

Colonisation and good governance in Africa: Myth or reality

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the concepts of colonisation and good governance. The argument was guided by the principles of dependency theory married with elements of social contract theory. Secondary source of data was employed. Based on facts, it was concluded that colonialism has distorted the African economy and since there is positive correlation between economy and good governance, it follows that, the issue of good governance in Africa is a myth. Among the recommendations made is, African countries should be left to decide what suits them in terms of economic, political and social issues rather than the west imposing what they (the west) think is good for Africa and Africans.

Keywords: Colonisation, governance, dependency theory, social contract theory, Africa

Introduction

Before the arrival of the white men to Africa, there existed societies with their traditions, nature of technology, no matter low primitive and administrative set up among others. They had their means of livelihood, trade form as well as a mode of worship and level of knowledge. When the white men eventually came with their missions ranging from adventure, raw materials and market outlets, they felt there was need to introduce their foreign mode of life to Africa, which is colonialism. This new way of life introduced by the white men equally extended to the way Africans should organize and conduct themselves by establishing laws such as tax payments, introduction of paper money as means exchange of goods and services. This development, no doubt has an impact on Africans and whether the arrangement has led to any significant change either positively or negatively which Africans can learn from is the thesis of this paper.

Dependency theory posit that, the low level of development in less economically developed countries (L E D C's) is caused by their reliance and dependence on

more economically developed countries (M E D C's). Viewed from the Marxists perspective, the above condition was the consequence of capitalist exploitation. In his contribution, Theotonio Dos Santos emphasizes the historical dimension of the dependency relationships when he said "Dependency is... a historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favours some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economics... a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which their own is subjected."

The above definition of Dos Santos captures the essential aspect of colonialism in Africa and how can this condition allow for good governance bearing in mind the positive correlation between the economy and good governance.

Methodology

This paper relied on secondary data obtained from published and un-published materials as well as the internet.

Discussion

It is pertinent to note that, the issue of good governance has become part of the package of political conditionalities. It is imposed on African leaders by the international financial institutions as a precondition for support. A World Bank report on sub-Saharan Africa in 1989 argued that, the economic crisis in the continent is because of the absence of good governance, accountability and lesser government interventions in the economy. In clear terms, the cause of weak economic performance has been the failure of public institutions. Thus, "good governance goes hand in hand with a public service that is efficient, a judicial system that is reliable and administration that is accountable to its people".

The position advanced by the World Bank on the crisis of the African post-colonial state are worthy at a general level. But good governance agenda put forward by the World Bank, it is argued, constitutes another perception of international capitalist illumination to rehabilitate decaying and crisis-ridden structure in Africa; it is a top-down prescription which failed to examine how the state, its custodians and institutions as constituted presently, cannot be the basis for democracy. The simple reason is, it is a continuation of the colonial state, except in terms of personnel. Furthermore, if the World Bank's prescription of good governance as the panacea for the current crisis of African states, then, it contains diverse perspectives and approaches on the problem of good governance.

At the general level, international financial institutions conceptualized governance as a descriptive category that focuses on (a) the nature and style of a political

system, type of political regime, lines of political authority, (b) decision-making processes-information flow; and (c) nature of relationship between the state and society. But others link up the concept of governance to normative issues focusing on questions like human rights standards, legitimacy of government, accountability of leaders (both elected and appointed), the transparency of decision making; freedom of mass media; the right to free association; freedom of speech and general respect for the rule of law.

Leftwich (1994) contributing to the governance debate asserts that, the concept has three levels of meaning, namely; systemic, political and administrative. At the systemic level, to him, the concept of governance is wider than that of government. To him, therefore, governance refers to a “looser and wider distribution of both internal and external political and economic powers”. On the other hand, the political level forms the perspective of most western governments. To them therefore, good governance entails not only a regime type per se but explicitly a state enjoying legitimacy and authority derived from a democratic mandate and built on the traditional liberal nation of clear separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers. Dauda (1997) argued that, the idea of good governance is not simply a mere technical answer to the constraints of development being experienced by African States while Leftwich holds the view that, good governance discourse is best understood as an intimate part of the emerging politics of the new world under which the western liberal democracy conceptualized as a model for other cultures and societies to follow.

The concept of good governance is much larger than mere administrative reforms in the conventional sense of the term. It has much to do with the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. It looks at the functioning of the given segment of the society from the point of view of its acknowledged stakeholders and beneficiaries as well as customers. A mission statement of good governance will thus read quite differently. Good governance, therefore, is a concept that is applicable to all sections of the society such as the government, legislature, judiciary, the media, etc. Public accountability and transparency are as relevant for one as the other. It is only when all these and various other sections of the society conduct their affairs in a socially responsible manner that, the objective of achieving larger good of the largest number of people in the society can be achieved.

In clear terms, colonialism is the complete control of the people, their land and their destiny by a foreign people. This possession of the people enables the colonizers to determine the fate of the possessed people. In world history, colonialism became a fashion among the developed nations to possess colonies in a foreign land and by so doing controlled and determined the political, economic and social lives of such colonized people. This was carried out essentially by Britain, France, Spain,

Portugal, Belgium, and Germany among others. They all possessed colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In Africa, colonization took different dimensions and a lot of strategies were employed to subdue and control Africans. Force was used to over run the people and where the natives cooperated; treaties were signed whose content was never known. Two broad patterns of administration were introduced, and these were Direct Administration and Indirect Administration. The French colonies witnessed direct rule of Assimilation that made the colonized French –Africans to drop most if not all their African culture.

The Direct Administration was adopted by the British and applied to mostly areas close to coastal towns with large number of British settlers like Freetown, Accra, Lagos etc. this areas experienced direct administration because, the British were directly involved in administrating them, and thus, they were called crown colonies. On the other hand, areas outside the crown colonies experienced the Indirect Rule and were called the protectorates.

In Africa, the impact of colonialism took two dimensions; positive and negative are depending on one's position, but certainly according to our view the negativity is more pronounced. Africa became underdeveloped due to colonial rule in the continent. This was because of a spate of economic exploitation and social degradation as a result of the nature of colonial policies. These policies facilitated economic exploitation dehumanized Africans, stagnated and distorted Africa's economy. Such policies included among others (a) destruction of indigenous economy and technology –Africans were forced to go into importation of Europeans made goods, (b) forced labour through the instrumentality of tax payment and seizure of people's land e.g. Zimbabwe, (c) intimidation and discrimination- the relationship Africans had and are still having with Europeans was that of superior-subordinate relationship, (d) inter nation division of labour where Africans became merely primary produces. i.e., Africans were made to produce what they did not need and consumed. Prices of their produce were determined by Europeans and (e) deliberate neglect of industrialization.

The economic fortunes of Africa started declining in the 1970s. In a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United State published in 2003 revealed that, while the world economy grew by an average of about 2% annually between 1960 and 2002, in Africa, the GDP growth was negative from 1974 to the mid 1990s. Furthermore, by early 1960s only 10% of the world's poor were Africans and by 2000, it rose to 50%. On the other hand, between 1960 and 2001 according to the World Bank, the average per capita annual growth rates for some countries were (i) Cote d'Ivoire – ½ of a percent, (ii) Zimbabwe – 1/3 of a percent, (iii) Nigeria – 1/5 of a percent and (iv) Ghana, Senegal, Chad, Central African Republic, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Niger, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo were all negative.

Added to the above conditions, Africa has to contend with stringent conditionalities of the industrialized world and or their agencies if they (Africa) wanted to combat poverty. This situation is not withstanding; African leaders continue to receive funds from these international agencies or donor agencies which inhibit the prospects of development. The effects of the Special Adjustment Programme designed and pursued by the international financial institutions compounded the conditions of most African countries so much that, governance did not measurably improve. Today, most if not all, African nations are battling with all forms of unrest and substantial portion of their resources are being used to secure peace instead of infrastructural development, poverty reduction, effective and efficient healthcare service which are serious social problems in the continent.

However, the above situation notwithstanding, a number of these African economies started growing, but the general problem being that, by 2001, the African population living in extreme poverty reached 316 million from 164 million twenty years before (Stiglitz, 2007). In his words, (Ake, 1994) said, "Poverty disempowers and subverts democracy". How can there be democracy in Africa that the west is again preaching?

Most African nations had new heads that came to power through coups or civil wars, or both at the inception of the 21st century. For instance, Cote d'Ivoire had a military coup in 1999 followed by a civil war (north versus south) recording a large number of the people becoming refugees occasioned by malnutritionment. Similarly, the Democratic Republic of Congo tasted its own too where an estimated people of about 5.4 m (IRC, 2008) lives were lost. Mali is presently in a similar situation. Liberia went through the same difficulties. Somalia, Egypt, Libya, Chad, Sudan are all not left out.

While such situations prevailed, some African leaders appeared to be autocratic. Even though democratic structures have been put in place in almost all African states, such as political parties, electoral processes, etc. the outcomes of elections are not always accepted to be free and fair. In his words, Wangari (2009:55) described the type of African democracy as "a bromide offered during voting rather than a means of enhancing the capacities of governmental and non governmental institutions, providing basic services to the people and empowering them to be active partners in development".

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussions, we have seen how colonialism impacted on African countries. By the same token, we have also seen what can constitute good governance. The relationship between the economy and good governance has a positive correlation, and since colonialism has distorted African economies, this

paper, therefore, concludes that, the issue of good governance in Africa is a myth. No wonder, African countries are battling with reviving their economies as well as governance that, unfortunately, again are being dictated or interfered by the west otherwise called neo-colonialism. The recommendations are (i) African countries should be left to decide what suits them in terms of economic, political and social issues. Time has gone for the west to keep on imposing what they (west) think is good for Africa and Africans, (ii) Dishonesty of most African Leaders and their governments is responsible for their inability to be accountable and hence lack of good governance, (iii) Africans should themselves develop their technology commensurate with their level rather than importing sophisticated technology that is expensive and cannot stand the test of time, (iv) Africans should imbibe the culture of likeness, utilization and promotion of their products, so that it will reduce their level of dependence on the technologically advanced nations. This will encourage and increase their levels of savings thereby getting them out of high level of unemployment if the resources are properly used.

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