

## **Sustainable Development in Africa: Challenges and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

*Most countries in Africa today have embraced democracy. This is alright but not too important. What is important is the sustainability of this democratization process and democracy itself. We all know that what we have on the ground in some countries is seamy democracy. Let us hope they will metamorphose into democracies. There is deep pessimism about countries in Africa, this is why these countries are seen and treated as underdogs. Our problems are multi-quam plural and are undeniably colossal and serious. Africa has its fair share if not more of ecological disasters, (natural world disasters) some of these were bargained for hence man-made do we talk of bad, ineptitude leadership, corruption, diseases, poverty, environmental pollution, wars in different nations in Africa. Though the darkness and smoke are thick and heavy, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. There is still hope. At least some countries in Africa are planning seriously and have developed consistently sound policies and have fared better. Some are embarking on economic and political reforms which are yielding dividends. Some are benefiting from one world aid organization or the other. My purpose in this paper is to discuss the challenges to sustainable democracy, strategies for development of Africa. We suggest a more active involvement of each actor, and a more co-operative relationship among these actors.*

### **Introduction**

There is deep pessimism in many quarters about Africa. The Africa that catches the headlines is the Africa in continued civil war, the Africa in great famine, the Africa with great natural disorders, the Africa with a chain of problems such as economic depression, inflation, breakdown of law and order, and with corrupt leadership.

In the past, Europe colonized and underdeveloped Africa. Today Africa survives with teeth on edge because Europeans and Africans through the instrumentality of neo-colonialism under develop Africa. The African youth and the masses have watched continuously and helplessly as the light of hope and seed of a better tomorrow ignited by the optimism of independence dimmed in the hands of both our past military and civilian leaders. Africa, hitherto, proclaimed the land of the great, the land of promise, is now littered with the debris of broken dreams, unrealized hopes and punctuated seamy growth. Africa in the hands of most of our selfish leaders is eclipsed by the heavy and dark shadows of lawlessness in the pinnacles of power, corruption, ineptitude, and disillusionment. Many of us have in their very sober moments desired the delicious meal of colonialism having been put off by the vagaries and sophisticated nature of internal slavery.

It is a truism that Africa has gone through the burden of colonialism, most countries in Africa have set the burden of militarism ablaze, the fact remains that we have the burden of civilian leaders, which give birth to burdens of exploitation, economic recession, election rigging, imprisonment of political opponents, turning of states into private fiefdoms and others. A matured, calculated and well thought out response, though painful, is a sine qua non for our collective survival, well being and growth as a people and as sovereign nations. It is based on this background that our topic of discussion is not only important but timely.

My purpose in this paper is to discuss the concept of sustainable development briefly, the challenges to sustainable development which anchors on good governance, strategies for development, the role of governments of nations and actors in the development of Africa. We suggest more active and cooperative relationship among these actors, for the idea of complementarities of efforts of these actors to make sense and become really felt.

### **Sustainable Development**

On account of the wide gap between the developed and the underdeveloped nations many people have engaged themselves in the bid to define the term development. The term development is slippery. For progress in academics and every discussion every misleading term must be clearly defined or abandoned. Ogugua (1996:7) made an attempt to define development. He says this term development "is very slippery that is the reason behind different definitions people offer. It is the noun form of the verb to develop which means bringing out what is latent in something, making something to grow by working out the potentialities in it",

*The Chambers Dictionary* holds that it is "the act or process of developing: state of being developed: a gradual unfolding or growth". According to Rodney (1972:9) when it concerns an individual it includes... increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being". But an individual cannot exist outside the society hence for Rodney it implies "an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships".

A society is developing if it has the wherewithal of "overcoming malnutrition, poverty, disease which are the most wide spread aspects of human suffering" (Benstein, 1981:7). Development is not uni-dimensional rather it is multi-dimensional. According to Amaucheazi (1980:4) it involves "the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological, social relations among others". It is not linear. Ogugua (1996), development is "progressive and at the same time cumulative". Development simply put is transformation of the societal organs for enhancement of the living standard of the populace. Little wonder, Cockroft (1972:XVI) holds that it involves structural transformation of "the economy, society, polity and culture of the satellite that permits the self-generating and self-perpetuating use and development of the people's potentials".

The first phase of the question is now over. What then is sustainable development? Sustainable development requires conserving natural resources and energy, and controlling these judiciously, in a mature and accountable way so as to ensure that the environment capital, the present generation borrow from the future generations are developed, multiplied and reserved for their use in a way that will ensure their wellbeing and development. It involves controlling our economic, political, social ecological environments and keeping them away from pollution and decay. *The Commission on Environment and Development* (1987:8) says that "the needs of the current generation without compromising ability of future generations are to meet their own needs".

### **Challenges to Sustainable Development**

We cannot rightly think of development without thinking of the governments of nations. Most nations in Africa have embraced democracy. It is the onus of these governments of nations to ensure that their policies reflect putting in place sustainable development. The challenges to sustainable development become more or less challenges or obstacles to democratic government or good governance. There are some essentials to good governance in a democratic set up. These include: a written constitution, constitutionalism - government of laws, declaration of rights - in order to ensure the safeguard of individual liberties, a democratic governmental structure - this helps to ensure participation of the populace and disciplined leadership and followership.

Democracy is an ideal. It is an aspiration of the people. There is no place in the world that democratic practice is perfect. Mistakes are made and are corrected. The mistakes of democracy take more and refined democracy to correct. Burns (1994:30) observed "No one denies that existing representative assemblies are defective, but even if an automobile does not work well it is foolish to go back into a farm cart, howsoever romantic." Let us now look at some obstacles to good governance as these will open to sight why. It has been difficult for government of nations to have embraced sustainable development policies which should be the end product of good governance. These factors will be discussed under these headings international politics, lack of political direction, absence of social justice, institutional decay, and the population crises.

### **International Politics**

When one talks of international politics, he invariably talks of international relation, for nations are not independent of each other because they are not self-sufficient. In the distant past, nations related and they had a number of ways of achieving their foreign policy objectives including war. Before the cold war between United States of America and the Soviet Union, there was an old world order.

Today, a new world order is in place with the end of the cold war. Things have fallen apart and the centre holds unlike in Chinua Achebe's instance in *Things Fall Apart*, where the centre would no longer hold. Things hold in the sense that the United Nations is still alive. It is very clear that capitalism had spread its tentacles too wide with its disregard for social justice. Experience has shown and proved that the cries and noises being made by most of our governments as regards embracing democracy are only pretentious and casuistic. These so-called leaders are merely distracting attention of the people of Africa and those of Europeans and are silently though manifestly plotting measures in grand way to attract foreign aid. They create confidence by their orchestrated measures of seemingly democratizing Africa, and build their own fiefdoms. With the digitalization of almost everything, and the Maclubn's global village becoming

all the more real with the introduction of the computer and internet Africans are at a loss. This globalization has a lot of implications for us. Can we afford to live like those in America, Britain, France etc, whose ways of life infiltrate to us through the CNN, Video tapes etc?

The crucial questions must be asked. Japan has virtually no natural resources, but she is an industrialized nation. Nigeria with all her natural resources has not found her feet. Has Nigeria a place in this world order? Have we started dreaming of finding our way on the Labyrinthine new information super highway? If Africa does not get information with this speed with which it passes, she cannot fit into this new world order which spread across information, economic and politics. Information helps in developing a nation and a people. Any set of people who lacks the necessary and required information lacks one of the vital tools for development. Information is one of the life-wires of any nation. The populace have seen that Africa is behind and that our past leaders had been selfish, the past leaders and present leaders need not be asked to sit up. No, they may not because the ill gotten wealth and the inordinate passion to be in control have blinded them. The populace must realize the plight and do something urgently in order to institute the policies favourable to sustainable development.

#### **Lack of Political Direction**

Nothing is congenitally wrong with us. The problem is not with the food we eat, the water we drink or our air. No, it is basically the problem of leadership. Kukah (1996: 13) expressed it thus: "clearly, our leadership has been visionless, rapaciously and tyrannically corrupt and lacking in good will." Our leaders have not acted intelligently enough. They have allowed their passion and desire for wealth to block their reason and they showed lack of political will and courage. I respect people like Nyerere of Tanzania and Nelson Mandela of South Africa. An individual without a vision dies, likewise a nation; for where there is a will, there is hope and this hope will sustain one in not only finding the way but in being in the way. The past leaders of Africa with the exception of very few did not do Africa proud. They were lazy and wicked. They refused to think. They lived a pleasurable kind of life. Today history cannot praise them; it must hurt them, for they exchanged hardwork, proper vision and discipline needed to build a formidable Africa with life of ease, greedy and accumulation of wealth. They stole from Africa and left Africa naked, making it difficult for Africa to cater for her sons and daughters who are brothers and sisters of these looters.

#### **Absence of Social Justice**

At times I wonder if actually human beings learn anything from history. I wonder if politicians think they are more intelligent and clever than the people they serve. You hear a lot of double talk. In Nigeria for instance, you hear a state Governor saying contradictory things within a week, of course in different gatherings. African life has cascaded into a despicable rut on account of the unquenchable, uncontrollable and immoral greed of African politicians. Social justice is all about being conscious of the fact that human life has a worth, and that those in authority who are elected (appointed or chanced) to serve are to protect this human life. This anchors on the principle that human life is a primary value with every other value subordinated to it. One cannot rightly talk of social justice without distributive justice. The fact is that no nation is without any resources and no nation has every resources needed to run it. This is why we talk of absolute and comparative cost advantage of nations.

Resources are both human and non-human. The right view is to see these resources as been put in an area by God from the pursuit of the happiness, growth and harmony of the society in question and for humanity in general. This is why Nigerian oil finds its way in United States of America, and Ghana's cocoa finds it way in Britain. Social and distributive justice seek to use the resources of nations to remove the obstacles or challenges to development so as to put in place participatory society. The acme point remains giving each one according to one's need and not according to one's wants. When this principle becomes applied in our society then we can think positively towards sustainable development as waste will be dealt with.

#### **Institutional Decay**

It is on record that Africa produced great civilizations and empires like old Egyptian empire, Songhai, Mali, Oyo, Bornu etc. These systems have collapsed due to the intrusion of colonialism into Africa. Greed, mismanagement, kleptocracy, graft and theft of our post-colonial politicians added salt to injury and phased out these old political systems and in some places their traces. Africa today, is in a dilemma; she is not sure whether to go back to the past or to embrace democratization though she makes noise in favour of modernization/democratization. Africa is a hybrid of political system, a foot in the past and a foot in the present. In the past, people who were asked by communities to

lead declined, not because they are unworthy but because they know and realize what it means to lead; that is to be of service.

But today people who do not even qualify, they are sure they do not qualify, struggle for political posts at times they rig elections, manipulate election results, maim 'people and even kill to lead. Don't you see the sign of institutional decay? People who will be afraid to swear by a traditional totem (god, goddess) are seen swearing without qualms of conscience using the Bible or Koran in the name of Almighty God. But they are afraid to swear in the name of *Alusi*. And after ignominious service as this and that, having looted that states treasury they will retire to the village and live with the same people they have thrown their future to the mud and seek relevance in dredging up confused traditional images to worship.

### **The Issue of Population**

African countries have great number of citizens with very low income per capita (per head). In the past, we needed many persons in the families in order to produce enough. Today agrarian economy has given way to modern economies and it looks like our population outstrips our productive capacities. Something urgent need be done about it. Abortion is not the solution. Euthanasia is not the solution. The use of contraceptive is not even the solution. Natural family planning need to be introduced.

We need to give birth to the number of children we can sustain and train. When there is population pressure or upsurge on the available scarce resources the leaders are tasked all the more and the job is made more difficult. There is no logical connection between small number of people and equitable distribution of wealth and enhanced development. China has a population of over a billion and Nigeria has only about 150 million persons, but China is highly developed.

Some of these aforementioned challenges make the pursuit of sustainable development policies a child's play. Now let us turn to the strategies which if tactfully and religiously followed stand a chance of seeing Africa developed.

### **Strategies for African Development**

Development is a self-thing. It has to do with interest and desire, planning and effort. Programmes of economic restructuring by organs of international repute have not succeeded. Some countries in Asia have succeeded without recourse to these agencies. This shows it is a do-it-yourself thing. If we are to do it ourselves, what strategies are we going to employ so as to ensure that it is done? The measures advocated include good governance, investment in human resources, investment in social infrastructure, development of the cult of entrepreneurship, pursuit' for social stability, integration with world markets etc.

### **Good Governance**

The vision of the leader is the vision of a nation. We all know that lack of vision destroys an individual and a nation. Visionless vision does the same. We know that the government in power in any nation has a lot to do with the economy of the nation. Think of the case of Tanzania when Nyerere was there; think of the case of Ghana with Rawlings, think of Paul Biya of Cameroon, think of Japan and some Asian nations without any natural resources. These nations have made some remarkable impact. This is due to the vision of the leaders of these nations.

Good governance is necessary, for it underpins development. In short, it may make development take place without the help of other factors but it promotes development. Good governance is seen and recognized wherever it exists, for it shines like a diamond, there is high degree of certainty as regards the actions of government. Government actions are more predictable because it operates with a framework of known laws and these laws are dependable.

### **Development of the Cult of Entrepreneurship**

It is the individual or the organizations in any state that takes the central position in development and growth of the economy. They stand at the epicenter of the economy. They can only succeed if the government gives them the incentives or palliatives, putting in place an investment environment for nobody want to invest and lose. Wealth and value are not created by the ministers, commissioners or public servants. Wealth is rather created by the entrepreneurs through their litany of actions. Governments should make effort to nurture and protect these entrepreneurs, for they see dimly ways of reconciling means and ends, ways of making something novel or providing a service and plunge into activities geared towards making it real. They are heroic persons for they take risks which the governments on account of huge responsibilities cannot; take. Governments cannot provide jobs for every person; hence, the need to

develop all the more the culture and environment of entrepreneurship to enable those who can, earn their livelihood on their own to do so; or else the culture of entitlement (professional administrators, civil servants) will tear us apart.

### **Pursuit of Social Stability**

Everybody is first and foremost a family being before he becomes a societal being for the family is the first agent of socialization. The society is built up from the bottom, the family and shaped from the top by the state. The national leaders work with individuals which the families and citizens have created. The family is the foundation of the larger society and essential to the survival of the culture of a people. The family is a primary group with a difference and a social institution. The integrity of the society flows from that of the family. The communities are equally of importance in structuring both the individuals and the state. Politicians propose policies which the people dispose. Laws are made by the government and the people through their attitude and actions give credence and life to these laws. The communities are the real players to see that there is order in the society. For instance, for the past two years laws were broken and order was chased out of the state (Anambra). The Policemen could not do anything because they were involved. The people embraced Bakassi phenomenon and saga and brought order to the state.

### **Integration with World Markets**

When an organ in the body is sick, the entire body remains sick. A sick fellow in the society will find it difficult to relate very well and efficiently with others who are healthy. We have said earlier that governments find it difficult to create value and wealth. Governments have proved to be bad managers of business (material resources). Government actions and inactions most often obstruct economic development. Government can assist by facilitating the market; by putting in place policies that would enable entrepreneurs to operate not at a loss. It is when the market is friendly that investors are attracted and they are the force that catapults the economy of a nation. Economic isolation is not good for any economy (nation) for no nation is self sufficient. There is need for nations to have the global outlook. Experience has shown that nations which are integrated with world markets develop faster and are economically reliable than others which had boycotted association with the global markets. Help can come to these nations in form of reductions in tariffs due to importation from nations, easy access to these markets, free trade, philanthropic gestures from wealthier nations etc.

### **The Role of Governments and Other Conceivable Actors**

In the past, the state was the major agent of economic development. Since the 1980's the state has been seen and accepted as being the major obstacle to progress and development. This is due to its bureaucratic measures; high level corruption, inherent in the system. The past has been the era of public enterprises; which were mismanaged. Of course, we had earlier hinted that the state is not a good creator of wealth and value since these are not created in the cabinets.

The heavy regulation of the private sector is what we want the governments to look into as it has always led to excessive debt problems and inflation. It is the role of governments to help in creating an enabling environment for business activities. There is every need for governments to show that they are guided by the rule of law and not the rule of man, to ensure that human rights are protected and respected. In a good number of African states, adequate environment for economic growth and development is not there; and activities of some governments are harmful for business to thrive. The governments need put in place stable conditions for business or predictable conditions. As corruption grows in the dark, openness becomes a means of actualizing this.

There is every need for governments to review the scope for private sector alternatives to public utilities. Nigeria is in need into sourcing these alternatives today. But these alternatives should not have been done to leave everything to the private sector. World Bank Paper (1992) reviewing the bank's lending to privatization writes: "The main lessons of experience are clear: first, private ownership itself makes a difference. Some state-owned enterprises have been efficient and well managed for some periods, but, government ownership seldom permits sustained good performance over more than a few years. There is a higher probability of efficient performance in private enterprise.

Second, the process of privatization, though not simple, can and has worked; this is true for a variety of enterprise in a variety of settings, including in poor countries". The governments have not been up and doing; at times manned by

inexperienced people; people who are selfish, coupled with the fact that they are not good creators of wealth. It is necessary that other actors join hand with governments to provide these essential services for the good of the people and development of the physical infrastructures in Africa.

It is not very easy to move from a public-sector dominated economy to private-sector dominated economy. It is a challenge, but this challenge is an opportunity if it is handled very well. It needs the support of governments, entrepreneurs, non-governmental agencies, aid donors and other members of the international communities. The help these actors render becomes meaningful only when they render help the people want. For instance, in some cases projects of doubtful value are embarked upon because the donors favour it leaving vital areas of concern. The African nations will grow faster if these aid granting nations develop the willingness to sustain high levels of aid in flexible forms, render help without strings attached and possibly aid in cancellation of debts to lessen balance of payment problems of African nations. A crucial question faces us boldly in the face now and it is how do we encourage the private sector?

### **Supporting the Private Sector**

The private sector is known for profit. This pursuit of profit will be the anchor of economic growth and development in Africa. Like America and Japan are developed because of the concentrations and survival of private firms. It is our onus to seek the best ways to enable the private sector to thrive for there lies our hope. Governments are not good creators of value and wealth because of distractions and lack of good management.

There is need to put in place a healthy, well educated, intelligent and resourceful work force. This necessitates making human beings human resources. Where they are human resources and there are no enabling physical infrastructures, nothing will happen for these agents of development will operate poorly as they lack not only tools to do the job but equally the inner drive. The private sectors need finance to do the huge job of transforming Africa. This kind of money needed for this task cannot be sourced from within, hence, the need to liaise with the aid donors. It is not easy for these donors to deal directly with private men and women or organization for they have dealt only with governments of nations in the past; moreover, they have lasting identities. The private sector need to understand the problems ahead: and find a way of developing new skills in communicating with the aid donors and make themselves more responsible as to warrant relating with.

The private sector need to cultivate foresight and hindsight and use new discoveries and inventions to cushion the effect of the losses incurred in the past by the nations, and develop the ability of being flexible, and adjusting to changing environments. In short, change is the only thing permanent hence; they must be ready to change anytime in order to fit into the trend the world over. In Kenya, for instance, experts predicted environmental degradation in the 1950's, the people invested in conservation and adjusted to suit the changing times, the degradation is yet to happen.

There is need to invest on studies for it is a way of improving our knowledge of reality and our understanding. The East Asian experience is still current, an area without natural resources and without so much foreign investment or aid, becoming developed with strong economic muscles. The questions we need address include: how can we increase private investment? How do we ensure that we shift from traditional exports to non-traditional exports? How do we develop the human resources needed? Of course with functional education, proper vision, and love for our people, the governments can help in creating enabling environment for business.

### **Conclusion**

African nations have embraced democracy. Political reforms are on likewise economic reforms; so there is hope that Africa will in the future rub shoulders with other developed continents. There are evidences of some goodwill by some of our presidents, as signs of economic revival are seen in some natural resources. The governments' responses to the development of Africa have been poor and disappointing. This is due to mismanagement of public utilities. The role of private sector has been encouraging, there is need to step up investment in the private sector, as it is this sector that controls the markets and create value. There is need for the development of an adequate vision. African nations have dwelt so much on traditional exports, this has not done us proud, and we have slaved for the West. There is need to diversify and embrace non-natural resource sectors. Though we cannot get into the manufacturing sector presently, we can start now to lay the plans for so doing in the future. Economic growth and development requires a troika of forces, the government, the private sector and the donors.

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