

# Governance Democracy: The Dynamics and Possibilities for Development in Africa

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**Abstract** - This article deals with the dynamics of governance in a democracy and its interconnectedness with national as well as continental development. Since political institutions are important in the development equation of any nation, because power and authority are needed for allocating resources needed for development, it highlights the imperatives of good governance in a democracy. It also notes that the extent of freedom of individuals or citizens in social, economic and political processes determines the success or otherwise of any democracy. The article, therefore, stresses that the interface of political current is governance that paves the way for development, particularly as development can be achieved only through collective efforts, directed by the predominant systems of government. Again, it emphasizes the need for the involvement of the citizens in participating in governance and the political process and equally the importance for accountability by the people at the corridors of power. In conclusion, the article emphasizes the essence for appropriate platforms to be instituted for the pursuit of the public good of the state and the need for their effective participation in the implementation of public policies for the acceleration of political, economic and social development of the state.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Development, Governance, Infrastructure, Institutionalization, System, Rule of law,



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The institutionalization of positive system of governance is important for a nation to develop. This is because it is through the political current of any nation, as is perceived in governance, that development can be achieved; and this is done only through collective efforts and directed by the predominant systems of governance. Indeed, good governance embodies the rule of law, respect for human/group rights, religious tolerance, social justice and other essentials of democratic governance. These are preconditions for stability which provides room for the actualization of the common good and the subsequent development of the state. From the early times of different nation's existence, the domains of government determine how far a people will go in terms of growth and development. Thus, the drive to development remains the infrastructure of governance, the collective resources and the galvanized individual capacities of the nation.

Governance is, therefore, not just an independent variable to be factored into regression analysis of growth and development, rather it is dependent on the manner in which states organize themselves and therefore impinges on all other forces linked to indicators of development. These include human capital development, respect for property rights, the rule of law, openness to the outside world, the adoption of technology, access to information, transparency, and a general capacity to exploit both immediate and distant environments [1]. It therefore involves the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. Equally, it comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate differences [2].

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But, the implicit adherence to those manners of organization in governance and the attendant exploitation of the environments for proper progressive development is the problem of most African countries. Thus, a consideration of the dynamics and possibilities of democratic governance in the African development efforts shall be our focus. And development involves the active participation of all and sundry so as to bring about concrete and meaningful transformation in the lives of the people and community, state and the nation at large.

## **2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

### **2.1 The Concept of Democracy**

In this discourse, democracy is seen as a form of government in which the supreme power of a political community rests on popular sovereignty, i.e. a people-driven system of governance. In such a system, the masses exercise the power of general will in electing political office-holders and, at the same time, determining the style of governance and trends of public policies in the state [3]. Hence, by extension, [4] rightly sees it as a system of government which seeks to realize a generally recognized common good through collective initiation and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegate authority to agents to implement the broad decisions made by people through majority vote.

As a principle of governance, democracy in the classical context is articulated as a revolutionary antidote to dictatorship, monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy and feudalism [5]. However, in the contemporary times, democracy has been referred to as the expression of popular will of the political community through elected representatives and in addition, a government that ensures social, political and economic equality [6]. For [7] the contemporary democracy rests on "representative government." Consequently, the ordinary citizen comes into the process only by casting vote in favour of a representative or a broad policy of a party. And the decision on concrete issues is left to the body of the representatives elected by the people and accountable to the people who, depending on their positive or negative performances, may turn them out at the next election for a replacement by a different group. In other words, democracy is a form of government exercised by the whole body of free citizens directly or indirectly through a system of representation as distinguished from monarchy, aristocracy or oligarchy and it safeguards the right of the minority. It refers to a specific form of government which allows the participation of the majority in the decision-making process of the polity and which also enthrones equality of the individual in the polity. Democracy as a system of government is based on the acquisition of authority from the people and any authority that does not emerge from the consent of the people is not democratic. Again, a democratic polity must be based on the rule of law. In other words, there are no sacred cows before the law and no individual takes the law into his hands because the system provides opportunity of redress for the aggrieved. Furthermore, a democratic polity must be legitimate. So, given the rules for accession to power, the leader has the right to rule i.e. he is the right person to be there. This means that there is the right institutional mechanism for his accession to power. Another side of this is that he is ruling rightly i.e. he is performing well, given the ends for which he has been elected or chosen. There is also the need, in a democracy, for the people to have the right to effect changes in the leadership or the government of their country. That is, mechanisms for providing choice must be provided. Finally, there must be transparency and accountability i.e. leaders must be held responsible for their actions as representatives of the people who entrusted them with power to achieve particular ends. The account for such actions must not only be given periodically, but must exhibit clearness in action, which puts such action above question. A

transparent process or system is one that is open, very clear and very easily recognized. If a process is not clearly understood, open or recognized, it is not transparent.

The major hallmarks of democracy therefore, include popular participation, supremacy of majority will but with respect for minority rights, constitution and government by popular choices through periodic election. Included also, in these hallmarks, are competition for public office, freedom of press and association, incorruptible judiciary, respect for the rule of law, open and accountable government, and existence of competing political parties whose programmes and candidates provide alternatives for voters.

As a form of government, democracy, therefore, appeals to both the government and the governed. In other words, it assures equality by opposing discriminatory practices and abuse of power, as well as assuring individual liberties through constitutional safeguards such as freedom of association and free press. It further guarantees popular participation in government and must be relevant to people's lives and thus be able to guarantee transparency and improve people's wellbeing and quality of life. Though democracy is not a perfect system, it remains the most enduring form of government in the world today.

## **2.2 The Concept of Governance**

The literature of political science has regarded governance as nebulous, ambiguous and a vague term. However, in this article, we shall look at governance as the totality of processes entailed in the exercise and management of the collective will of the people or group under a defined authority or constitution [8]. Governance is not only concerned with political activities and institutions such as the economy, family and other human congregations, but also can be regarded as the provision of leadership throughout a given society for the actualization of common good.

Thus, for the purpose of contemporary relevance, governance needs to be qualified as good [9]. In other words, governance is synonymous with good government and should be measured in terms of certain attributes. These attributes include popular participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, equity, respect for the rule of law, political stability, peace and security of lives and properties, economic self-dependency and social welfare system. As stated supra, the importance of governance providing the mechanisms, processes and institutions for citizens and group to articulate their interest, exercise their rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences [10], cannot be overemphasized. Good governance comprises some specific characteristics and processes such as participation of the people in the decision-making machinery of the society. As a fundamental principle, participation is an indication of the inclusive nature of the system of decision-making. Thus, the interests of both men and women, young and old, the minorities and the vulnerable in the society are considered in decision-making i.e. high premium is put on democratic values such as equality and freedom. Equity and fairness in the application of rules are also indicators of good governance. In other words government must be fair to all – majority and minority groups, male and female citizens. It must treat all as equal citizens and this must be reflected in the distribution of resources. Again, transparency and accountability of the authority to the polity are the cornerstones of good governance [11]. It considers if decisions are taken and enforced according to rules, procedures and regulations. It insists on an effective system of checks and balances among the various arms of government and across the ranks of public service. In furtherance, governance entails the efficient and effective delivery of services. This requires that the government must be responsive and responsible so as to meet the needs of the citizens. This means that the decision-makers must be resourceful and innovative in the management of scarce

resources in order to reduce poverty and poverty-related problems such as illiteracy and endemic diseases. In other words, good governance stands for acceptable government and desirable leadership [12]. Good governance, therefore, deals with how those who have the authority of the state make efforts to meet the needs and expectations of the citizenry in order to earn their confidence. This requires the effective and efficient management of state resources – material and human – for the realization of government objectives. Consequently, good governance facilitates or even serves as a pre-condition for the attainment of sustainable development – the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

### **2.3 Development**

Though difficult to conceptualize because of varied scholarly interpretations, in this paper, development will mean the increasing ability of any country (society) to effectively utilize or mobilize all available resources, both material and human, in transforming the socio-political environment in order to satisfy the social and/or material needs of the citizens. It is identified by collective increase among members of a society in their capacity to deal with their environment in their own interest. In other words, the concept of development includes not only economic, social and political changes, but also a broad and all-embracing transformation of the society. It involves the structuring of society in such a way that will improve the quality of lives as well as the satisfaction of psychological wants of members of any given rural area. It also involves appropriate governance relations, mobilizing of resources and peoples' capacities, which will, in the final analysis, facilitate development.

Consequently, development of a nation involves total and full mobilization of the whole societal system that has to be comprehensive and that will invoke total political commitment. Such development will be geared towards eradication of poverty, reduction of inequalities, checking unemployment and facilitating easy access to basic needs of life, such as food, health-care, education, shelter, electricity, transportation and communication.

## **3 THE DYNAMICS AND POSSIBILITIES OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE ON DEVELOPMENT**

### **3.1 Democracy and Governance: Any Link?**

The concepts of democracy and governance are intrinsically inter-linked and interdependent. Democracy and governance are both based on salient values and elements such as participation, collective action, legitimacy, general acceptability and accountability. Although both democracy and good governance possess common elements, they cannot be used synonymously. A democratic government may not be a good government in practical realities. Meanwhile, good governance cannot be guaranteed without the fundamental elements of democracy as there can be no democracy without well-organized political parties. In addition, people must see concrete evidence of democracy making a difference in their lives through good governance.

On the other hand, a political party is generally very essential to democracy and good governance. It constitutes a central instrument of democracy and governance. It provides the means of promoting accountability, collective action, popular participation, inclusiveness, legitimacy and accountability through the

integration of their competing principles, ideologies and goals for eventual control of the government in the state. However, political parties are not in our purview for this paper.

In the African continent, not minding that democratic governments are said to be instituted, there is lack of enough concrete evidence of democracy or what we may call democracy dividends/satisfying socio-economic conditions. For instance, no one cares for democracy on an empty stomach. Thus, there is difficulty for democracy to thrive where there is abject poverty. Hence, a democracy that fails to provide the anticipated outcome undermines development.

It is important to note that for many Africans, unless the human being is used as the basis of development, there is no good governance. Hence, once the principles of democracy are adhered to, they guarantee basic individual and group liberties and ensure governance according to law. Again, through periodic popular elections, democracy facilitates peaceful change of leaders and thereby leads to upliftment of the society to a better one. Apart from all these, democracy has the potential to accelerate the pace of development by promoting popular participation and by equally ensuring accountability in governance. This is because if the people are allowed a say in the government, i.e. in the choice of their leaders and policy directions, it will be incorporated into development plans and, thus, their commitment will be better assured. Moreover, there can be no viable democracy, with its attendant development, without relative peace. Yet relative peace is often assured by good governance. Both good governance and peace are therefore imperatives for a durable democratic polity. But when political leaders become conflict/crises generators, they threaten the basic foundations of democracy.

### **3.2 The Nexus between Governance and Development**

Good governance paves the way for development. Because the domains of governance determine how far a people will go in terms of development, the bankruptcy of governance will compromise all individual's capacity for growth and development. Governance is therefore necessary to accelerate group yearnings for development that caters for all [13].

Respect for shared norms, values, ethics and belief systems has helped in sustaining efficacious governance and sustainable development [14]. These popular values and ethics that are generally respected, shared and subscribed to, can be best described as ideals because they form the bases upon which the actions of all are judged. Because these ideals are central to the existence of groups, they determine what is normal and acceptable and what is not. It therefore becomes imperative that leaders must possess and respect these ideals so as to be able to provide needed governance infrastructure for the people. And because leaders are the mirror images of society and the embodiment of the ideals used in forming opinions, attitudes and practices, they are the models and, therefore, face higher stake when their adherence is being measured. Consequently, leaders in government as models must display these shared ideals as they determine the present and chart the future in their states. Leadership, thus, remains a vital factor in effecting desirable compromises in our democracy. The way the political leaders respect the rules of the games of politics; their ability to imbibe the democratic value of accommodation, tolerance of opposition and participation; and their ability to demonstrate gallantry in defeat and grace in victory determine the extent of harmony in future in their states. In addition, a good and committed leadership should build core state institutions that would work creditably. The combined manifestations of these ideals therefore, remain the hallmark of strong structures of governance that will be popular, enduring and legitimate. The development of, and the inter-relationships among these ideals were

fairly uniform, central and stable in the past, but their development and definitions across strata – between the rulers and the ruled – in the contemporary African environment appear precarious, dynamic and transient [1]. No wonder then, the increasing realization that good governance matters to development have gained necessary attention.

It is the current and force of governance that set the pace in the political domain with its attendant development. Therefore, attitudes towards governance can be used to judge the state and the capacity and potentiality of the state to develop. And what governance means is not difficult to depict. In the academic arena, the concept has been variously defined, but the definition exists within a consensus. For, even on the streets and the market, whether good or bad, governance, according to [15], is obvious: when you see it you will know it. Governance, therefore, is a self-describing entity because it affects everybody in tangible terms. According to the [16], it involves several aspects including the pervasive voice of citizens' participation, empowerment, and the assurance of civil liberty, equity, the rule of law, the curbing of corruption, and the improvement of the delivery of public services by making them more transparent, accountable and responsive. The public sector transparency is important in the governance matrix, as it is the ligament that uniquely connects people with their government. The core principles and practice of the public sector determine the extent to which people benefit from governance, form opinions about it, and relate to political systems. These background elements, in the final analysis, determine whether a given nation will develop and how far these developments will go [1]. However, it has been realized that aggressive self-interest [11] – both among leaders and followers in African states – has blocked their chances to develop. For instance, it is not enough for leaders to call for patriotism, when their words and actions do not demonstrate such. Nor is it important for leaders to call for discipline and sacrifice when their lives indicate the opposite. No society grows or develops without some appreciable level of patriotism and discipline.

### **3.3 The Imperatives of Good Governance**

Two extremes exist on the governance continuum: good governance and bad governance. It is in the practicality and effects of governance on the individual and groups that everyone, educated or not, rural or urban, can relate to governance and describe it at any level of sophistication because it affects everyone always. Perceiving and relating governance in directional terms results in people considering governance to be good or bad. It is considered good when it is legitimately constituted and upheld and when it reflects and respects the core parameters espoused for people to enjoy a high quality livelihood [1]. However, the opposite is the case when people feel alienated from governance and even when governance does not yield the appropriate platform for quality livelihood, and so they see it as illegitimate and bad.

Good governance can be said to mean effective state administrative frameworks that enable citizens to access resources optimally to build capacities so as to make real progress and achieve a high-quality livelihood as deemed appropriate within the socio-cultural and political milieu. Again, good governance builds sustainably effective systems that would not hamper the developmental potentialities of the citizens and that would minimize risks that could cripple initiatives. So, state administrative frameworks that cannot guarantee these outcomes would be deemed worthless, anti-developmental and ultimately anti-people [1]. Going by the analytical designs of government as espoused by [1], three government deficits can be identified in most African countries. These are: compliance deficit, a coherence deficit and a democratic voice deficit.



Looking at the compliance deficit, it has been noted that the people at the corridors of power in most African nations are united on the importance of societal ideals and their capacities to strengthen governance and galvanize development but, their actions negate such unity in practical terms. Hence, the peoples' raised hopes and expectations are never matched with the actions of government. Thus, their promises and their handling of key issues and problems are filled with non-compliance on the ideals. And once the ruler-ship is found wanting in compliance with the provisions of national visions, values, norms, beliefs and ethics, the followership immediately falters, disregards the compass of governance and retires to faith [1]. Another important and critical subject is on how coherent the people are on their perception and subscription of governance, which have implications for ultimate sustainable development. Coherence, which is usually achieved through a collective perception of the rulers and the ruled on the implications of governance ideals are fragmented. And this, results to the differential perceptions of the governance environment, core ideals of behavior and the democratic performance indicators. Hence, sentiments and parochial interests colour objective perceptions. And these results in differentiations on the perceptions of free and fair elections, corruption, government by the people, democratic performance and good and bad government, which are all largely dependent on whether one benefits directly or indirectly from governance in tangible terms. Such benefits could be political appointments, contracts, whether one's party is in government or whether one's family members hold key position in government. These make the people express sentiments that prevent them from seeing governance in the same way and therefore galvanizing collective action for the needed change and tangible development. Again, though in Africa, people suffer socioeconomic deprivation, but they also suffer a compromised democratic voice capacity and this has taken a toll on the possibility of collective action. The key indices of the socioeconomic deprivation could be seen in the increasing rate of unemployment, poverty, political alienation and election rigging against popular wishes. The unique voice of the people is their votes, which is the means for expressing their wishes, making it possible for them, for instance, to replace irresponsible leaders. But once this process is impossible, the voice of the people is stifled, and this is the case in most African states. People no longer trust the democratic process of voicing their votes, as this has been taken over by the ruling class to legitimize its emergence. Also tied to the democratic voice deficit is the fact that though the civil rule may have all the laws and institutions but may not be underpinned by democratic values. In other words, they may be democratic institutions operated undemocratically because of the absence of a minimum level of democratic political culture and the lack of adherence to the rules of the game. Consequently, not minding that most African nations are enjoying many years of democracy, it has remained difficult for them to galvanize development. In other words, deficiencies of governance are a major factor in African developmental disappointments [17].

#### **4 Conclusion**

The nexus between governance and development is intractable. This rests on the fact that the development of any nation depends on how well its people are allowed to exercise their fundamental human rights through the enjoyment of improved quality of positive public and governance relations. Such appropriate platform can result in the construction of values, ideals and norms and these can be used to measure the development of that nation. Since the development of a nation depends on how well its people are allowed to exercise their fundamental rights, it can be achieved through the enjoyment of improved quality of positive policy, governance relations and identical construction of values, ideals, and norms. It has therefore, become essential that the political currents of governance in most African nations be stemmed with better positive engagement

with the people [14]. And again, as many African nations battle to institutionalize democracy, there must be evident proof that the dividends of democracy can be positively reaped so that all can not only perceive it but, be part of the efforts towards national development [1]. Situations where democracy is based on the enrichment of the few, rather than of most, will not galvanize development and will not make all the people see themselves as stakeholders. The political current in such a system alienates the people from governance, leading to a governance disconnect and the negative construction of governance values and ideals for poor development. This will result in leaving the development process to the few in the political class who find it difficult to connect with the people as they see themselves mostly as the development think tank, against the need to bring everyone on board. Governance must, thus, be positively connected with the people for positive construction if development is to be positive in most African states [1]. As it stands, the political current of governance is too weak in most African states so that it is most difficult for their keeping pace with the parameters needed for development.

Finally, it should be noted that good governance would result in the development of the societal base of the nation. Hence any non-compliance to the principles of governance generally impinges on development in at least four ways. Rightly, according to [18], these could be summarized in the following way:

- i) It leads to loss of development opportunities,
- ii) It erodes confidence between the government and the governed,
- iii) It damages all the efforts to promote valuable foreign investment and
- iv) Finally, it slows down the country's effort to participate more effectively in an increasing globalized world economy (p. 41).

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