase in the number of non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations established and working in
Africa. Such organisations are funded by, among others, the IFIs to champion good governance in Africa. For example, there were about 2,085 NGOs and CSOs (those registered on the UN website) working in Africa on all areas of development. Moreover, governance, it is argued, ought to be improved for African countries and people to build real freedom and real development. But without good governance, we cannot eradicate poverty; for no corrupt government is interested in the eradication of poverty; on the contrary, and as we have seen in many parts of Africa and elsewhere, widespread corruption in high places breeds poverty (Nyerere, 1998) in (Poncian & Mgaya, 2015).

The African Development Bank cites the following elements of good governance in Africa. These include accountability, transparency, combating corruption, participation and legal and judicial reforms (Jagdish, 2000). The capacity of African societies and leaders to respond to and address critical challenges such as: achieving sustained high economic growth and development, meeting basic needs such as food, shelter, housing, clean water and electricity, providing better access to education and health, increasing agricultural productivity, ending civil wars, and reducing poverty substantially hinges on whether Africa is able to institutionalize good governance. It is by addressing these factors it will be determined on whether the current wave of democratization will be sustained and become the norm in the 21st century.

However, based on the elements or parameters of good governance cited by the African Development Bank (ADB), most governments in Africa are unable to satisfy the most basic needs of their people because accountability and transparency are low, and many people are unable to participate effectively in the governance process, there has been rampant cases of corruption. As a result, many doubt the long-term sustainability of the current effort at instituting participatory democracy in Africa, as the people grow more disenchanted with the pace of progress. The slow progress, the manipulation of the process, and the resulting disenchantment has prompted experts to wonder whether participatory democracy in Africa will thrive or collapse in the near future (Decalo, 1994).

### 3.3 Challenges of leadership and good governance in Africa

Good governance in many African countries is still far from “good” because the systems are not as open as they should be due to leadership failure. First and foremost, African leaders recognised that the resurgence of the coup d’état as a phenomenon in Africa represented a serious threat to peace and security and the process of democratization in the continent. Coup d’états are also unacceptable because they contradict the joint commitment of African leaders, made at the 26th ordinary session in July 1990, to promote a democratic environment and principles. This mechanism helped to isolate the regimes which came to power through Coup d’état in Guinea Bissau, Niger and La Cote d’Ivoire in 1999.

According to Folarin (2013) there are three types of leadership challenges at the generic level in the 21st century, namely, the contextual, the personal and the changing paradigms. At the contextual level are the historical, environmental, diseases, poverty, wars and political instability, infrastructural and general underdevelopment. At the personal level, observation has shown that there is low drive or motivation towards self-development on the part of Africans (leaders or followers), absence of leadership and general performance skills and a warped educational system, The third is the challenge of
whether Africa is responding well to changing paradigms such as globalization, world perspectives, technology, international speed of events and democratization. He further identified the following challenges as being exacerbated by leadership thus;

**Political Challenge:** The political challenges are central to the causation of the other challenges. These are political instability that manifests in the Machiavellian arrogance of power consciousness or civilian dictatorship or even in third term bids of septuagenarian leaders; militarization of the ostensibly democratic institutions; excessive politicization of issues and policymaking; political corruption, manipulations of electoral processes; compromising to western dictates; disunity; failed policies; etc. For instance, the nature of Nigerian state evolved a predatory political class that was concerned with power struggle, consolidation, alignment and realignment in the context of hegemonic control. This is linked to the lack of ideology in the political space, monetization of the political process, expand the basis of political participation and canvass alternative policy agenda (Seteolu, 2004; Obi, 2000).

**Economic Challenge:** Poverty; infrastructural underdevelopment; urban decay; economic dependency upon western nations for financial aid, loans, technical assistance, and technical expertise; external indebtedness; misappropriation of public funds; embezzlement and financial mismanagement; money laundering; cyber fraud; poor economic, including agricultural policies and poorly implemented engineering programmes like SAP are some of the economic challenges.

**Social Challenge:** These include ethnicity, ethnic violence and genocide and civil wars like in Rwanda and Burundi between the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, Darfur in Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Niger Delta in Nigeria; sectarian or religious violence; sectionalism and communal violence; widening social disequilibrium and injustices arising from escalating economic misfortunes; unemployment and underemployment crises; anti-social activities, including rape, prostitution, robbery and a creeping culture of violence among the idle or unemployed youths; declining educational quality and collapsed university system; food insecurity and general social insecurity therefrom.

Other important challenges at the national level include the lack of civic education among citizens and civil society leading to low participation in the political process, lack of credibility of the electoral system, especially of the Electoral Commissions. However, the lack of respect by leaders and citizens for the rule of law and human rights often poses a great challenge to stability. The judiciary in many states is constraint by structural difficulties and inadequate funding.

### 3.3.1 Leadership and governance challenge in selected African countries

In order to have a clear picture or understanding of leadership and governance crises in Africa, the paper briefly identifies leadership and governance challenges in selected African countries. These include Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Zaire, Kenya and Liberia.

**Nigeria:** This is the “Giant of Africa”, the country became independent in 1960. Out of 60 years of independence, the country has been under the control of tyrannical and autocratic military dictators for about thirty years. Under the new dispensation, the country seems to be experiencing nascent democracy but leadership into public and political office still follow imposition pattern due to massive rigging in the past elections, though there has been improvement in the 2015 general elections with the introduction of card reader. Nigeria, which is the largest country in the continent of Africa has a dearth of genuine leaders.
According to Ibrahim (2017) cited in Okeke (2017) therefore Nigeria is suffering from a real crisis related to the scale of theft of public resources that is beyond all logic and can only be equated to madness. For decades, he posits, some public officials have been stealing billions of naaira and subsequently some of them graduated into stealing billions of dollars and in the process, they have completely lost sight of rationality; that is, how much they could reasonably spend in their lifetime and in the lifetimes of their children. The human capital quality of such individuals is certainly in the negative regards.

**Ghana:** The political situation in Ghana is similar to that of Nigeria, for instance, since the country’s independence in 1957; Kwame Nkurumah ruled the country until 1969 when his government was toppled. Since then military ruled the country for almost twenty years (1979), Jerry Rawlings ruled the country from 1981 and changed to President after 12 years in power through a series of less-than-legitimate election before he handed over to John Kufor in 2001.

**Mali:** Mali with a population of 20 million people was facing strong conflicts, where rebels are fighting with the government forces on the issue of power politics. Recently, President Boubacar Keita who came into power in 2013 was toppled in August 2020 after protests fueled by pervasive corruption, extreme poverty, conflict etc. Tensions snowballed into a crisis on July 10 when anti-Keita rally organized by the June 5 Movement turned violent.

**Zaire:** It was formerly known as Congo-Kinshasa is a country in Africa that never experience stable democratic governance as a result of despotic and tyrant leader. In 1960 Mobutu Sese Sekou terminated the government of Patrick Lumumba in a bloody and gruesome manner. Mobutu a self-acclaimed life President of Zaire is one of the African leaders that overstayed their glorious day in office until he was chased out of the country while the present administration in Zaire is not ready to give room for popularly elected leader.

**Kenya:** In Kenya, after the death of President Jomo Kenytta in 1977, Daniel Arap Moi became their leader and ruled for years, he ruled autocratically and reject any reform that can pave way for democracy in the country.

**Liberia:** The country was described as the oldest in democracy in Africa until 1980 when Samuel Doe killed William Tolbert who had been in government since 1951 with President Tubmen in a bloody coup. Samuel Doe ruled for ten years and turned Liberia to a personal courtyard, until 1990 when he was brutally murdered by Prince Yormie Johnson version of rebel. Then rebel version of Charles Taylor ruled the country in a tyrannical and despotic manner, until recently when peace returned to Liberia, and the country became the first country in Africa to produce female President in a general election.

Wani (2014) stated that the entire African continent is under transition. Most of the countries in Africa are conflict ridden societies. In some countries there is intractable political wrangle going on from last so many decades and still conflict is unresolved. The conflict situations have been controlled in Sudan after dividing the country into two parts South Sudan and North Sudan by the United Nation interventions. In some countries there is ethnic conflict, such as Nigeria; here it’s a long story of conflict between two communities Muslims and Christians. Here so much human rights violations are taking place daily. Somalia is under the conflict crises from a long time still conflict is going on there which affects badly the innocent people of this country. In Ethiopia there is ethnic animosity between Christians and Muslims which is still unresolved. And the situations of Libya and Egypt are also volatile and critical. Africa continent as a whole is facing so
many nation building challenges such as: corruption, conflict, crime, poverty, bad governance, malaria, HIV and lack of good infra-structure etc.

The foregoing is a pointer to the fact that in Africa, most countries are still been ruled by the tyrants, as a result of this, good governance and development is very far from the continent. This menace has dogged almost all African countries since independence that the whole continent is riddled with despots. Most of the leaders have decided to remain in power and aid to retain number one seat of their countries. Most of the leaders have intentionally render democracy useless in their countries simply because they want to remain in power.

Africa continues to face a host of challenges as it struggles to bring about inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Although several theories have been advanced to explain why Africa remains poor for over fifty to sixty years of independence, African leaders supported by the passiveness of the citizens and the weaknesses in the global governance institutions have wreaked havoc on the continent and its people through poorly thought out ideologies and policies, corruption, illicit capital flights, dubious agreements with multinational and transnational corporations, abuse of human rights, etc. (Poncian & Mgaya, 2015).

Nevertheless, we cannot say that Africa has totally failed in the mission of good governance but still it is trying to achieve progress and development. Some of the countries in Africa are trying better like, South Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, Botswana, Burkina Faso, and Namibia. Other countries are just trying to come out from the mess of the bad governance. Africa has to learn lessons from the Asian countries in terms of development and advancement such as, Japan, China, India, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore etc. (Wani, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the trouble with Africa is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. This paper has argued that Africa’s poverty has more to do with its internal weaknesses, notably its bad leadership than external forces. There is nothing basically wrong with the African character or political system in operation. The character of political leadership became a problem as most of them lost or lacked control of effective leadership. This led to the scramble and partition of state resources to suit their purpose. It is sad to observe that Africa’s leadership selection process takes the imposition pattern directly or indirectly. Worrisome too is the fact that the Africa’s political formation is along tribal groupings and ethnic aggregations thus visionary leaders are dropped while mediocres are often selected or imposed on the masses.

Therefore, Africa needs leaders that are patriotic, visionary and bold. They should be emerged through the democratic process based on constitutionally fixed period and leave through the same process. Thus, the electoral process should be strengthened to ensure free and fair elections at all levels, an election where the citizens have the ultimate power to make decisions on who represents them. Thus, the military should not be allowed to truncate the re-democratisation process; rather, they should continue to defend the territories of their respective countries.
As the former President of Nigeria Obasanjo (1993:100) stated, the crucial elements in the good governance being called for in Africa are accountability, transparency, predictability, human rights etc. African can develop the common values necessary for the governance of Africans societies which in essence must be rooted in the spirit of cooperation, tolerant and adherence to constitutional rules and procedures. These are required to control the menace of corruptions which makes Africa as whole weak. Popular participation of the people will give birth to the responsible political institutions in Africa. Therefore, a robust and effective civil society is required which could serve as a watchdog.

Finally, there is a need to create a democratic culture, a culture that is receptive to political competition through popular participation not just in elections but also in decision making, hence, the spirit of open and public dialogue is critical. This will make the new efforts at re-democratization in Africa to lead to genuine democracy.

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