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Journal homepage: www.twistjournal.net

Political Instability, Underdevelopment and the Misgivings of Democracy: Problematising the Issue of Political Leadership in Africa

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This paper contends that political leadership plays a crucial role in fostering social and economic justice, peace and stability, national unity and socio-economic development. The absence of effective and responsive political leadership has been a catalyst for social and economic injustices, leading to intra-state conflicts in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Attaining social and economic justice requires the interaction of multiple factors that go beyond existing structures. Although often overlooked, political leadership is argued to be a critical factor in achieving these goals. The paper examines the importance of responsible, responsive, and ethical political leadership as an essential requirement for social and economic justice and good governance. This includes upholding and respecting human rights, promoting civic participation, ensuring accountability, managing state resources responsibly, and fostering social cohesion among the diverse demographics within a state. This paper emphasises that political leadership is the pivotal variable that must be considered when driving a state towards providing social and economic justice for all. In this context, the international and regional human rights frameworks concerning social and economic rights serve as valuable tools to guide political leaders in their pursuit of social and economic justice and good governance within Sub-Saharan African societies.

Keywords

Resources-driven conflicts in Africa, Political leadership, Neo-colonialism, Ethical and responsible political leadership, The right to development, Development in Africa, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

The right to political participation in the affairs of a country is one of the cardinal political rights that stands at the peak of other political rights, such as the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of association. Entrenched in international and regional human rights instruments, it has served as the legal basis upon which political involvement (that is, to choose and to be chosen) at different levels of governmental structures can be conducted. Without utilising the phrase “democratic participation”, it has nonetheless evolved to what seems to be settling in domestic legal and political practices as the right to democratic governance. Thomas Franck’s piece, even though scripted in the context of political developments in the then-Soviet Union over three decades ago, explored the evolution of the notion of democratic governance, arguing that the crumbling Soviet Union was a living testament in which governance was no longer determined by the barrel of the gun but by the ballot box (Franck 1992, 46-91; Ocheni and Nwankwo 2012; Manirakiza 2016, 86). In other words, he discredited and dismantled dictatorship as a way of governance, as opposed to the key pillars that should make governance—the inclusion of the masses in the selection of political leaders through free and fair

elections conducted on a regular basis. If that holds true, then power ultimately resides in the people. Over the decades, this view has been tested in numerous countries across the globe, including Africa, where autocratic regimes were fortified by weak political institutions, which unfortunately produced strong men. In addition, those African strong autocratic leaders exploited such weaknesses to manipulate political institutions like their national constitutions to prolong their stay in power, giving them the perception of contemporary African monarchies. Examples of this abound: President Paul Biya of Cameroon who has been in power since 1982 and has succeeded in amending the constitution to remove limitations to presidential terms (Musa 2008). Autocracy, as a political culture, is built on strong individuals rather than strong institutions (Anderson et al. 2021, 1-30; and Gerschewski 2018, 665). Looking at the political developments and realities in African countries such as Cameroon, Senegal, Congo, Gabon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Zimbabwe, their shallow political arrangements were suggestive of nothing more than fig-leaf democracies, as the fundamental canons of a democratic state were anything but concrete. Like their Cameroonian counterpart, Presidents Abdou Diouf (Senegal), Denis Sassou Nguesso (Republic of Congo), Idriss Derby (Chad), Theodoro Obiang Nguema (Equatorial Guinea) and Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe) wielded state authority with no checks and balances. Public servants served at their pleasure, as they had the power to appoint or unappoint anyone to key political offices. Without any real distinctions between the organs of the government, it was impossible to contest the legality of any executive act. Political freedoms were severely curtailed, and any act that challenged the system in place would result in victimisation. The victimisation of political dissidents took many forms, and with the complicity of law enforcement and judicial personnel. Within such contexts, divisive political ideologies were fermented, circulated and implemented nation-wide, often resulting in intra-state conflicts. The looting of state resources by some individuals was evidence of the degree of moral turpitude that had wrecked those countries and explained why, for the most part, the much-needed development and fight against poverty has not made significant progress. Frank's essay, from a theoretical perspective, and based on what has been experienced in many African countries, warrant us to be cautious in our evaluation of autocracies: autocratic governance comes with its misfortunes and complications such as social exclusiveness, extortion, unaccountability, rule by law, strong men, victimisation, polarization of the people and the pursuit of self-enrichment through theft of state resources. An autocratic political culture, misrepresented as democracy in evolution, has thrown most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa into a political inferno, where civil and political rights are severely curtailed and unfulfilled. Their political realities, gauged from an objective lens and against democratic criteria, constitute nothing but an affront, a mockery of democracy and political civility. Quite difficult to ignore is the abject abandonment of social and economic rights within such political environments, evidenced by the perennial consignment of the masses to chronic poverty, high levels of unemployment, skyrocketing levels of inflation, failing state institutions and infrastructure, crumbling schools and unequipped medical facilities. While the masses struggle with these challenges on a daily basis, the political elite lavish themselves in luxurious lifestyles with a clear disconnection from the realities faced by their people.

Looking deeper into those political developments in most Sub-Saharan African countries, it is argued that to an extent, they betray and debunk Frank's theory of democratic governance. First, democracy does not guarantee success. Secondly, an emerging right to democratic governance has, so far, not been marked by a compelling discussion of the contents of democratic governance. If Sub-Saharan African countries have produced bogus democracies, political instability, and conflicts, it is probably because little efforts have been made in emphasising what democratic governance entails. The latter probably, explains why African political leaders, on campaign trails, speak more to why they should be elected, rather than asking electors to assess them on what they have done while in power. Upon election, a leader-led relationship is built between those in elected offices and the electorates which touches on a sacred covenant that is built on trust as the offices and resources of the state are entrusted in their hands, and the ultimate welfare of the people is the overall sacrosanct objective of the government. While African countries boast of having democratically elected governments with democratic governance built on specific criteria, relative successes have not been felt in many sectors such as economies, social strata, national unity, and cohesion. Thus, it raises the question of whether democratic governance is about the ascent to power and the establishment of political institutions, or the manner in which such political power is wielded for the achievement of people's welfare. If political power and institutions would breed divisiveness and alienate a people, widen the gap between the rich and the poor, and usher more people into poverty and the resulting social exclusiveness, then, democratic governance is misdirected and hijacked. However, if the welfare of the people guides the exercise of political power, and national cohesion and equality are ultimately achieved, then, democratic governance is on track.

The political developments in African countries from the 1990s till date, unfortunately, give plenty of reasons to interrogate not the right to democratic governance, but the contents thereof. Since the 1990s, millions of Africans have experienced some form of political instability or crisis, either short-term or long-term. These political crises, dominantly intra-state in nature, are driven by social and economic dynamics outlined earlier. Arguably, these political crises were fuelled or exacerbated by the calibration of political leadership. The unwillingness of political leaders to mainstream the attainment of social and economic justice in their political agenda accounts for the continued social and economic injustices in their respective countries and, ultimately, the eruption of political crises therein (Hendricks 2006, 2-7).

In contention in Sub-Saharan Africa are numerous thematic issues that have a huge and direct bearing on the wellbeing of the people: poverty, underdevelopment, corruption, internecine intra-state conflicts, impunity for gross violations of human rights, unemployment, preventable and curable diseases like malaria, diarrhoea, typhoid and dysentery; famine and malnutrition; climate change; natural resources management; decolonisation; neo-colonisation;

Pan-Africanism; harmful cultural practices and democracy; the rule of law and good governance. Without doubt, each of these issues carries a deep layer of complexity, explaining why they constitute some of the topics on which scholars in humanities, policy makers, and professionals have sparred, with their differences in ideologies rooted in, and informed by history, economics, politics, development, and culture. The discussions and debates on the above-mentioned issues have raged for numerous decades, with scholars and policymakers from different backgrounds offering various points of view on how to surmount these intricate matters affecting Sub-Saharan Africa. While this paper will not put an end to these debates, it hopes to (re-)invigorate such discussions by offering some critical insights on a specific issue: suggesting what could be done to prevent and surmount the numerous avoidable internal conflicts that plague numerous Sub-Saharan African states. It argues that ethical, responsible and responsive political leadership becomes an indispensable criterion and conditions towards this end.

Exploring the concepts of political leadership, social and economic justice, and good governance, and the role played by political leadership in achieving social and economic justice, this paper argues that realising social and economic justice should be the defining criterion of democratic governance and political leadership. It is further argued that, because democracy does not guarantee success but facilitates popular participation, an assessment of political leadership, whether democratic or autocratic, should be based on whether there is a progressive measure of social and economic justice in a community.

A SYNOPSIS OF INTRA-STATE CRISES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

At any given time, parts of sub-Saharan Africa were mired in an intra-state conflict with internecine and devastating consequences (Rwantabagu 2001, 53). In 2023, at least three African countries experienced a dramatic turn in their political leadership: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Added to these are countries like Cameroon where political violence marked by the use of unconventional tactics of ‘warfare’ and urban terrorism erupted in 2016 (Okereke 2018, 12; Pommerolle and Heungoup 2017, 538; Agwanda et al. 2020 ,1-16; and Chapman and Pratt 2019, 11). Recent protests have been reported in Nigeria, where civilians took to the streets to protest the brutality perpetrated by law enforcement personnel(Acheme and Cionea 2021, 20; Ojedokun et al. 2021, 1903; and Chisom 2021, 53) ; Mozambique (Macuane et al. 2018, 438); Burundi (Rwantabagu 2001, 41-53), Chad (Massey and May 2006, 449), and the Central African Republic (Welz 2014, 610). Casting an eye two to three decades ago, one would have included Liberia; Sierra Leone; Rwanda (where Hutus committed a massive onslaught against another ethnic group on such an unprecedented scale); Kenya and *Côte d’Ivoire* where post-electoral violence resulted in nation-wide political instability, marked by the commission of serious crimes in international law; Zimbabwe, where political reforms were resisted by the then leader, President Robert Mugabe (Sachikonye 2002, 20); Uganda where a major warring group has struggled to destabilise the nation (Dunn 2004, 142); the Democratic Republic of Congo as nationals therein contest for accountability in the use of their natural resources (Jacquemot 2010, 7; and Nathan 2006, 299); and up to the decade-old Arab Spring which orchestrated the fall of the then Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan leadership (Campante and Chor 2012, 188; and Stepan and Linz 2013, 30). Intra-state conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa have evolved to become a permanent feature of the region’s story. The problem, however, is that the narratives are either misrepresented by the narrators or investigated with pre-conceived biases (Ndlela 2005, 90; and Scott 2017, 210). The literature on intra-state conflicts in Africa has hardly considered the role of political leadership in their eruption, prolongation, or conclusion. The notion and role of political leadership has been overlooked, even in studies of economic development in the Sub-Saharan region. An investigation into political leadership in most of those conflict-torn societies would reveal that political leadership should take a significant part in the blame (the origins and nature of the conflict). Likewise, political leadership is expected to play a crucial role in not only ending such conflicts but also ensuring that guarantees of non-repetition in the future are established.

The discussion on the role and impact of political leadership is on at least two fronts. On one front, political leadership should be held responsible for socio-economic injustices, underdevelopment, mismanagement of a state’s natural resources, political instability and the lack of legitimacy in state-run institutions and processes. On the second front, the foregoing issues are the factors that spark an intra-state conflict since differing factions run their political ideologies based on those challenges. Therefore, one can sum up the relationship between political leadership on the one hand, and socio-economic development and political stability on the other hand, as follows: a responsive, responsible, and ethical political leadership in a country will result in socio-economic development and political stability (Dartey-Baah 2014, 203-218). On the other hand, an unresponsive, unethical, and irresponsible political leadership will adversely affect socio-economic and political development, as well as create fecund grounds for political instability that may escalate to intra-state conflict (Dartey-Baah 2014).

The socio-economic and political realities existing in African states serve as bulletproof evidence to buttress the foregoing premise. The current underdevelopment of the African continent is partly and greatly attributable to the poor political leadership that has been dotted by disastrous political choices (Iheriohanma and Oguoma 2010, 416), a culture of corruption that is sanctioned by selective impunity (Awojobi 2014, 14); and the complete lack of clairvoyance to steer different countries on the path to sustainable economic development whose benefits would trigger to all.

Residing in the pages of history as ‘the Dark Continent’, ‘the Continent where poverty, wars and diseases are never on vacation’, ‘the epicentre of gross violations of human rights’, ‘the hub of political and economic corruption’, ‘the land of political volatility and uncertainty’, ‘the terrain of unending tribal and ethnic tensions’, ‘the continent of coup d’états’, these monikers are well-deserved as they are triggered by the daunting and dismal realities that have rocked most

of the African continent since they divorced from the colonialists. For a continent endowed with an avalanche of natural resources and human potential, its stagnation in underdevelopment and the eruption of intermittent political instability and crises are partly and greatly attributable to irresponsible and unresponsive political leadership: a curse that Sub-Saharan Africa must accommodate and surmount.

CONCEPTUALISING THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The concept of political leadership cuts across almost every social science discipline (Morrell and Hartley 2006, 504; Carbone and Pellegata 2020; Rhodes 2014, 1-24; and Goldsmith and Larsen 2004, 133). However, for many scholars and practitioners, the discussion dwells more from a political-science perspective (Edinger 1975, 269; Edinger 1964, 439; Dion 1968, 17; Seligman 1950, 915; and Masciulli et al. 2016b, 23-48). While the exact contours of the concept of political leadership have always been reconfigured, it is quite important to take a much broader perspective, including even a legal lens. Beyond political science, and within a nation's political, economic, social and cultural development, political leadership touches on many aspects. For example, economic development, good governance, poverty alleviation, respect for human rights, the establishment of national institutions, integrity in public service, the rule of law, sustainable management of natural resources, the fight against corruption, building and enhancing social cohesion to achieve national unity, avoidance of toxic politics that splits the country and pits one segment against the other, *etc.*, are all the responsibility of political leadership. Consequently, the political leadership issue used in this paper touches on numerous aspects. For this research and relevant to the issues of underdevelopment and intra-state conflicts, it shall be limited to the following: the establishment and management of national institutions which lack operational independence and are always starved of the requisite political will to enable them to fulfil their mandate and accomplish their objectives; the perpetration of conduct that delegitimises those national institutions and processes; the choice of divisive and toxic politics by making diversity a liability rather than an asset; securing the proper international alliances for development; endemic corruption that deprives the people of the much-needed resources for development (Aidt 2009, 291 and Jain 2001, 121); the manner in which natural resources are managed; and dealing with socio-economic injustices and poverty alleviation. These constitute a complex interplay of factors that usually account for underdevelopment and political instability, including intra-state conflicts.

What is political leadership?

The notion of political leadership in political science, politics, government, governance, law, economics, management, *etc.*, stands out clearly as a key factor that makes the difference between states, especially with regards to how they respond to, and resolve contemporary problems, heal divisions, foster unity, and conclude alliances with other stakeholders and states with the goals of fostering their international stature and resolving problems. Political leadership influences events. It also affects outcomes. As such, political leaders must be willing and able to reject outdated and discredited philosophies and abandon policies that are unworkable in a new age or environment. Political leaders must accept the new, reassess the old, and discard the unworkable to adapt to, and introduce a new environment.

Political leadership is a historically concrete and multi-dimensional phenomenon that cuts across numerous disciplines in both theory and practice. With regards to theory, such disciplines include political science, politics, economics, and law. In practice, political leadership is principally governed by government and management. At the dimensional level, political leadership transcends different levels of government, from local municipalities where there are councils or counties, to provincial or regional and finally to national level. In a globalised world with national borders dismantled and technological developments accelerating communication and migration, political leadership has safely stabilised in international relations, law and politics, with power, obviously perceived as residing in the hands of those who make decisions whose ramifications percolate every corner of the globe. However, the global dimension of political leadership is beyond the scope of this paper since what happens within states ultimately and invariably affects the global context.

Political leadership involves and evokes followership: by their ideologies, alliances, vision and personality, political leaders can motivate and mobilize followers. On the one hand, there is motivation and mobilisation. On the other hand, this motivation and mobilisation generates followership, a kind of causal (cause and effect) relationship, making it difficult to split such a causal sequence. Political leadership is also influenced and shaped by history, culture, personality traits, and alliances: as such, it varies from one individual to another individual and country to country. It is a much-needed variable to deal with and adapt to innovative approaches in dealing with issues.

There exists a plurality of definitions for the word "leader". However, common to the many definitions in the English lexicons is the definition and description of a leader as a person who commands, directs, leads, controls, or manages a group or organisation or country. The dictionaries unpack what it is to lead or leading as causing or making someone or something to follow, draw, show, guide, inspire, direct, or to instruct or show the way or destination by preceding or accompanying them. If these descriptions are correct, then, setting goals and motivating others can be described as essential features of leadership. According to Blondel, the concept of political leadership is difficult to define essentially, because it is dependent on institutional, cultural and historical contexts and situations – both particular and general (Blondel 1987, 1-9; Blondel and Thiébault 2009; and Masciulli et al. 2016a, 3-27).

The African continent has produced different kinds of leaders, both democratic and autocratic. Within some countries, different regimes have also steered various kinds of political leadership, making it much about the individual

than the country itself. The ability to stir a national-unity-spirit that has triggered social cohesion and national development in post-genocide Rwanda has ushered a different perspective on the possibilities, promises and rewards of ethical, responsive and responsible political leadership under President Paul Kagame. The different kinds of leadership styles experienced on the African continent, to a greater extent, have institutionalised and aggravated socio-economic injustices. If we hold that the (progressive) realisation of socio-economic rights requires resources, then, theft of the state's resources by senior officials, by implication, deprives the state of the resources needed to progressively realise those rights. Considering the nature of obligations imposed by both international and regional human rights instruments, political leadership becomes a critical variable in many ways: for example, appointing competent individuals to lead national institutions and formulating policies aimed at ensuring inclusivity and equality in all programmes. It also means that individuals elected to the law-making body should, within the remit of their constitutional powers, be able to domesticate such instruments and create mechanisms for their enforcement at all levels. Political leadership must ensure that the judiciary has the power to consider international law, apply it to the interpretation of domestic laws on human rights, and be driven by a normative framework comprising equality, inclusiveness, fairness, and accountability. Political leadership should see to it that laws and institutions are complemented by the requisite political will to allocate resources and utilise resources in a wise and sustainable manner, ensuring that no one is secluded because of any distinguishing factor.

Africa and the crisis of political leadership: an eternal problem?

At any given time, Africa is deeply mired in numerous intra-state conflicts during which heinous violations of human rights are committed by both state and non-state actors. Such conflicts are provoked by a complex blend of factors such as systemic violations of human rights by political elites; unconstitutional changes to government; poverty and inequality; corruption perpetrated by senior state officials; weak political institutions that are at the service of a few; the treatment of minorities within political and economic structures; absence of accountability, transparency and the rule of law (poor governance); social exclusion of specific individuals and groups from political processes; and infrastructural decay. The political developments in conflict-torn countries leave no alternative to a gloomy picture: the cases of Central African Republic; Mali; Burkina Faso; Cameroon; the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chad are worth-mentioning. Beyond the few examples of armed conflicts, volatile political situations often escalating to political instability can be attributable to the factors stated above. Within such contexts, and against such a complex background is the commitment to realise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With an understanding of the dynamics that drive intra-state conflicts in Africa, and the literature, both from theoretical and practical perspectives, that deals with the realisation of the SDGs, this paper argues that there is a need to underscore the importance of a critical variable: political leadership. Unfortunately, conversations about Africa's conflicts, political instability and tensions, are not debated from an objective, honest and critical standpoint. Rather, they were approached from the perspective of providing temporary medications to abate their gravity, while the same factors that triggered them were unattended to. Justifiably, Africans have been likened to the Biblical Adam and Eve as they live in paradise but have no clothes to wear. It is argued that if focus is narrowed to the issue of political leadership, and attended to from local to regional, national and global levels, with honest and critical conversations premised on resolving the surmountable problems facing Africa, then, prosperity will defeat adversity, peace will trump over conflicts, and political participation would prevail over seclusion.

It is further argued that despite the numerous complex problems facing African countries, a solution to them can be made if and only when focus is directed to political leadership because every (major) problem facing Africa revolves around the issue of political leadership. Any sincere conversation about Africa's problems must consider the role of political leadership in, first, the cause of the problems faced and secondly, the role it will play in resolving those problems. Undoubtedly, there is a continental deficit in ethical, responsible and responsive political leadership: a narrative that is shaped by the developments on the continent itself, on which a compelling assessment will inevitably dismiss all the political orthodoxy of remedies that are mindless of causes, always appearing as temporary reliefs without putting a permanent solution thereto. Political leadership in Africa must be attended to in every detail, including the contents of what is meant by political leadership, and that becomes a prerequisite if Africa is to unlock its potential and bring prosperity to every man, woman, and child living on the continent. If poverty and underdevelopment are attributed to poor policies and philosophies, then, a thought must be directed to those who engineer such disastrous policies and choices that have engulfed the people in abject poverty, misery, and underdevelopment. African political leaders have made bad choices, obtained wrong advice, and in turn relied on Western countries that have contributed to the *status quo* and do not wish to see a united and prosperous Africa (Mills 2012, iii).

Academics and practitioners in different areas of work and at various levels have authored numerous works on Africa's intra-state, complex and multi-dimensional problems, and what can be done to surmount them. Weaving from the intricate blend of theory and practice on this contentious issue, one notices the conspicuous (and probably inadvertent) trivialisation of political leadership: an issue which, in our view, is of critical importance in surmounting the problems facing Africa. Among the rich literature on this issue, three authors are outstanding: Greg Mills (Mills 2012); Dambisa Moyo (Moyo 2009); and Martin Meredith (Meredith 2016; Meredith 2013 and Meredith 2005). Their works investigate the causes and analyse the complexities of human factors that account for why Africa is where it is today and what can be done to change the story and direction. These authors take a practitioner's perspective, collate indisputable facts and

provide a discourse that deals with insightfulness, incisiveness, bluntness and robustness, both in depth and breadth, sharing uncomfortable truths and making bold suggestions on what can and should be done.

Mapping the link between good governance, socio-economic justice and political leadership

Political leadership can be vital in seeking and achieving good governance and social and economic justice. This requires a commitment towards that end and entails wise management of natural and human resources; sound economic policies that are informed by and speak to the realities of every society; tackling the issue of corruption at all levels and in all forms. Political leaders must ensure that socio-economic rights are not a matter of choice: they are an urgent priority to be tackled because they touch on the issues that affect a person's life and wellbeing. Socio-economic rights require the urgency of now because they speak to a person's individuality, worth and status in society. If all the obligations in international and regional human rights instruments are fulfilled, then, political leaders would understand that theft of resources is quite detrimental. Leadership requires honest debates about issues, sound management of resources, beneficial alliances and holding everyone accountable for mismanagement.

The relationship between political leadership and good governance is complex and has multifaceted dimensions. Political leadership has severe implications on democratic consolidation; the functioning of political institutions; the rule of law; combatting corruption and infusing the requisite political will to complement national mechanisms to fight corruption; the attainment of nationhood; development; respect for human rights; setting the tone for political inclusiveness and political stability. Looking at the issue of political stability, and with focus on Sub-Saharan African countries, examples abound of intra-state conflicts that are attributable to poor governance and political leadership. These costly and avoidable conflicts are a manifestation of toxic political leadership that steers the affected societies in the wrong direction. The politics of seclusion and victimisation, worsened by an irrational, unaccountable and unconscionable exploitation of natural resources, corruption and failure of democratic norms and institutions account for the numerous intra-state crises that have plagued portions of Sub-Saharan Africa. The evidence from unstable societies in Africa highlight the direct causal relationship between the quality of political leadership and good governance. To ensure that the cornerstones of democratic societies are established, anti-corruption mechanisms erected to fight corruption, development projects and nationhood pursued, political leadership becomes critical and valuable. In addition, it is incumbent on political leadership to close the gap between the rich and the poor and make socio-economic services and facilities accessible for these constitute some of the major blocks upon which socio-economic injustices are perpetuated. Finally, redeeming Africans from the miserable image of a person entangled in a natural resource curse (unto whom nature has given so much, so little has been reaped for their benefits), political leadership becomes a pivotal instrument in ensuring that natural and other resources are harnessed for the benefit of the people.

TACKLING THE SCOURGE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INJUSTICES AND BAD GOVERNANCE

The following discussion looks at the scourge of socio-economic injustices in Africa, and what can be done to overcome the issue. It looks into the international and regional human rights framework and builds on the normative framework and substantive contents which could be used to guide the development of policies and deployment of resources to fulfil specific goals.

The false promises of democracy: drifting the focus from socio-economic rights and justice

As argued earlier, democracy, unfortunately, has been perceived and (mis)understood as a political culture that guarantees development and individual success: this explains in part why many African countries, from the early 1990s to late 2000s, fought for democracy hoping that as a political culture and with its institutions and processes, their numerous social, economic and political problems would be surmounted. The failure to achieve such outcomes not only caused frustration but also sparked instability and conflict. Social and economic conditions did not change, the perpetration of corruption by senior state officials spiked, accountability mechanisms were compromised by political interference, corruption infiltrated into political processes and institutions, with electoral irregularities and fraud that resulted in keeping the incumbents in power.

The frustration, however, is fuelled by the manner that natural resources are managed: exploited by multi-national corporations, the local communities derive very little or no benefit from those extractive industries. Such experiences and developments have questioned the effectiveness of democracy as a political culture in bringing about social and economic justice in Sub-Saharan African countries. As such, scholars have been tempted to interrogate every political culture and ask whether the answer is found in political leaders or their style of governance. In answering this question, they have looked at a few countries, two of which are Cuba and Libya. Neither of these two countries can boast of being democratic per the scholarly definitions and parameters for assessing a country's democracy. However, under the previous Libyan leader, reliable evidence speaks of a decent level of socio-economic justice for every Libyan, in spite of the curtailment on civil and political rights as illustrated in western-written narratives.

What is socio-economic justice?

The notion of social and economic justice touches principally on the fair and equitable allocation and distribution of resources and opportunities in society. It examines the structural arrangements that are put in place to enable access to social and economic institutions for everyone, especially the poorest. If we acknowledge that there is a gap between the

rich and the poor, that the poor are unable to access social services, and we define poverty by looking at a person's inability to afford the most basic of necessities, then, social and economic justice requires that there is an equitable and fair allocation of social goods and services. By factoring the people's inability to obtain such social goods, physical and economic access to such social goods is enhanced through their distribution in the communities where such poor people are based. The social and economic conditions of the people should be factored in when determining how to allocate and distribute the state's wealth and resources. Rather than limiting the distribution of social goods to predominantly rich areas, the people's inability to access those goods and services should be the paramount determinant. In doing that, issues of physical and economic accessibility are addressed.

The entire concept of economic and social justice is founded on some fundamental pillars: fairness; access; equity; diversity; participation; inclusivity and human rights. These concepts, construed broadly, are implicitly evoked in the normative contents of international and regional human rights instruments, all of which are consolidated towards the achievement of peace, stability, equality, justice and human progress. The non-discrimination clause in international and regional human rights instruments ensures that no one is discriminated against with regards to the rights contained therein. The different obligations to realise those rights require that physical and economic accessibility are significantly improved to ensure that widest reach in the enjoyment of human rights. If many societies in Africa struggle with the realisation of socio-economic rights, then, obviously, the achievement of social and economic justice is severely compromised. A progressive realisation of social and economic rights also means an improvement in attaining social and economic justice since that requires a broad and substantive provision and allocation of social goods and services. The reality, however, is different: numerous African countries are struggling with the realisation of socio-economic rights, and by implication, with socio-economic justice.

Most of the crises in Africa are rooted in systemic social exclusiveness: political favouritism in which specific people are preferred to others because of their ethnic or tribal roots; limiting opportunities to specific individuals; violation of human rights; mismanaging public institutions for the benefit of a few; gender inequality; corruption for the benefit of some; and venal justice delivered by judicial institutions in favour of the powerful in society (Williams 2017, 36-37). Systemic social exclusiveness stands as the anti-thesis to social inclusiveness which, in the words of Gupta and Vegelin, "has its roots in human rights, inequality, redistribution, rural development, entitlements and capabilities concepts" (Gupta and Vegelin 2016, 436). As explained by Gupta and Vegelin, social inclusiveness takes different dimensions, each commanding different kinds of implications: at local level, social inclusiveness includes accounting for specific groups and individuals within that locality (such individuals may come from different spheres of life such as culture, sports, religion, entertainment, technology or a profession) (Gupta and Vegelin 2016, 436). At national level, it means taking into consideration sectors, places and communities that are marginalised. The regional dimension of social inclusiveness warrants transboundary movement and reallocation of resources to assist the vulnerable. At global level, social inclusiveness would mean demanding explanations on least developed and developing countries, the prevalence of conflict and what efforts are in place in building post-conflict societies as well as on which pillars such are done.

Social inclusiveness, it is argued, is the core norm that defines and develops social and economic justice. That means the poorest in every community, must be empowered through investments in them and the creation of opportunities for them to participate in. Built on the principle of non-discrimination, it means that everyone, irrespective of their age, gender, religious creed or political affiliations, should be included in projects at all levels: such inclusion offers them opportunities to develop themselves and their communities to be developed too. If social inclusiveness is factored in programmes, and the poorest are targeted as the beneficiaries, then, such projects will identify and focus on both rural and semi-urban areas where the poorest reside. They will touch also on the various sectors in which they are involved: small-scale subsistence farming, forestry, fishing, animal husbandry (cattle-rearing, poultry and snail farming), horticulture, petty trade, logistics and clerical work. Given their inability to generate capital in doing these income-generating activities, their potential to grow is severely curtailed. Moreover, they have become highly vulnerable to policy changes and environmental factors. Social inclusiveness and economic empowerment geared towards the achievement of social and economic justice would mean that every context is investigated and recommendations that are made are suitable and adaptable, beneficial to everyone rather than a few.

Does the human rights architecture bring socio-economic justice?

The publication of data by international bodies on various social and economic issues, including poverty, healthcare, education, food, and corruption, is deeply concerning. This concern is amplified when examining the data specifically related to Sub-Saharan African countries. The data clearly indicate that Sub-Saharan Africa is still struggling to achieve social and economic rights, overcome corruption perpetrated by senior state officials, and establish social and economic justice. These harsh socio-economic conditions stand in stark contrast to the vision outlined in the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which emphasises the interconnectedness of human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the importance of recognising human rights in the broadest sense.

Within the Preamble to the UDHR, two clauses highlight the relationship between respect for human rights and the achievement of peace. The first clause recognises the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all human beings as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. The second clause acknowledges the faith of the United Nations' member states in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of every human person, and the equal

rights of men and women. It also expresses their commitment to promoting social progress, better standards of life in larger freedom.

Based on the fundamental and undeniable principle that all individuals are born free and equal in dignity and rights, they are obligated to treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Among the numerous rights enumerated in the UDHR and the subsequent international and regional human rights instruments, certain provisions pertain specifically to social and economic justice. These include Article 2, which establishes the non-discrimination clause ensuring that all rights in the UDHR are available to everyone without distinction, promoting equality as a fundamental principle of social and economic justice. Other articles address topics such as recognition as a person before the law, equality before the law without discrimination, the right to an effective remedy for rights violations, the right to participate in government and public service, the right to social security and the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights, the right to work and receive fair remuneration, the right to rest and leisure, and the right to an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and social security. Additionally, Article 26 guarantees the right to education, particularly aimed at the full development of the human personality and strengthening respect for human rights and freedoms.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) echoes the sentiments expressed in the Preamble to the UDHR. It emphasises the relationship between human rights and the attainment of human freedom. The Preamble to the ICESCR recognises that conditions must be created to enable individuals to enjoy their economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as their civil and political rights, in order to achieve the ideal of free human beings living without fear and want. The rights enshrined in ICESCR are closely related to the economic, social, and cultural aspects of human rights. These rights directly impact a person's daily life, including where they live, the food they eat, the availability of medical facilities and personnel, access to education, and the nature of their work. These rights significantly affect a person's dignity and worth, and contribute to the division between those who have and those who do not. Poverty, in particular, is defined by a person's inability to afford essential needs such as housing, clothing, food, medicine, and education.

However, despite the aspirations set forth in the UDHR and the obligations outlined in the ICESCR, the realisation of social and economic justice has not been fully achieved. One of the reasons for this is that within the international legal order wherein resides international human rights, legal philosophers and other social scientists argued that socio-economic and cultural rights are 'second-generation' rights, meaning they play second fiddle to civil and political rights. In essence, it meant that focus was directed to political systems and inclusiveness in terms of allowing people to participate in the public lives of their countries, while socio-economic rights and their issues are ultimately addressed by such political systems and their leaders. In other words, the realisation of civil and political rights would eventually result in the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. That approach, as known today, was significantly flawed, with questionable motives as to whether the architects really sought to achieve social and economic justice in every corner of the globe.

Corruption has had a detrimental impact on the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights. It has deprived communities and states of the necessary resources to build infrastructure and recruit experts. As a result, the number of schools, competent teachers, improved road infrastructure, fair salaries, job opportunities, and adequate remuneration for workers have not been possible to achieve or experience some progress because of corruption. A system that allows a state employee to misappropriate over 40 billion francs CFA while his security guards are paid 70 USD a month as a salary is a system that perpetuates social and economic injustice. Thus, while many Sub-Saharan African countries have ratified international and regional human rights instruments, the disappointing and chilling data published by intergovernmental organisations on social and economic issues demonstrate that the human rights architecture alone is insufficient to bring about socio-economic justice: its progressive realisation necessitates a broader range of social and economic initiatives, policies, interventions and infrastructure, and all these depend on the quality and vision of political leadership. Achieving socio-economic justice requires comprehensive policies and measures that address structural inequalities, redistribute resources, and ensure equal opportunities for all members of society. Economic and social policies, including progressive taxation, social welfare programs, inclusive education, and labour rights, play a vital role in pursuing socio-economic justice.

CONCLUSION

Africa's report on the Millennium Development Goals was poor: transitioning to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the critical importance of political leadership was not highlighted. The possibility of fulfilling the aspirations in the SDGs remains largely in doubt. Political leadership involves power, influence, followership and direction. To end the protracted and violent political crises that plague most African countries, it is important to address the issue of social and economic injustices. This is completely incumbent on political leadership since it requires a vision, wise policies, sound judgments, effective management of resources and credible individuals who share in such a vision to take part in directing state institutions established towards that end. The African continent is eloquent evidence of the fact that the abundance of several rich natural resources does not automatically translate into development, wealth, equality and prosperity of a people. However, political leadership has the power to reshape this reality, steering the continent towards a respected status where wealth is managed for the benefit of all. Additionally, political leaders must confront the challenges posed by colonisation and neo-colonisation in various aspects of life, such as culture, economics, politics, religion, and medicine. The impact of colonisation on African territories hindered their industrialisation, while simultaneously fostering class

struggle, tribalism, and ethnic divisions, all perpetuated by the colonial powers to maintain control. Addressing corruption, particularly the grand corruption perpetrated by senior political officials, necessitates international collaboration and innovative approaches. Lastly, political leadership should champion national unity and advocate political philosophies that promote social cohesion, recognising its significance in advancing the country in all dimensions.

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