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**Political Leadership and Good Governance in Africa: The Role of African Intellectuals in  
Reinventing a New Dawn for African Renaissance**

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## **Abstract**

Achieving good governance has remained one of the African region's greatest challenges that has continued to shape the success of programmes and projects aimed at promoting development on the continent. Good governance and ethical leadership are central to the success of any economy. Despite good progress in recent years, a lot of works still needs to be done to address poor practices manifesting in corruption, mass poverty and prevalence of curable diseases, sectional and ethnocentric maneuverings, high level of insecurity, electoral fraud and violence, poor intergovernmental relationships, and political interference in decision making. This paper thus captures information about governance and ethical leadership practices across Africa and explores the role of the intelligentsia in recreating "positive vision of Africa as a peaceful, democratic and market-oriented region that will attract foreign trade and investment, as well as the return of thousands of talented Africans and billions of flight capital now in safe havens abroad". It projects the view which offers an "alternative to the prevailing European concepts of, and structures for, African and global order" and promotes more enduring and universal human rights in an atmosphere of accountability and greater citizens' participation. The paper also sees African continent that is capable of evolving endogenous theories and precepts to redefine its processes of growth and development in order to fashion a sustainable vantage for the region at the world stage.

**Keywords:** Political leadership, Good Governance, Intelligentsia, African Renaissance

## **Introduction**

The import of governance, especially good governance alongside its corollary of political leadership in contemporary times cannot be overemphasized. The two are like Siamese twins that the condition of one informs the other. In other words, when political leadership is visionary, honest, dedicated, committed and purposeful it brings about good governance. Furthermore, when good governance is entrenched, quality political leadership emanates subsequently from the system. However, when the reverse is the case it is vice versa.

The nexus between leadership and governance, particularly political leadership and good governance is crucial for the attainment of a just and egalitarian society. They have become the crux of contemporary government and administration. Little wonder, Botha (n.d) observes that in addition to leadership, governance has become a significant area of research. He rightly explains that one of the key outcomes of governance in democratic societies is that it opens up the political space, process and enables the formulation and implementation of more transparent and responsive public policies. This outcome stems from the variety of participants in the policy process: legislators, political parties, interest groups from both civil society and the private sector, research organizations and to a degree, even civil service and local government.

Leadership and governance in Africa's scenario leaves sour taste in the mouth and depicts abject poverty and misery in the midst of abundance. Attempts have been ongoing to explain these

concepts in Africa's history and the continent's contact with colonialism. Ake (1996, p. 140) contends that it is true that Africa's colonial history and its place in the world system have not been conducive to independence. He however rightly argues that matters have not been helped by the performance of most African leaders in about five decades of independence. With few exceptions, their rule have been notable for oppression, corruption, social disorganization, demise of development project and growing poverty (1996, p. 141). In the same vein, Ottosen (2010) notes that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) recognizes the responsibility of African leaders even if emphasis was still placed on the legacies of colonialism: 'post-colonial Africa inherited weak states and dysfunctional economies, which were further aggravated by poor leadership, corruption and bad governance in many countries.' On his part, Ibrahim (2012) explains that there is nothing wrong with African people or the continent while however observing that good people and good land do not necessarily make for successful countries. He observes that it is good leadership – the steadfast pursuit of a vision, the ability to take risks and make difficult choices – and good governance – the management of those risks and implementation of choices made that is lacking. Hence, improving government and governance on the continent requires a good dose of both.

Furthermore, Ake (1996, p. 135) attempts to chronicle leadership and democratization processes in Africa, he notes that a strong movement for democracy is firmly in place in Africa, and it has had considerable success. For about two decades ago, military rule, one-party systems, and personal rule were the standard fare in Africa. Now they are the exception rather than the rule. An impressive number of African countries can boast of electoral competition, constitutionalism, popular participation, and a respectable human rights record notwithstanding the rate of its lopsidedness and how negatively skewed to the strangulation of opposition and minorities. But the pressures for democratization are so strong that for most of Africa, it is no longer a question of whether there will be a democratic transition but when and how. The recent experience in the Gambia defined the resolve of African states (through regional and sub-regional formations enforce democratic ethos) to accept democracy and popular participation. The prediction of Ake (1996) has also manifested in the popular protest in North Africa, dubbed the "Arab Spring," in the form of demonstrations against high rates of unemployment, poverty, rampant government repression and corruption. Chatora (2012, p.6) observes that against the background of the Arab Spring, it has been argued that this new type of political activism and participation will spread across the rest of African Continent.

Sequel to the above background, we will take a cursory look at political leadership, good governance, African intellectuals and African renaissance; establish the nexus between political leadership and good governance which serves as a precursor for analyzing and appreciating the role of African intellectuals in reinventing a new dawn for African Renaissance.

## **Political leadership**

Ordinarily, leadership as conceived by Cartwright (1978) means the ability of an individual (who leads) to get others to do what he wants for their own or for society's good rather than his own. Going by Cartwright's conception, it implies that leadership is altruistic and gears towards harnessing the people and their potentials to achieving their own good and that of society. Getting down on political leadership, Okadigbo (1987:1) explains that it connotes the personality at the helm of affairs and the manner of his exercise of given or appropriated powers with respect to the dispensation of national resources and his approach to the well being of the people. In a related perspective, Ogbeidi (2012, p. 4-5) in a more comprehensive approach avers that political leadership refers to

the ruling class that bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory. It could also be described as the human element that operates the machineries of government on behalf of an organized territory.

The foregoing broad based postulation implies that people who hold decision-making positions in government whether by means of election, appointment, electoral fraud, conquest, right of inheritance or other means constitute political leadership. It thus presupposes that political leadership goes beyond the ruling elites that directly manage the affairs of a territory; it embraces the totality of the political class that has the capacity to manipulate the machineries of government even from behind the scene.

What is more, the issue here is the type of leadership that is in place. They are typologies of leadership; the emphasis is on political leadership which is the fulcrum of galvanizing men, materials and resources aimed at attaining good governance which depicts a sine qua non for African Renaissance. The centrality of political leadership in governance has been captured vividly by the political economy approach or perspective that emphasizes the interface of the state and economy as well as the dynamics. Thus, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) does not lose sight of the importance of political and public administration dimensions of development with strong emphasis on good governance. It links these dimensions or variables of development to the economic and socio-economic ones (Ottosen, 2010). The pre-eminence of state (political or super structure) in the distribution and allocation of resources (economy or sub structure) as well as moderation in any society stands out. Efforts to build institutional, administrative and other capacities will be wasted if the political context is not favourable (Herbst, 1990: 957).

This could explain the nexus between the ruling and governing classes as well as the interplay of their interests on the one hand and with that of the citizenry on the other. The greatest problem

in Africa is the provision of effective, progressive leadership which seeks not to be served but to serve, a leadership that goes beyond verbal declarations to action (Report of the First Conference of Intellectuals of Africa and the Diaspora, 2004). The ruling class as used here are the leaders that occupy governance positions, while the governing class refers to the sponsors of those in leadership position, described in most cases as godfathers. It is through political leadership manifested in the manning of the structures of government that the affairs of the state are managed and regulated. The background, orientation, character and perceptions of the leaders that man the governance structures as well as the milieu inform their pattern/style of governance and ultimate aim: good or bad governance. This could go a long way to understanding the diverse nature of electioneering and other democratic processes in Africa; their fallouts and the concomitant levels of development across countries in the continent. The fore-going explains the import of political leadership and its inevitability in achieving good governance. Therefore, Hutchful (1991:55) points out that democracy in Africa should be focused on two critical elements: the political will to uphold the basic principles of democracy, and concerted efforts to create an economically enabling environment for democracy to thrive.

### **What then is Good Governance?**

This paper is conscious of the variations in the conceptualization of governance. Bovaird (2005, p. 217) observes that “good governance is a contested concept, both in theory and practice”. From its etymological antecedents, good governance in the development discourse has always been a conceptual *problématique*. It is susceptible to a variety of interpretations appropriating meanings that befit the context of its usage. Maserumule (2011, p.9) thus, observes that, a large body of scholarship is unanimous in the contention that good governance is a conceptual *problématique*. The meaning of good governance therefore is often the subject of contextual and situational peculiarities of its conception.

We will not dissipate energy over the conceptual clarification debates; thus, we will hold the variations in conceptualizing good governance in time and space constant; and align itself with perspectives of the World Bank Group and New Partnership for Africa’s Development. The reasons are not far-fetched: the World Bank Group represents global perspective and NEPAD spearheads or champions African’s Renaissance. According to the World Bank Group (2012) Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. Good governance therefore implies competent management of the country’s resources and affairs, that is, strengthening parliaments, protecting the autonomy of the judiciary, improving the performance of the public sector, supporting the development of professional media, encouraging private investment and decentralizing the delivery of services, open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people’s needs. It also includes extending the rule of law through effective impartial legal systems; high level of transparency and

accountability in both public and corporate processes; energetic, vibrant and pluralistic civil society activism; promotion of broad-based economic growth; dynamic private sector propelling poverty reduction and community participation in the country's democratic processes during referenda, periodic elections, open and fair gender representation. It thus implies participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive framework for decision making and implementation conducted within the ambits of the rule of law (Onu, Chiamogu and Anierobi, 2011).

### **Who are the African Intellectuals?**

We should bear in mind here that African intellectuals are not limited to the academia; it is an integral part of it but goes beyond that. It embraces all Africans at home and in the Diaspora that are conscious of Africa's problems and have made and are making concerted systematic cum creative efforts and contributions towards curbing or exacerbating them. All those that have theorized on re-inventing African renaissance; those that participated in the process either directly as leaders or indirectly as Administrators, Technocrats, Aides, Advisers, etc. The African intellectuals are in this study equated to the intelligentsia. The latter according to Wikipedia, (2017) is a status class of educated people engaged in the complex mental labours that critique, guide, and lead in shaping the culture and politics of their society. It includes artists, teachers, and academics, writers, journalists, etc. The intelligentsia as a specific social phenomenon is expected to perform conscious, proactive role in preserving national values and traditions. The intelligentsia like Edward Said observed comprised those persons whom the society recognized as having the legitimate role to 'speak truth to power'. By that, the intelligentsia are those persons who by their wisdom, knowledge, learning and creative outputs have the latitude to guide the political leadership of their society by recreating and reaffirming core values of the people within their context. These categories of people have however been sidelined by the successive governments of various independent states of Africa on coming to power and at independence thereby creating an ambivalent kind of relationship between them and the political elite.

### **African Renaissance**

This refers to the concept of Pan-African unity anchored on socio-economic and political prosperity that was first articulated by Cheikh Anta Diop in his book "Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in Culture and Development, 1946-1960". It was recently popularized by former South African President Thabo Mbeki when he predicted the rebirth of Africa in the 21st century. In his famous 1997 speech to a gathering of American investors and leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Mr. Thabo Mbeki was quoted to have spoken in the following lines:

"Those who have eyes to see, let them see. The African Renaissance is upon us. As we peer through the looking glass darkly, this may not be obvious. But it is upon us" (Mbeki: 2000, p.76). Those lines represent the optimistic utterances of a pan-Africanist that painted an imaginary picture of redefining the position of Africa in the comity of nations. The idea of an African Renaissance was later popularized by the 1998 African Renaissance Conference,

the Foundation of the African Renaissance Institute in 1999, and the book *African Renaissance* by William Malagapuru (1999) (Ottosen, 2010, p. 2).

African Renaissance is the quest for attainment of advancement in all ramifications, a break from negativity and rediscovery from a dark phase. The agenda of African renaissance according to Mbeki (2000, p.77) "is to restore Africa as a contributor to, as well as a beneficiary of, the achievements of human civilization. This resonated the need to empower African peoples to deliver themselves from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism thereby constructing a growing and sustainable economy that is capable of assimilating the best characteristics, contributing to, and taking advantage of the real flows of economic activities around the world. What is paramount here is endogenous approach towards reviving the fundamental values indispensable for building African modernity.

### **Political Leadership and Good Governance in Africa: Tracing the Nexus**

Good governance and effective-ethical leadership are the essential requirements for any country or organization to be considered successful in the eyes of all stakeholders in the 21st century. Botha (n.d) rightly observes that hunger, poverty, diseases and lack of development in Africa are in the first instance political and governance issues. Both economic and corporate governance take their cues from political governance. It would be naive to suggest that the latter could improve within a corrupt and self-serving political system, without ensuring that political governance itself is underpinned by effective-ethical leadership.

Many African nations, and others elsewhere in the developing world, are poorly governed. It could be proposed that this is one reason why these countries lag behind the rest of the world in economic growth, in medical and educational achievements, in social and political improvements and in freedom from internal conflict. If governance and leadership were to be improved in Africa, infant mortality and maternal morbidity rates would fall, the struggle to contain malaria, typhoid and other curable diseases would be more effective, civil strife would prove less damaging and democratic transitions would be much smoother. Analyzing one of Africa's Development Strategies – The Lagos Plan of Action, Owusu (2003, p. 1657) rightly notes that it focused exclusively on the external causes of the economic and social crisis and neglected internal causes such as lack of political leadership and good governance.

Thence, good corporate governance is critical for developing countries towards alleviating its problems of governance and leadership, especially concerning housing, health, education, unemployment and low economic growth. Without effective leadership and good governance at all levels in public life especially, it is arguably virtually impossible to achieve and to sustain effective administration, to achieve sustainable collective goals, to sustain quality and deliver first-rate services to the people of the continent. The increasing complexities and requirements arising from the constant change in society, coupled with the constant push for higher levels of



productivity, require effective and ethical leadership. Therefore, Annan cited in Venter (2011) contends that for Africa to prosper, good governance, the rule of law, and systems of accountability are essential to ensure that resources are subject to public scrutiny and used effectively and efficiently”.

Political governance thus has an important interrelationship with economic and corporate governance. The interrelationship between the institutions of political and corporate governance can be recognized through the principal roles the main legislative, regulatory and judicial bodies play in the establishment and in ensuring the relevance and continuation of many key institutions in public, private and civil societies. The objectives and principles of good corporate governance aim to assist and enhance regulations that govern institutions. The main aims thereof, are to create a certain degree of order and stability and to protect the interests of the public. Governance cannot attain its promised results if it is not supported in an interactive relationship with effective political leadership.

### **African Intellectuals and efforts at in re-inventing a new dawn for Renaissance: the roles underscored**

The prevailing dismal socio-political and economic landscape that characterize the continent of Africa smack volumes of yet to be 'decolonized minds' in the region. People of African descent resident in the shores of the continent are yet to seize back their creative initiative from an age long process that created unimaginable quantum of confused personalities who have passed on to generations attributes of people without need for achievement. Post independent Africa saw colonialism constructively restructured into neo-imperialism and globalization which have left the continent in shambles perpetuated by Afro-European compradors who through their actions have continued to obstruct real development on the region. Thrown into an unparalleled competition unprepared, the emergent African political leaders who were battling with managing complex statecraft without firm grasp of the substructure, were lured into adapting and copying foreign theories and precepts that were incompatible with African history, culture and realities of African environment thereby creating an overdeveloped state with massive external trappings. This thus rendered African economies subservient, rentier, mono-cultural, import driven and grossly dependent upon European nationals/economies and Breton Woods imperialistic policies and programmes. African resources have continued to be a boon to outsiders (Mbeki, 2014) while African people are constrained to live in abject poverty, prevalence of curable diseases, extreme lack, unending internal conflict, deprivation and frustration.

The foregoing scenario has further snowballed into a situation where many African states and their economies have continued to wallow in copied policies and political instability (South Sudan), inter-sectional crises (Cote d'voire) and ethno-religious conflicts (Nigeria), dry exploitation and extreme deprivation (Niger-Delta region - Nigeria), bitter struggles on land (Somalia), militancy and insurgency crises (Boko haram - Nigeria and many areas in the horn of Africa), secessionist agitations (Independent People of Biafra (IPOB)), massive hunger and poverty, institutional corruption subsumed in poor leadership and bad governance.

Nonetheless, the aphoristic realization and statement by Naomi Chomsky (1971, p.13) below presents informed hindsight on the will be roles of the intelligentsia:

Anyone can be a moral individual, concerned with human rights and problems; but only a college professor, a trained expert, can solve technical problems by "sophisticated" methods.

There have been concerted efforts by African intellectuals geared towards reinventing a new dawn for African Renaissance. The First Conference of Intellectuals of Africa and of the Diaspora organized by the African Union in collaboration with the Republic of Senegal was held at the Hotel Le Méridien, in Dakar, Senegal, from 6 to 9 October 2004. The Conference was a follow up to, and a logical extension of, the first Meeting of African Intellectuals and Personalities of Culture which took place in Dakar, Senegal, in 1996. Prior to these, the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in 1956 (Report of the First Conference of Intellectuals of Africa and the Diaspora, 2004).

To amplify and put to practice the fallouts of these Meetings and Conferences towards reinventing a new dawn for African Renaissance, the intellectuals must do the following:

1. **Identify the constraints:** The fifty-four (54) countries in the continent have diverse histories, cultures, experiences, etc; these to a great extent influence the nature and character of the states as well as the styles of leadership. Therefore, it is the responsibilities of the intellectuals to x-ray, identify and dissect constraints in countries of origin particularly and sister countries in general. When the exact hurdles in each country are properly identified by the intellectuals, the journey of reinventing a new dawn for African Renaissance has been done mid-way. Problems identified correctly are half solved.
2. **Act as a connect between the ruling and governing classes:** I have made reference earlier to these classes; I will expatiate a bit further here. The ruling class is referred to here as the leaders elected and/or appointed that run and oversee the day-to-day administration of the state. The governing class refers to those that ensure that the members of the ruling class emerge as winners at elections or appointed to political positions through legitimate or illegitimate ways or both. They are referred to variously as *kitchen cabinet*, *king makers* or *godfathers*. Note that members of this class are not limited to Africans; some Westerners that represent foreign interests also belong to this cabal. The members of this class constitutes over seventy (70%) percent of leadership and governance problems in Africa, they hold members of the ruling class and by extension the state by the jugular and throttle to stifle genuine efforts at development. This is because there are discrepancies between latent and manifest functions of policies and programmes designed for the citizenry and the state. The manifest function is beauty and ambition of policies and programmes to hoodwink the people, while the latent function is to siphon funds, divert resources meant for programmes, mismanage commonwealth for personal and self aggrandizement. The intellectuals are not ignorant of this scenario; some have had firsthand experience. By virtue of their status, the intellectuals enjoy close relationship with members of the ruling and governing classes;

therefore, they are in a better position to point out their nefarious activities and analyze the consequences of their actions and inactions to leadership, governance and development in the continent with statistical facts and figures and lucid pictures of what the scenario would have been if their actions and inactions are supportive to political leadership and good governance. When the ruling and governing classes turn a new leaf, the gap for reinventing a new dawn for African Renaissance is bridged further.

3. **Vanguard of the people:** Poor leadership has its way of fostering poor followership. The case of Africa is worsened by high rate of illiteracy and poverty that climaxed in ignorance. A good number of the citizens in most African countries are yet to appreciate the import of social contract between the state (personified in the leaders) and the people. The intellectuals should inculcate formally (especially the academia at schools) and informally, the expectations of the people from the state and the consequences when the state fails to live up to its expectations. Furthermore, the intellectuals should enlighten those that hold brief, run errand and act as fronts for members of the ruling and governing classes of the consequences of their actions and dishonourable roles in their lives, their families and future generations. They should be taught of the benefits of delayed gratifications, dignity of labour and to hold their leaders to account for their stewardship. When this is done, the leaders will be constrained to doing the needful – good governance.
4. **Leadership/governance by example:** Some intellectuals have held and some are still holding leadership positions. Intellectuals in such positions should lead by example by bringing the wealth of knowledge in research and training to bear on governance. An example worthy of mentioning here is the leadership of the electoral body in Nigeria – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The former chairman of the Commission is a professor and his predecessor is also a professor, the fallouts of the 2007 and 2015 general elections in the country under their respective watch are household stories. One striking feature of the Commission under the custodianship of Prof Attahiru Jega (the immediate past chairman) is the rise in standard of educational qualifications for the Supervising Presiding Officers (SPOs) and the Returning Officers (ROs) at all levels and the introduction of permanent voters' cards as well as card readers. The minimum qualifications for SPOs was PhD and Professors for ROs; universities Vice-Chancellors and Polytechnics Rectors acted as Returning Officers for Senatorial District Elections. With the introduction of this standard, a lot were checked and those involved knew the weight of their assignments and the dire consequences of misbehaving on their personalities and offices. When other intellectuals in similar positions follow suit, Africa will get to the promised land.
5. **Sacrifice and strong will:** The intellectuals must be willing and able to make huge sacrifices for a new dawn to be reinvented in African renaissance. The success of the fore-going factors analyzed centre on the ability and willingness of the intellectuals to make sacrifices. This entails that the intellectuals in leadership positions must be honest in every aspect without bothering whose ox is gored and ready to bear the consequences as well. They should not encourage and participate in tainting and falsification of data and figures to deceive and mislead the public in the guise of *National Interests* and *Security Reasons*. Furthermore, those involved in Constitution Amendment or Review should craft words in clear terms, not in ambiguous manner with provisos that give room to capitalize (create lapses) on the provisions of the constitution and perpetrate evil.

Those in foreign affairs should advise objectively on multi and bi-lateral relations. In a nutshell, wherever the intellectual is, s/he should make constructive criticisms and proffer remedial measures; shun mouth-watering gratifications that may be difficult to resist. Thus, Chomsky (1971, p.1-2) aptly observes that it is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies. Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyze actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions. We believe when the intellectuals do their bits diligently and other groups do theirs religiously, that the new dawn for African Renaissance is at sight.

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