

Information and Communication Technology and Good Governance in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed major paradigm shifts in the conceptualization of development and governance. These phenomena are aided and propelled by a new “network intelligence” consummated in the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT). The world has also witnessed a reinvention of the whole process of governance that has impacted society in various ways. Through the Internet and digital connectivity, today’s world has come to be closer than ever before. Efficiency and processes of governance have been improved through faster information flow in the governance chain. Bottlenecks and cost of labor have been reduced across the world. Furthermore, ICT has opened new possibilities, improved transparency and access to information as well as partnership and collaboration, leading to improved relationships between the citizen and state. While Europe and North America, as well as some countries of Asia and the Pacific, have taken advantage of this development to improve their economies and governance process, Ning (1999) observes that sub-Saharan Africa has remained either passive or in the periphery, often reduced to a consumer for reasons related to its history or its system of governance—or lack of one. This has led to a yawning digital divide (especially between Africa and developed states of the world).

What led to this divide and how can Africa, then, benefit from this revolution? What are the obstacles?

BACKGROUND

Such historical factors as colonialism and associated exploitative orientations and, more recently, military dictatorship and neo-liberalism have dominated the literature of Africa’s political economy as explanatory framework for underdevelopment. Little has been blamed on the problems of state interventionism that characterized the post-independence period and that appear to have exposed the weakness of the state in Africa to manage its resources and deliver services, thereby leading to underdevelopment and poverty. Even at that, the prognosis and

taxonomy of the post-cold war developments in Africa still lean on such templates. In fact, African scholarship has continued to heap blames for underdevelopment on doors of liberalism, mercantilism and their “center-peripheral” characters. According to Bathily (Nnoli, Ed., 2000, p.49), “It appears clearly that the crisis of the post-colonial state is not directly caused by state intervention in the economy.” To that extent, Bathily contends that the solution to this crisis cannot be generated by the mere restoration of the so-called macro-economic equilibrium.

The current Africa’s problems have also been traced to corruption and bad governance (World Bank, 1989). Identification of these problems and their impediments to political and economic development have led experts, scholars, organizations and agencies to show concerted interests towards paradigm shift and reinventing governance. The move is borne out of the genuine conviction that there is a correlation between bad governance as witnessed in Africa and other parts of the world and over-centralization. This correlation also extends to governance and problems of war, poverty, corruption and human security. Consequently, these have led to various dimensions of inequality and growth below the world’s minimum standards for economic development. According to Adedeji (2002), African performance in 1960-1975 was substantially below all the targets set by the United Nations (UN) Second Development Decade. Its GDP annual growth was 4.5% instead of the 6.0%; its export was 2.8% instead of 7.00%; its agricultural growth rate was 1.6% instead of 4.00%; while manufacturing grew at 6.0% instead of 8.00%. Import was 10.0% instead of 7.0%. This, according to Adedeji, reveals that Africa was faced with development crisis. Unfortunately, performance during the one-quarter of the 20th century (1975-2000) was more abysmal than that achieved during the first 15 years of independent Africa (1960-1975). It is postulated that if Africa has to exit from poverty and develop, it needs a growth rate of 7.0% per annum (Adedeji, 2002). The following data demonstrate Africa’s growth rate and prospects from 2002 to 2006.

It is the contention of scholarship also that this bad governance could be averted if there is culture of accountability, transparency, as well as commitment of political leadership to deliver services to the governed.

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Table 1. Real GDP growth rate of developing countries (International Development Economic Associates, 2005)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
East Asia and Pacific	6.7	7.9	7.8	7.1	6.6
Europe and Central Asia	4.6	5.9	7.0	5.6	5.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.6	1.6	4.7	3.7	3.7
Middle East and North Africa	3.2	5.7	4.7	4.7	4.5
South Asia	4.6	7.5	6.0	6.3	6.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.6	3.7
All Developing Countries	3.4	5.2	6.1	5.4	5.1
— excluding transition countries	3.2	5.1	5.9	5.4	5.1
— excluding China and India	2.1	3.8	5.4	4.6	4.3

Table 2. Actual and projected long-term growth of per capita GDP (in percent) (International Development Economic Associates, 2005)

	1980s	1990s	2000-06	2006-15
World Total	1.3	1.1	1.6	2.1
High-Income Countries	2.5	1.8	1.7	2.4
Developing Countries	0.6	1.5	3.4	3.5
East Asia and the Pacific	5.8	6.3	6.0	5.3
Europe and Central Asia	1.0	1.8	5.2	3.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	-0.9	1.5	0.8	2.4

Table 3. Percentage of population living on less than \$1.08 per day (Chen & Revallion, 2004)

REGIONS	1981	1984	1987	1990	1993	1996	1999	2001
East Asia	57.7	38.9	28.0	29.6	24.9	16.6	15.7	14.9
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.5	3.7	4.3	6.3	3.6
Latin America and Caribbean	9.7	11.8	10.9	11.3	11.3	10.7	10.5	9.5
Middle East and North Africa	5.1	3.8	3.2	2.3	1.6	2.0	2.6	2.4
South Asia	51.5	46.8	45.0	41.3	40.1	36.6	32.2	31.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	41.6	46.3	46.8	44.6	44.1	45.6	45.7	46.4
Total	40.4	32.8	28.4	27.9	26.3	22.8	21.8	21.1

STEPS TAKEN TO ACHIEVE GOOD GOVERNANCE

Various steps have been taken at the national, regional and global levels to address the problems of bad governance in Africa. At the global level, there is a general call for democratization and economic reforms that could entrench a regime of accountability, transparency and culture of trust. Institutions, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and donor nations, have not minced words on these virtues as conditions for granting any form of aid to Africa. They have even extended their definition of governance to include a

redefinition of the state, the de-politization of public administration and involvement of non-governmental organizations.

At the regional level, there have been concerted efforts at political and economic integration as well as such programs as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is designed to use its Peer Review Mechanism and ICT as tracking tools against bad governance. Through this process, NEPAD will help eradicate poverty and empower African states to develop.

At national levels, states of Africa have various provisions in their constitutions and have introduced various institutional measures and anti-corruption agencies

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