Philosophy, Governance and Social Development in the African Context

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ABSTRACT
Africa is a continent of paradoxes. Whereas she has abundant human and natural resources, she is the poorest continent in the world. This African paradox is a subject of continuing discussion and it is the focus of the paper, “Philosophy, Governance and Social Development in the African Context.” Philosophy is basically a reflection on life and human existence as part of reality, and it cannot be done in a vacuum. Against the background that philosophy must contribute to the development of the society, if it will be relevant to its context, the paper outlines how philosophy can contribute to governance and social development in Africa.

Keywords: Philosophy, Governance, Social development, Leaders, Transformation and Africa.

INTRODUCTION
Africa is a continent of paradoxes. Whereas God has endowed her with abundant human and natural resources, she is backward and the poorest continent in the world. Whereas she is potentially a great continent, the actualization of the greatness has eluded her. Whereas she has produced giants in virtually all fields of human endeavors, many things are not working in the continent. Thus life and living in Africa have become burdensome, and except the trend is reversed, the future is bleak. The African situation has been a concern for many thinkers and leaders in Africa as well the topic of discourse in many conferences.

The paper, “Philosophy, Governance and Social Development,” examines the roles of philosophy in promoting good governance and social development to ameliorate the burden of life and living in Africa. The paper briefly describes the African situation, reflects on philosophy and the society and identifies the role of philosophy in effecting good governance and social development.

The African Situation
Even though there have been some developments in several African countries, the magnitude of corruption in Africa, the near collapse of infrastructure, the ineffectiveness of many institutions, the desperation of African youth to leave Africa, the crisis of identity and the quantum of wastage of lives and resources, all combine to make life and living a burden in Africa and has brought continental embarrassments of great proportions. In other words, the African situation conveys the imagery of being an African as a burden. It is disheartening that the African situation constrains one to agree with Charles Sherlock that “The term ‘Third World’ has become synonymous with poverty, oppression and deprivation.”

Four indexes will be used in describing the African situation: namely, bad governance, poverty, violence and low life expectancy.

1. Bad Governance
The missing link in Africa’s golden thread has been good leadership. “Leadership is a very significant concept. Certainly leadership makes a great difference in every organization or group. It can be affirmed that the success and achievements of a group to a large extent will be proportional to the quality of its leadership.” Bad governance is the bane of Africa, which has accounted significantly for the inability to translate her potentiality into actuality. According to UNCR, “Governance is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights.
This must be accomplished in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law. The factors identified as deterrents to good governance include feudalism, military interferences in governance, intolerance, corruption, donor dependence, and absence of a strong civil society. Many of these factors are rife in Africa. Generally, with exception of a few countries, Africa has had the unfortunate burden of many leaders who are ideologically poor, politically ill-equipped, intellectually deficient, personally selfish and developmentally myopic. Though cast against background of the second republic in Nigeria, Isma’il B. Jose’s analysis of the failed experimentation of constitutional government in Nigeria has continental applications. According to Jose, The primary reason for the failure of our experiment with constitutional government is the rather poor quality of leadership in this country. With very few exceptions, we have collectively failed to provide good leadership for our nation. The commitment of the entire political leadership of this country to a democratic form of government is extremely doubtful. Once installed in power, Nigerian’s leaders are prone to such display of arrogance of power that one must question their sincere and genuine commitment to a democratic way of life. The basis of this assertion is the regularity with which our elections are blatantly rigged in this country, and our political leaders find willing accomplices in some courts, electoral officers, the police and civil servants.

Jose wrote in 1987 but 30 years after the situation to a great extent is the same. Allied to the problem of bad governance is the persistent failure to improve structures and overcome weaknesses. African countries have maintained systemic failure for decades and thereby perpetuated leadership mediocrity syndrome. The bad leaders have their way and the nations and the people are the losers. Again, related to the problem of bad governance in Nigeria is the recycling syndrome and god-fatherism. Some people have been recycling in leadership for decades. They have been governors, senators and/or ministers. After they leave, if they belong to the ruling party, they may still be made Chairmen of one commission or another. This explains why our political leaders change parties frequently. The present political dispensation in Nigeria is a demonstration of the politics of fair weather syndrome which has been part of the nation’s history for decades. Many of the present All Progressive Congress (APC) politicians were key players in the previous People’s Democratic Party (PDP) government. The clash of interests and personal agenda of some of the key players have prevented a cohesive center. After three years the nation does not seem to have a clear-cut political direction. The political landscape of the nation has been filled with tension and confusion because many are leaving the APC back to PDP. Due to the role of money in politics, many upcoming politicians have to rely on political god-fathers. When they are elected, they are expected to be paying money to the god-fathers which will reduce the money to be spent for their respective states. There may also be conflict between the elected politician and the god-father which would impact negatively on a particular state. The general bad leadership syndrome has been so entrenched that sometimes it is difficult to choose among aspirants. Some other times, the better qualified person would not get the position sought for or may even be rigged out of the power game. The recent election in Ekiti State where vote buying was so pronounced that the election was widely condemned is an example of political desperation.

2. Poverty
The pervasive poverty level in Africa is burdensome. The poverty level has worsened due to the recent economic recession and the high dollar exchange rate. Apart from millions who are jobless, a good percentage of those employed are living below poverty level, judging by the international standard of anyone earing below $100 per day living below poverty level. In practical terms, those working whose salaries are below N11, 160 per month are living below poverty level. The pervasive poverty translates into millions not living in good houses, diseases and inability to afford medical care even for common ailments and thousands of children and teenagers out of school, among others. These manifestations are due to the fact that poverty is characterized by lack of means to meet basic needs and obligations, inability or difficulty in meeting financial responsibilities and substandard living. Poverty is connected with many social problems and vices like low self-image, low productivity, violence, armed robbery, prostitution, kidnapping, ritual murder and corruption. Two other related
problems are the issues of baby factories and even parents selling their children. The resultant effects are due partly to the fact that the desire to escape the grim realities of poverty ensnare many people into social vices. As Stephen Oladele Ayankeye and Abraham Olutoye Odeleye observe, poverty is “affecting Africa in so many ways. Hunger, lack of shelter and basic amenities of life are confronting Africans. It is a form of evil which increases social vices in the society.”

They further note that poverty and its effects waste the lives of youth and children thereby endangering the future of Africa. This is because the continent would be robbed of the contributions such wasted youth and children would have made in the future. The future consequences of poverty lend credence to the vicious cycle of poverty as it has a grip on its victims.

3. Violence

Another characteristic of the African situation is violence. Africa is a crisis–ridden continent. Again using Nigeria as an example, the Niger Delta crisis, the Boko Haram menace and the Fulani herdsman problem have bedeviled the nation for years resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of people, wanton destruction of properties and loss of arable land. With reference to the Boko Haram menace, for example, Jacob Segun Olutanji and Kolawole Daniel reported that the Nigerian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Prof. Tijani Bande, informed the United Nations Security Council that 14.8 million people were affected by the 9-year old Boko Haram insurgency. “He said 1.7 million people were internally displaced with the most adversely affected being women and children.” These are apart from cases of recurrent communal clashes, industrial violence riots, civil protests and demonstrations.

A worrisome dimension of violence in Nigeria is religious violence, which is a cause of serious concern to many people. Indeed some are apprehensive that except the nation stems the tide of the dangerous religious violence, it may lead to a major religious war. Against the background of the beginning of the third republic, A. Z. Apena and A. P. Adega commented on religious violence in Nigeria thus:

Religious violence has taken the front burner in contemporary discourse on Nigeria’s democracy. Since the re-commencement of democratic rule on 29 May 1999, religious violence has come to occupy the center stage. The ubiquity of religious violence is attested to by the sheer dramatic rise in the incidences as well as the volume of destruction of lives and property that have accompanied them and the palpable tension and animosity it has generated in the relationship between different groups in the country.9

Religious violence has not only continued till date, it has become aggravated. As Michael Adeleke Ogunewu asserted, “The scale of persecution of Christians has heightened in recent times, especially in the northern states and in the Middle Belt zone. It has resulted in immense loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties, prominent among which were churches.”10 Painting a picture of a dangerous future if the trend of religious violence is not reversed, Cornelius Afebu Omonokhua wrote:

The cloud on religion and ethnic co-existence is getting thicker on daily basis. Dialogue as a tool that ought to beam light on this apparent dark relationship needs to be given a renewed impetus in the face of criminal activities that now carry the label of religion. Some of the government policies and political appointments are often given a religious interpretation such that some people even perceive these as indicators of a systemic method of endorsing a particular religion as National religion. There is an escalation of mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims because of these. To drive home this enquiry, there is need to be honest and frank if we must avert the sword that is dangling over the head of the nation. Religious war has never been funny in world history.11

Christians express the kind of sentiments reflected in Omonokhua’s comment above because there is no strong denunciation of the senseless killings by the government, and perpetrators are not punished for their acts of wickedness.

Violence affects development severally. It compounds the political instability of the nation, which makes it difficult for foreign investors to come into the country. Violence has caused the closure of several investments thus making the country to lose both recourses and foreign investors. The Niger Delta crisis is a case in point. The crisis has forced the closure/relocation of some oil companies from the area. Most importantly in the effects of violence are the loss of lives and the massive and colossal waste and
destruction of properties worth billions of naira, on the one hand, and the money that would be spent in replacing some of the properties on the other hand. For instance, the devastated northeast farmlands would take decades to restore, if ever. Even now, over four years after, some of the Chibok girls captured by Boko Haram terrorists have not been released. The Chibok girls’ phenomenon is an open sore, a national embarrassment of the highest order.

Those who died or were incapacitated through mindless killings for a bizarre, ideological cause have been robbed of the contributions they would have continued to make to national development. Their family members and relatives have added the burden of the memory of the losses. There are widows who may never fully recover and orphans who may never be what God wants them to be. Similarly, there are owners of destroyed properties who would never make it again. Hundreds have left the “war zones.” Some literally abandoned what they had acquired. They moved when they were not prepared at the time. They continue to bear the psychological pain and burden in their new locations. The lives of many are characterized by bitterness, sorrow and anguish. Several families that they have come to meet have their resources stretched, increasing their challenges and geometrically compounding the burden of being and living in Africa. At this juncture, one is constrained to ask, “How long?” How long shall Africans engage in senseless and unnecessary killing of themselves? How long shall they be controlled by bizarre, irrational and anti-intellectual ideologies? How long shall they be religious bigots, political illiterates, economic dependents and technological backbenchers?

4. Low Life Expectancy

Life expectancy in Africa is low compared with other continents. This is the outcome of the three manifestations of the African situation discussed above and many other ones. In other words, low life expectancy is the cumulative effects of pervasive poverty, endemic corruption, social evils, diseases, rate of accidents, lack of social amenities and infrastructure, senseless killing and avoidable death caused by violence, ethnic, political and religious conflicts and riots. In a sense, these factors of low life expectancy show that the value placed on human being in Africa is comparatively low. In a related context, I noted: “Due to such factors as wars, crises, inept leadership, bribery and corruption, selfishness, wickedness, ritual killings, assassinations, political instability and economic recession, the quality of life and life expectancy are comparatively low in Africa.” And from a critical evaluation, there is no end in sight for some of these factors of low life expectancy in Africa. Thus, except there is a reversal of the dangerous trend, the future of Africa is bleak.

Low life expectancy is reflected in Africans’ responses to danger or problems, value on human dignity and attitude of security officials, among others. For instance, there are cases of stray bullets, even police officers killing people due to slight provocation or because of money. Roads are left unrepaired until lives have been killed. Cases of strikes involving health workers are allowed to drag on for weeks leading to the death of many people. There is also the problem of political thuggery and election related loss of lives where politicians sacrifice others for their selfish political ambitions.

Furthermore, there is the problem of fake drugs and expired drugs produced or imported in most African countries not minding the implications to the lives of citizens of the affected countries. Dayo Ojerinde reported a study in this regard thus: “A new study from the University of North Carolina, USA found that substandard and falsified medicines, including medicines for treatment of malaria, pose a serious problem in developing.” It is unfortunate that Africa has become a dumping ground for drugs and other chemicals that have adverse effects the quality of life and the life expectancy of Africans. The problems of corruption and materialism make some Africans to endanger other people’s lives.

Philosophy and Society

Philosophy is intricately bound with the society as philosophy cannot be done in a vacuum. Especially in its practical dimension, philosophy addresses problems and issues of the society. Philosophy should seek the improvement of people and the transformation of the society. This is philosophy for life, philosophy with an intentional purpose. Writing on philosophy and relevance with reference to the African philosopher, Godwin Sogolo commented on the Marxian persuasion that philosophy has the function of changing the world rather than merely explaining it: “The implicit assumption here that philosophy
explains the world is itself questionable. However, there are many thinkers who still agree with Marx that philosophy has a role to play in society or at least that there is some connection … between philosophy and the problems of the society.”\footnote{1} It must be noted that this is how philosophy can be relevant to its context.

The history of philosophy has shown several of the great philosophers who were actively involved in the issues of their societies, with some even bequeathing political philosophies to the world. The earliest philosophers were interested in the question of the natural world and their works laid the foundation for later science. Later the sophists shifted the attention of their society to practical issues of pragmatism, rhetoric and social control, among others. Then came the great trio, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who engaged in ethics and truth in addition to the overarching issue of knowledge to which all of them were committed.

From the foregoing, it is appropriate that philosophy would contribute to the issue of governance and social development, and with reference to the level of development in Africa, the contribution is one very significant input of philosophy to African development. In the Socratic gadfly approach, philosophy must point out attitudes and practices Africans must eschew, and some others they must develop to bring about the transformation which Africa greatly needs. It is significant to emphasize that in carrying out this critical role the philosophers should be unbiased and have accurate information about the issues they discuss. The goals always should be the improvement of the quality of life, the advancement of knowledge and the transformation and development of their society. These parameters should form the basis by which each philosopher should evaluate his/her engagement with the society.

**Philosophy, Governance and Social Development**

**Philosophy and Governance**

*Philosophy Provides Ideological Basis for Governance*

Philosophy provides ideological basis for governance so that a particular government can be oriented ideologically. The absence of ideological orientation has been a factor for the lack of good governance in Africa. Philosophers should challenge leaders to adopt an ideology. Political ideology is a clear cut political philosophy encompassing principles upon which a government or political party is based. Among others, it provides the basic framework for the government’s or party’s operations and also is a means of distinguishing a political party. A major reason for the African situation is that most of our political parties do not have well-articulated political ideologies. Sogolo observed that most African nations concentrated on fighting for independence but did not think of political ideologies to guide their countries. “For most African nations independence has been fought for and won. But in terms of what direction to go the continent of Africa is still caught between the conflicting ideologies of the so-called politically developed nations of the world.”\footnote{15} The omission of not having political ideologies from the beginning has brought grave consequences for many African countries. Among others, it has led to colossal waste of resources, and has retarded the growth of many African countries.

A classic example of the power of political ideology in Nigeria is the Sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo. His extraordinary achievements were linked with his political ideology. Even after years of his death he has remained a point of reference. For instance, Adewuyi Adebite compared him to the moon that is beneficial to “…generations and observed: “At the micro level, Awolowo as the premier of the old Western Region revolutionized the life of the region in an unprecedented fashion and pushed her ahead of other Regions in terms of development. At the national level, Awolowo was a role model, a stabilizing factor and a guide to the nation.”\footnote{16} Governance at its best is a government with an ideological basis.

*Philosophy Provides Parameters to Evaluate a Government*

By its nature, philosophy is critical reflection on life and human affairs. This assertion is in line with Segun Ogungbemi’s thought that “Philosophy by its dynamic nature- as a critical examination of beliefs and practices- is revolutionary. By this I mean that philosophy provokes minds, creates doubts or skepticisms and challenges dogmatism, traditions, cultural values, scientific, social, political and moral beliefs and practices.”\footnote{17} Thus philosophers in a given society should evaluate the government in power.
with the aim of bringing about better governance. In other words, philosophers should be part of the checks and balances needed in a modern state. This function is very imperative in Africa considering the prevalence of bad governance, the intolerance of many political officers to opposing views and the docility of the general populace. What evil needs to thrive is for good people to keep silent. If many more people would engage in evaluating the government in power, the challenges of doing so notwithstanding, it would facilitate good governance in Africa. For instance, in reaction to the demolition of the property housing Radio FM, belonging to Mr. Yinka Ayefele, which has been critical of the Oyo State government Akande Adeolu said: “The primary responsibility of any government is to protect life and property. The sacredness of private property is second only to that of the preservation of life.”18 In a similar vein, reflecting the political situation in the nation, Niran Adedokun asserted, “Hundreds of millions of Nigerian youths are without jobs, millions of children who should be in school are instead on the streets without hope and subjected to conditions bound to force them to soon take vengeance on the country. Yet our leaders find time to bicker over the allocation of national resources and even dare to play on our intelligence.”19

**Philosophy Underscores Good Government**

Political philosophy is philosophical reflection on politics. Fundamentally, it emphasizes the essence of governance, which is the general well-being of the citizens and the development of the society. Accordingly, philosophers in a society should work together with like-minded individuals and groups to promote good governance. They should create awareness among the populace on what good governance entails. They should challenge political leaders on the essence of governance and insist on the government being accountable. One major problem in most African nations is the problem of debts, which not only makes development difficult but literally mortgages the future generations of nations. And the debts keep piling up. For instance, Everest Amaefule reported on the Nigeria’s foreign loans thus: “The nation’s foreign commercial loans have risen to $8.8 billion.… A further analysis of the debt statistics shows that the commercial debts make up 39.87% of the nations $22.07% external exposure.”20 The comparison shows that the loans was $1.5 billion on March 31, 2015 and so it has grown by $7.3 billion or 487.67% in three years.21 Except for God’s intervention, the hope of the nation is very bleak.

**Philosophy Inspires for Good Governance**

One benefit of philosophy is the exposure it gives to great philosophers. Thereby, it gives inspiration derived from the great philosophers. Among the philosophers are those who have discussed good governance. Philosophy exposes people to their thought with the purpose of incorporating relevant principles to contemporary situations. The application of the principles brings improvement to governance and enhances people’s lives. Again, with the present situation in Africa, having good government is one of the greatest needs of Africa, and whatever contribution is made towards its actualization would be a most worthy contribution.

**Philosophy Equips People for Good Governance**

In view of the pervasiveness of bad governance in Africa, it would take a long time to overcome it. Consequently, it is necessary to train the next generation on good governance and philosophy can be of great help in this regard. Philosophers in the society should make deliberate efforts to address this challenge from the home to the society at large. In addition, philosophers in institutions of higher learning especially should be intentional in re-orienting the youth to desire to change the society for the better and to maximize any future state leadership positions as means of achieving the great objective. This orientation agrees with Ademola Adeoye’s thought on leaders thus: “Leaders are change agents; they change the course of history as a result of their actions. Like salt, they change the ambience of their environment by doing things differently….”22 In this regard, youth should be encouraged to imbibe discipline and sacrifice, thinking of ways they can make significant contributions to their societies. Also, youth should be guided to know that indulging in vices would hinder them from personal development as well as their future usefulness to their societies.
Philosophy and Social Development

Philosophy Contributes to Social Development

Social development is a very broad concept requiring inputs from various disciplines. Philosophy is one of the disciplines that can make significant contributions to social development. As a basic, preliminary step toward achieving this goal, the philosophers in a society in their various walks of life, contribute to social development by their vocations. Their concern for a better society, which they would communicate by words and deeds, would have rippling effects on those they come in contact with. Also, they can share such concerns through the print and electronic media as well as through books, journal and conference proceedings based on social development. Additionally, they may be given opportunities to hold one position or another in the state, which will provide wider platforms to contribute to social development.

Philosophy Articulates Principles for Social Development

Philosophy deals with concepts and ideas. Thus, it is well primed to articulate principles for social development. The implicit understanding in this regard is that it is when social development is based on well-articulated principles that it can be its best. So philosophers in a society should assist in fashioning social development that would be most relevant to a given society so that its purposes would be achieved. The purpose here is optimal development of the society. Once again, this is one of the most urgent needs of African countries now. In the writer’s considered opinion, Africa can still blossom with capitalism. However, African countries should overcome the defects of capitalism. This is why the endemic problem of corruption is a dragon that must be tamed for the breakthrough of Africa. Also, a more conducive environment for individual development is imperative. Furthermore, schemes to take care of those disadvantaged in the system, like the social security programmes in the advanced countries, should be embarked upon intentionally by African nations. The above issues are related to justice and peace which are imperative for development of a nation. In the words of John Kwaku Opoke, et al, “Justice and peace are related subjects in the quest for promoting human development at all levels of societal life. Like major factors needed for development and sustainability, justice and peace are essential fundamentals in the quest for a prosperous society.” Of critical importance in all these processes is the method of electing leaders in a nation, since the leaders a nation has would determine greatly both the kind of nation it becomes and the level of social development it achieves.

Philosophy Encourages Re-orientation for Social Development

In the African context, re-orientation is needed before we can have social development and this is another way philosophy is an advantage to a society. Philosophy can help in the re-orientation of the society because re-orientation relates to human values, which is part of the domain of philosophy. The re-orientation is necessary to facilitate social development, to change the people from those attitudes that inhibit social development to those ones that enhance it. More specifically, such attitudes like materialism, destruction of public properties, ethnicity, and religious bigotry must be exchanged for attitudes as love, patriotism, tolerance and diligence which are imperative for social development. To be effective, however, it must be stressed that the re-orientation must begin from the leaders of the nations. In Nigeria, for example, the populace has been called once and again to make sacrifices for the nation and imbibe attitudes that would facilitate the greatness of the nation. However, such calls have been largely ineffective or short-lived because of the opulence, extravagance and waste among the leaders who make such calls.

Philosophy Motivates for Social Development

Social development requires motivation especially with reference to re-orientation. People need to be motivated so that they would key into the re-orientation efforts so that the efforts would have maximum impact on the society. The motivation would be based on the necessity, rationale, dynamics and benefits of re-orientation, and philosophy can be a great ally in formulating these concepts. The more extensive the motivation for re-orientation is, the better in terms of its success. However, as noted under the discussion of re-orientation above, mobilization cannot achieve maximum results if it is not exemplified by the leadership.
Philosophy Underscores Social Development

Philosophy underscores the improvement of life for the people of any given society, the development and advancement of the society. This is the essence of social development. Philosophy in its practical dimension identifies with the context in which it functions and aims at bringing significant improvement to the people and their situation. This is a legacy which philosophy has bequeathed to history. Several philosophers contributed to discussions on how to improve the political conditions of the times with a few formulating political principles for governing societies, for example, Plato and Hobbes. Thus philosophers who contribute to discussions on social development in their societies build upon this heritage.

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed philosophy, good governance and social development. As these are constructs in any society they deserve continual discussion. Philosophy should be seen as a great advantage in modern day society as it has varied roles to contribute to the development of the society. Similarly, philosophers should use their unique knowledge and training for the promotion of good governance and social development. Also, they should work together with others in their societies to enhance good governance and social development. Philosophy cannot be developed in a vacuum as it seeks the development and transformation of human societies. The pursuance of this practical goal of philosophy is one way to show its relevance and usefulness to the human society.

ENDNOTES

4 “Good Governance and Social Development.”
7 Ayankeye and Odeleye.
15 Sogolo, 186.
17 Segun Ogungbemi, Philosophy and Development (Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publications, 2007), 14
19 Niran Adedokun, “Politicians Bicker Whiled People Suffer and Die Cheaply,” The Punch, 22.
20 Everest Amaefule, “Nigeria’s Foreign Commercial Loans Rose to $8.8 bn.”
21 Amaefule.