9 The role of the Diaspora in strengthening democratic governance in Africa

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Introduction

Reflections about democratic governance in Africa elicit both a smile and a grimace at the same time. A smirk in the sense that frequent elections in the last two decades are a huge improvement from Africa of old with coups, violence and unconstitutional change of governments. On the other hand, there is grimace considering that the prevailing political environment in the continent is yet to be immersed in the culture, norms and values of democratic governance. It is on the basis of the latter that democratic regimes across Africa can be reasonably assessed or discussed within the context of what Steven Levistky and Lucan Way, as quoted in Yusuph Olaniyonu,[1] referred to as "Competitive Authoritarianism." The scholars wrote that, in a competitive authoritarian system, "formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy." They further observed that, although democratic states in Africa have constitutions and functional judiciaries, multi-party systems, periodic elections, etc., the incumbents violate rules of democratic engagement to the extent that most governments lack legitimacy. In most cases, election results rarely reflect the wishes of the electorate, because certain democratic institutions, such as election management bodies, security agencies, media organizations, and the courts, are frequently violated and manipulated to create an uneven playing field between the government and opposition. As quoted by Levistky and Way in Olaniyonu,[2] "incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters and in some cases manipulate electoral results."

Keen observations of democracy in Africa show that the practice is reflective of competitive authoritarianism. In other words, the character of democratic regimes depicts the definition and attributes of competitive authoritarian regimes. As a matter of fact, little or no genuine efforts are made to safeguard the sanctity of the electoral process and institutions of democracy. In some countries of Africa, there are still no clear-cut succession plans and programs.[3] Be that as it may, the situation created by competitive authoritarianism has its own contradictions; it usually

generates tension and sources of instability to the extent that violent outbursts are witnessed in sever~~██~~ts of the continent. This stems from the fact that the conduct of periodic elections and the presence of courts, civil society organizations, legislatures and independent media provide platforms for agitations and challenges by opposition forces.

It is largely due to the controversy as to whether or not Africa aptly fits into the model of competitive authoritarian regimes that some writers tend or prefer to describe democratic practice in Africa as nascent democracy, fledgling democracy, or growing democracy. However, in the opinion of Olaniyonu,[4] "the correct characterization of political systems in Africa is that the continent only transited from full blown authoritarianism to diminished authoritarianism or competitive authoritarianism." No matter what the theoretical submissions of various writers are, there are distress signals that indicate that political systems in Africa are not moving toward becoming a true representative of liberal democracy. Africa has often been described as a social formation where elections have been turned to wars, and where politicians govern without legitimacy. In the same vein, Nnanna Anyim-Ude[5] posits that African governments are organizing "elections," but democracy is not taking root because the ruling party usually "converts the electoral officers, police, and other security agents into an awesome infrastructure of rigging."

It is against this background that this chapter explores the role of the African Diaspora in strengthening democratic governance in the prevailing atmosphere of "competitive authoritarianism." From the foundation of the world, people have always left their homelands to live in foreign countries for social, economic, and political reasons. A relevant example is the emigration of the Israelites to Egypt thousands of years ago when there was drought. Also, there are some skills or expertise that are better appreciated in foreign countries. A classic example is the mass movement of African nurses and doctors to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s on the basis of better remuneration by the Saudi authorities. As a matter of fact, from the mid 1980s up to the 1990s, Africa suffered brain drain. African professionals in various fields, including medicine and technology, moved in droves to America, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other places.[6] These professionals genuinely believe they could get better value for their skills and qualifications outside the shores of the continent. The United Kingdom, for instance, has a program to attract African specialists through its highly skilled migrant worker program. People with huge financial and intellectual resources to invest in the British and American economies are also encouraged to live in these countries.[7] There are also hundreds of thousands of Africans who live in other continents because the foreign climes are convenient and working to near perfection. Hostile and intolerant political environment in Africa have also made people seek and secure asylum in the United States of America, Canada, and Europe. It is these categories of migrants that we refer to as the African Diaspora. This chapter mainly addresses the opportunities and dividends that benefit Africa from the intervention and participation of the Diaspora in the politics and governance of Africa.

Conceptual clarifications

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Diaspora

In simple terms, a diaspora is a community of people living outside their countries of origin.[8] In 2005, the African Union (AU) defined the diaspora as "people of African Descent and heritage living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship, and who remain committed to contribute to the development of the continent and building of the 'African Union'". Similarly, the AU defined "African Diaspora" as "the geographic dispersal of people whose ancestors, within historical memory, originally came from Africa, but who are currently domiciled, or claim residence or citizenship, outside the continent of Africa." Geographically, the African Diaspora is a large population found in the USA, Europe, Canada, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Asia, Oceania etc. The population of the African Diaspora is yet to be determined. It was at the inaugural AU summit in Maputo that the AU formally included Africans living in the Diaspora as the Sixth Region of the AU's organizational structure. The account of Foote[9] reveals that:

> This decision to open the door to the diaspora is in part a recognition that today as many Africans now reside outside the continent as live on the continent. The decision also dramatically expands the reach of Africa into the purer corridors of Washington, New York, London, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, and elsewhere.

From the narrative of Foote, the African Diaspora "have formed potent networks in cities where they live in the North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, and elsewhere around the globes." He further posits that Africans in the Diaspora "wield extraordinary political, cultural and economic power." Based on this, the African Diaspora has the potential to support sustainable development and improve democratic governance in the continent. The African Diaspora, therefore, connotes an emerging and new paradigm in which relationships between those residing outside and within the continent are being fostered to speed up the development process. It has often been argued that, in the womb of the Diaspora, Africa's best and brightest exist. They have different fields of expertise that could easily come together to find homegrown answers to the various issues facing the continent, including critical problems of leadership, food production and distribution, malaria, and AIDS. The different fields of expertise include political, military, diplomatic, economic, and social.

Diaspora clearly spells out the interconnectedness of Africa and her people, where the destinies of people who live outside and the threat to those who live in the continent are interwoven. There is no gainsaying that, not only is a threat against any African a threat against all, but failure to deal with a threat against any African can undermine the defense against all the others. Therefore, the underlining principle of diaspora, especially within the context of the AU's definition, is

simply that of shared responsibility, as well as shared interest among people of African descent and heritage. After all, Europe, America, or Asia will not develop Africa for Africans. Little wonder that the AU has committed itself to providing representation to the African Diaspora in its policy process in its amended constitution of 2003. The amended constitution, called the AU Constitutive Act, clarified the fundamental relationship between the AU and the Diaspora, and invited the Diaspora to join the organization in unifying Africa. Article 3(q) of the AU Constitutive Act states that "the AU hereby invite(s) and encourage(s) the full participation of the African Diaspora as an as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union."

The fundamental relationship between the AU and African Diaspora underscores the point that conceptualizations of diaspora must be able to accommodate the integrative mechanisms and impulses of connectivity from the homeland. This raises the question as to when new immigrants become part of the Diaspora. Zeleza[10] suggested that not every migrant turns into a Diasporan. In his words;

> Many Africans who have come to the United States, for example, since the end of the Second World War, have done so for temporary periods, as workers, expatriate professional, business people, students, and tourists and often go back after the realization of their objectives. It does not seem to make much sense to regard such temporary migrants as members of the diaspora.

A precondition, according to Paul Zeleza, for the transition from a migrant into a Diasporan, is "prolonged settlement, followed by permanent resettlement in a new host country." In most cases, the diasporization process is a cumulative one, beginning with migration, followed by resettlement, and then reproduced through the offspring of the migrants. In fact, Zeleza categorized the African Diaspora into the "historic Diaspora" and "the new Diasporas." While the former are those whose resettlement occurred in the past, the latter are those formed from the waves of more recent migrants.

In regard to the above, it is no doubt that diaspora is a complex phenomenon. As a matter of fact, many Africans are yet to appreciate the connectivity between the Diaspora and their homeland, especially in terms of the extent to which the Diaspora can be a political and economical ally of governments in Africa. In the same vein, the Diaspora also has a negative attitude toward the African project. Sometimes, the African Diaspora believe that Africa is retrogressive, and openly canvass this view in important fora and media platforms, which are major sources of information and intelligence gathering. The danger, according to Bola Akinferinwa,[11] is that when the Diaspora write and condemn the continent, it becomes obvious that the best of the world cannot but perceive Africa negatively. How this complex phenomenon called "Diaspora" can deepen democratic governance in Africa constitutes the problem of this study.

Democratic government

There is a general consensus all over the world that democracy is the best form of government, even if scholars and practitioners are not in agreement with the definition, content, and form of democracy. It is common knowledge that a system of government is democratic if it is based on popular participation and not on exclusivity. Democracy is simply defined as the rule of the people, and requires the protection of basic liberties such as speech, assembly, movement, religion, conscience, and private property. It guarantees the rights of individuals to equality, justice, and freedom. Anyim-Ude[12] affirms that any functional democracy must entail free and fair elections, rule of law, independent judiciary, virile opposition, organized political parties, and other strong institutions. However, he acknowledged that the conduct of free and fair elections is the strongest indicator of a country's democratic content.

In a historic address by United States President Barack Obama to the Ghanaian Parliament in 2009, entitled "Africa does not need strong men but strong institutions," Obama made a critical point that elections alone do not make a democracy. He argued that a society with good elections that remained mired in corruption, abuse of process and general insecurity is, in fact, a tyranny. He concluded that, "the ballot box can deliver a desired candidate, but the business of democratic governance is even more challenging than the ritual of election." Another point made by President Barrack Obama is that, while democracy remains a universal concept, it assumes local coloration in line with the history and traditions of specific countries. He declared that, "each nation gives life to democracy in its own way and in line with its own traditions." He, however, underlined the common denominator of all democracies, which is obedience to the will of the people and adherence to the basic tenets of freedom of expression, rule of law, and sanctity of institutions, etc. These suggestions imply that democratic governance is about values, standards, and principles that have international acceptability.

Kayode Komolafe[13] clearly argues that democratic governance is achieved when the instrumentality of a democratic political order is employed to bring about development in all its ramifications. In other words, developmental questions can only be resolved within the framework of genuine democracy. In every respect, democratic governance depicts an ideal that yields positive returns in various forms to the people whom, ordinarily, sovereignty belongs to. John Dara[14] said that the major positive returns of democratic governance on the political level are participatory politics, accountability, free and fair elections, representative government at all levels, and a system that offers opportunity for people to register their protests through the ballot box. The political contest of democratic governance essentially relates to the rights and powers of the people. On the socio-economic level, Dara posits that democratic governance yields an equitable distribution of the resources of the people among them at every level; this translates to employment opportunities, growth in agriculture and tourism, provides an enabling environment for business to thrive, creates an increase in

foreign reserves, provides adequate security, maintains social and physical infra-structure, and so on. The socio-economic aspect of democratic governance relates to the duties that the state and its various institutions owe the people.

On a general level, democratic governance guarantees the economic, social, and political rights of the citizens. Matthew Kukah,[15] for his part, considers the participation of the media, civil society, and non-governmental groups a *sine qua non* for democratic governance. A popular assertion from Ernest Gellner, a soci-ologist, is "no civil society, no democracy." Similarly, Jessica Matthew in Anyim-Ude,[16] while examining the role of civil society as an integral part of building and sustaining democratic governance, stated:

> they breed new ideas; do legal, scientific, technical, and policy analysis; provide services; shape, implement, monitor and enforce national and inter-national commitments; and change institutions and norms.

Accordingly, these groups "not only build society, but serve as a balance for government at all levels." Both Dara[17] and Kukah[18] conclude that democratic governance does not exist if the aspirations and socio-economic well-being of the people are not comprehensively addressed.

Painfully, throughout the continent of Africa, the "positive returns" of demo-cratic governance have remained elusive. As Abdulkadir Abdullahh Mohamodu noted, what is visible in most African countries is the failure of leadership and steady slide into an apocalyptic state. African leaders are renowned for scuttling the electoral preferences of their people. For the most part, elections conducted in Africa are characterized by voting irregularities and the suppression of the opposition. The electoral malfeasances perpetrated by Mwai Kibaki of Kenya, Laurent Gbegbo of Senegal, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and the perennial shenanigans of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and others are cases in point.

For our purposes, democratic governance has to do with the control or man-agement of democratic authority, and how it is exercised in the governance of the society in accordance with the principles of rule of law, legitimacy, free choice, and accountability. To all intents and purposes, democratic governance presupposes good governance.

Theoretical perspective

The systems theory, as espoused by David Easton, is adopted in this chapter. A system is the grouping together of functional related parts that are conceptually separated from their environment, in order to achieve some purpose. Easton is usually credited with pioneering the application of the systems theory to the ana-lysis of the political process.[19]

In studying political systems from a systems perspective, individual parts are viewed as highly interdependent; the way one unit of a political system operates affects the functioning of other units. The environment of the political system

consists of those institutions found in the economic, social, cultural, and international systems which shape political process and whose activities are influenced by the political system.[20] It is assumed that systems theory is comprehensive in the sense that it includes all the interactions which take place within the political system. Thus, a system is normally not closed, but open to outside influences. As Nekabari Ntete-Nna[21] puts it, a "system is prone to influences from the environment and it may in turn influence events within its environment."

In the present era of globalization, where there is no clear difference between foreign and home peoples, the Diaspora functions as a sub-system of the whole, and contributes to the proper functioning of the whole. It is within the context of the foregoing that this chapter applies systems theory to understand and argue that the African Diaspora is a critical part, institution, or agent of strengthening democratic governance in Africa.

African Diaspora: agent of democratic governance

The AU Constitutive Act of 2003 which "invite(s) and encourage(s) the full participation of Africans in the Diaspora" in Africa's development, is a watershed in Africa's democratization process. The invitation created the need for an institutional bridge that opened communication between the Diaspora and their homeland, and offered a more comfortable environment in which not only new relationships are built but also system theory operates. The invitation, which also heralded the recognition of the Diaspora as the Sixth Region of the African Union, aptly underscores the popular saying "you are not African because you are born in Africa, but because Africa is born in you." The Diaspora recognized by AU captures all the descendants of people of African origin who left the continent, either of their own volition or as enforced slaves, living across the world.

Africa has been experimenting with many reform initiatives. While a few of these initiatives have worked, the majority have simply amounted to an index of disgraceful misery. For instance, the neo-liberal policies of free market, competition, privatization, deregulation, etc. adopted by successive governments in most African countries have created economic and social conditions of poverty and poverty is antithetical to participatory democracy.[22] Scholars have argued that the high incidence of electoral fraud, vote racketeering, political and voter apathy, electoral violence, etc. in Africa's democratic practice is a function of poverty. Belinda Otas[23] writes that countries such as Israel have become economical and political successes partly because of the active roles and contributions made by their diaspora through the use of remittances in eradicating poverty.

During a ministerial briefing on the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) held at the National Assembly in 2008, Ambassador Joe Keshi, Permanent Secretary in the office of Secretary to Government of the Federation, revealed that members of NIDO remit about eight billion dollars to Nigeria on annual basis.[24] Muktar Shagari[25] also acknowledges that Nigeria, in particular,

has seen a quantum rise in the amount of foreign currencies remitted back home by the Nigerian Diaspora. He put the amount remitted by the Diaspora to Nigeria in 2008 at four billion US dollars, at a time home-based Nigerians take huge public funds out of the country. In the Netherlands, Diaspora migrants sent about 2.8 billion euro in 2003 through official and non-official channels. Much of the African Diaspora in the Netherlands is from Africa's poorest and war-torn countries, such as Angola, Congo, and Somalia. Public services in these countries have broken down because of corrupt and irresponsible government.[26] What these remittances mean is that the African Diaspora is contributing directly to the livelihood of many of Africa's poor, and thereby helping reduce the level of poverty in the continent. In the words of Mohamoud:

> remittance has a considerable trickle down effect, and in almost every city or town in Africa, poor people cite remittance as one of their sources of livelihood: An important factor promoting this trickle down effect is the nature of the family organization in Africa. African families are still organized around extended family networks rather than the smaller, nuclear families typical of the West ... collective reliance encourages individual family members, wherever they may be, to help and aid each other. And it is this tradition of mutual aid which obliges an African in the diaspora to send money back home to be, more or less, shared out by the members of the extended family. Thus, in this way, remittances provide direct benefits to many individuals who are at the bottom of society in many parts of Africa.[27]

The point made here is that remittances from the Diaspora alleviate poverty in Africa. As we noted earlier, democracy cannot take root in Africa in a "climate of poverty." Therefore, by alleviating poverty through remittances to Africa, the Diaspora is playing an invaluable role in promoting democracy in the continent.

A corollary to the above is the admission of Foote that Africans in the Diaspora have also begun to wield extraordinary political and economic power, which, if properly cultivated, can be effectively leveraged to reduce poverty in Africa. This is the point also canvassed by Dr. Erieka Benneth in Otas when he said:

> The kind of returns you can make on investment in Africa, you cannot make it anywhere else in the world. Everybody is here in Africa investing except us, the diaspora, and that's one of the things I'm really working on, championing, and helping our diaspora to see the potentials in Africa. There are vast opportunities here. The Chinese, Lebanese, and Indians are all here doing business in Africa—everyone but us, and that is one thing I think we need to wake up to.[28]

Dr. Erieka Benneth is an African American and founder of the Ghana-based Diaspora African Forum Mission. There is no doubt that investment by the Diaspora in the various sectors of the African economy can bring immense benefits in the

areas of job creation, building up capital, sustaining small and medium enterprises, creating a middle class, promoting exports, building capacity, and so on. These benefits of Diaspora investment will contribute to the growth of the private sector in Africa in the short, medium, and long terms. Therefore, a combination of remittances and vast direct investments by the Diaspora will have an impact on economic and political development in Africa. According to Shagari, it is this type of intervention by the Asian Diaspora that "launched the Asian Tigers in the world stage."[29] Our argument here is that, by helping to achieve economic stability in Africa, the Diaspora is being supportive of democratic governance.

Africa has been substantially plagued by a poor democratic culture and leadership failure. It is this leadership failure that elicits the concern of the African Diaspora upon the realization that destinies are intertwined and inextricably linked. As a matter of fact, the present era of globalization predisposes the Diaspora to act as a strategic non-governmental body in Africa's democratic project. Globalization means that, in a borderless world, there is no clear difference between what is foreign and what is domestic, and between who resides abroad or at home. To this extent, weak democracies leading to poor governance have as much impact on those outside the continent as on the people in Africa. In other words, the African Diaspora is not and cannot be insulated from "the prevailing rule of the jungle and its misery index." This is why foreign governments and global governance institutions are increasingly playing vital roles in instituting democracies around the world (some examples are in East Timor, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan). Therefore, as part of the "international community," the role of the Diaspora in building strong democracies in Africa is not only essential, but also a political desideratum. In other words, the Diaspora cannot afford or decide to remain distant, aloof, and insensitive while Africa "progresses into a steady slide into an apocalyptic state."

Some scholars have maintained that Diaspora participation in governance will be the ultimate catharsis in purging Africa of the stigma of a failed region. Mohamoud articulates the growing realization among the African Diaspora that they have a responsibility to intervene in governance at a time at which "Africa regresses while the rest of the world progresses."[30] In his words, "this painful experience is a growing concern among African Diaspora who believe that they are in a position to contribute to development in Africa because of their presence at the centres of global decision-making in the West."

Strengthening democratic governance in Africa requires governmental and non-governmental action. But, in the event that governments do not encourage free and fair elections, which are the strongest indicators of democratic content, the burden of building democracy falls on non-governmental organizations, such as the Diaspora.[31] There is no doubt that the Diaspora has played a central role in the recent global debate about the preconditions for democracy and democratization. In the newer democracies, the diaspora focused attention on the need to foster a vibrant democratic culture in "souls traditionally inhospitable to good governance." Also, the Diaspora facilitates peer review among countries in Africa by collaborating with civil society to act as the citizens' watchdog, monitoring and

evaluating the institutions of governance and those elected or appointed to oversee them. The Diaspora can also help to fight corruption by frustrating money-laundering and exposing the properties owned by public officers abroad. By collaborating with civil society to perform this critical oversight role, the Diaspora is informally woven into the network of governance to extend the administration of checks and balances within the political system. The role is without doubt crucial to the development and sustenance of democracy and good governance in Africa.

Apart from the oversight values explained above, the Diaspora also supports their home government, particularly the legislature, by providing law makers with important information, research data and resource materials that will assist them in passing high impact legislation that directly and meaningfully impacts the lives of the people. Media organizations, as democratic institutions, have a lot to learn from the African Diaspora media that were unabashedly in the forefront in advocating the for independence of African countries and dismantling the apartheid regime in South Africa at a time when most Western media preferred Africa in perpetual servitude.[32]

Finally, the Diaspora improves the "leadership quotient of Africa. As a matter of fact, the diaspora's intervention in governance is sure to generate a leadership program that seeks to bring the best brains around the globe to governance platforms."[33] We make this postulation on the basis that democracies all over the world have essentially profited from the concept of the circulation of elites. Pat Utomi[34] confirmed that elites who come from advanced democracies, with developed leadership skills and other capabilities have moved into fledgling or nascent democracies, to demonstrate how states are governed in line with best international practices. The bottom line is that several exploits of the African Diaspora in various fields of human endeavor in Europe, America and Asia indicate that Africans are not inferior in intellectual capacity.

Therefore, inclusion of the Diaspora in governments in Africa can only lead to a populace better educated in the decision-making process that in turn ensures stable democracies. Added to this is that, over a period of time, democracy comes to an understanding that what is best for everybody is to have an institutional arrangement that guarantees a level playing field. The end result of Diaspora participation in governance will be "brain-drain" translating to "brain-gain" in Africa.

Conclusions

One critical measure of the African Diaspora as a self-conscious identity lies in identifying with and engaging the original homeland. This is because the identity of the homeland is, in part, constituted by the Diaspora. So, the cycle of reciprocities between the Diaspora and Africa must be seen from the point of view that the Diasporas are legitimate actors in Africa's democratization process. In fact, there is documentary evidence that some Diasporas of North African extraction came back home to be part of effective civil disobedience and force the authorities to reckon with their views during the popular Arab springs in Tunisia,

Libya, and Egypt. The attitude presents the Diasporas as agents of change that support, encourage, and strengthen democratic governance through collaboration, representation, information exchange, and advocacy. Second, the essential part of democratizing means that boundaries have to disappear as groups and individuals seek context in which to operate. Based on these ideals, the Diaspora has a critical role in strengthening democratic governance in Africa.

Notes

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