

ROLE OF THE MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN EXPANDING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND ENSURING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Introduction

I am glad to be in your midst today, and especially to have the honor of delivering a talk on the role of the media and civil society groups in expanding democratic participation and ensuring good governance in sub-Saharan Africa. The lack of enhanced citizens participation in the democratic process in sub-Saharan Africa countries has robbed the citizens of good governance and led to the non-attainment of the lofty goals of democracy and democratic governance.

The Main Body

At this juncture, it is important to define governance, public governance, and what is meant by good governance.

Governance is the way society sets and manages the rules that guide policy making and policy implementation. Public governance is concerned with the conduct of government at all levels to bring about the best possible benefits to citizens. Therefore, governance can be “good” or “bad” depending on the manner and mode of governing. Good and effective public governance helps to strengthen democracy, promote economic prosperity, bring about social cohesion, and ultimately reduce poverty.

Governance is good when it allocates and manages resources to respond to collective socio-economic and political problems facing citizens. It can be argued therefore, that good governance should promote gender equality, sustain the environment, enable citizens to exercise personal freedom, and provide tools to reduce poverty, deprivation, fear, and violence.

Different Scholars over time, have identified three main types of governance. They are political (public) governance, economic governance, and social governance. The three types of governance are arguably inseparable and interrelated, particularly in the Sub-Saharan African context, where the governments are actively involved in the three types of governance, with a private sector that is yet to effectively emerge and take its rightful place in economic governance. While it is difficult to distinguish between the types of

governance; they are nevertheless inter-woven, and affect all spheres of development.

In public sector governance, institutions are central to the development process. As the World Bank Group (2002) pointed out, economic and socio-political development of most developing countries is dependent on public sector institutions in those countries; and this is true for sub-Saharan African countries. The role of the public service (bureaucracy) in achieving good governance cannot be underestimated. This can be gleaned from the central role it plays in the formulation and implementation of policies designed for the development of the society.

Therefore, governance should be seen as the way power is exercised through a country's economic, political, and social institutions. In reality, it is the political leadership of a country that exercises power; Governance therefore, should be seen as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good. This includes:

- The processes by which those in authority are elected, monitored and replaced.
- The capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies that are beneficial to citizens.
- The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

The responsive nature of good governance requires that institutions and the decision-making processes aim to serve every segment of the society. Accountability is an important component of good governance which makes it mandatory for those in authorities to show transparency and accountability to those they govern, in whatever they do.

Today, in Sub-Saharan Africa, citizens participation in the democratic process is low; this has led to non-participatory democratic governance in these countries, with negative consequences such as poor allocation of resources, non-accountability of the government to the governed, lack of transparency, prevalence of corruption, hunger, unemployment, unabating conflict, lack of basic healthcare, low rate of school enrolment, inequality between citizens, breakdown of law and order, unabating armed banditry and violent conflicts.

Why is citizens' participation in the democratic process in sub-Saharan Africa low?

The answer may not be far-fetched; Most African scholars have attributed the low citizens' participation in the democratic process in sub-Saharan Africa countries to flawed electoral processes that often throw up winners who may not have won the actual popular votes but would have influenced electoral officials to manipulate the processes and pre-determine the outcome. Beyond the manipulation of the electoral processes, there is also the issue of lack of good governance over the years in the region, signposted by lack of portable water supply, lack of adequate electricity, lack of good healthcare, and absence of gainful employment. These factors, in conjunction with others have led to a general lack of faith in the government, with consequential apathy among citizens. When citizens are disillusioned by repeated electoral fraud, marked by violence and non-transparent elections, with sometimes, non-reflective poll results, general apathy among citizens set in; leading to future non-participation in the democratic process. In Nigeria for example, virtually all local government elections organized by the various State governments not only fall short of the standards, the processes are manipulated, and votes allocated without any bearing with the actual field exercise. The consequences have been the denial of good governance to the people of the 774 local governments in Nigeria, and the repeated boycott of local government elections by opposition parties in most of the States. The Kano State example was made worse by under-aged voters which led to a national outcry, forcing the national electoral body to commence investigation into how these under-aged voters were registered in the first place.

To deepen citizens' participation in Sub-Saharan Africa democracies, the executive arm of governments in the region must not only be seen as patriotic, but truly dedicated to serving the needs of citizens of their countries. In the same vein, the legislative arm of governments in the region should engage and hold the executive arm accountable for its actions. The judicial arm of government on its part, must be fearless, and dispense justice when there is a conflict between the executive and the legislature; if the relationship between the arms of government are in tandem with the country's constitution, the confidence of citizens to participate in the democratic process will be rekindled. The judiciary is the last bastion of hope for the ordinary citizens; and once that hope is tampered with, frustration and apathy set in among citizens.

Additionally, the military and other security agencies, the public service or the government's bureaucracy must uphold the constitution of their countries always, and ensure that their loyalty will undeniably be to their country, and not to the heads of their various governments or any individual. This will ensure that all arms of government are working under the rule of law; leading inevitably to good governance in sub-Saharan Africa. This is especially important when it comes to succession of one government by another as a result of the electioneering process. The disappointing examples of Cote D'Voire and Gambia where sitting Presidents (leaders) initially refused to leave office after electoral defeats, are still fresh in our minds. However, the shining succession examples from Nigeria in 2015, Ghana in 2016, and Zimbabwe in 2017, as well as Liberia and Sierra-Leone in 2018 have rekindled hope that the sit-tight syndrome by sub-Saharan African leaders will soon be a thing of the past, and these developments are capable of affecting citizens' participation in the democratic process.

The media and civil society groups have a crucial role to play in the quest for enhanced citizens' participation in the democratic process in sub-Saharan Africa countries. As society's watchdog, the media should continually expose any arm of government that is not working under the rule of law and cause the relevant institutions of governments to hold such arm of government accountable. The media should be proactive and equipped enough to interrogate the electoral processes leading to elections, with the aim of educating citizens on their role, as well as beam search light on the candidates for election to help citizens make informed choices. To ensure that citizens of sub-Saharan Africa countries tap into the promise of good governance, the media and civil society groups must brace up and begin to set agenda for national democratic discourse, as well as help to hold candidates for election, electoral officials and government functionaries accountable, to ensure that credible processes are put in place for local, states/regional and national elections in sub-Saharan Africa countries.

Critical to success in this direction is that the various national electoral bodies should be constituted, neither by the executive arm of government nor the legislative arm of government. In my opinion, this role will be better served by the Judicial arm of government, which is the only non-partisan body among the three arms of government. In sub-Saharan Africa countries today, nowhere is the cry for justice more palpable than in the electoral process! The judicial service commission that has responsibility for the appointment and discipline of judges should be saddled with the responsibility of screening and appointing national

and state electoral officers, to midwife credible elections in sub-Saharan Africa countries. Inclusion of the representatives of registered political parties participating in national elections as part-time members of the electoral bodies, may also be helpful in the quest for transparent elections. This will set the tone for better electioneering devoid of manipulations by the political leadership in the region. More importantly, the national electoral bodies in sub-Saharan Africa countries must come to the understanding that their allegiance should be to the constitution of their country and therefore, should be patriotic in the discharge of their sacred responsibilities.

Conclusion

The media and civil society groups should not only be at the vanguard of educating citizens on their rights to participate in the democratic process, they should also set political and social agenda that could be beneficial to citizens, as well as help to expose any act of electoral corruption, with the aim of ensuring the emergence of credible processes of electioneering that will guarantee that the wishes of citizen-voters are respected. Clearly, an unbiased media, in conjunction with proactive civil society groups that help to give political education to citizens, have the potential of changing the narrative of citizens participation in democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa countries for the better.

Finally, based on recent experiences in sub-Saharan Africa countries, I make bold to say that Sub-Saharan African countries have no need for strong and dictatorial leaders; rather what is needed are strong institutions that will guarantee enhanced citizens participation in the democratic process, and capable of holding the political leadership accountable in public governance. When this happens, good governance will flourish in sub-Saharan Africa countries, and the prevalent poverty, hunger and violent conflicts will pave way for happiness and prosperity in the region.

I thank you all, for your attention.

Michael Onolememen, PhD.

(Public Management & Leadership Expert)

Dr. Michael Oziegbe Onolememen, CON.

Dr. Michael Oziegbe Onolememen was born in Uromi, Nigeria, on 4th September 1965. He began his early education at the Saint Anthony's Primary School, Uromi (1971-1976), and Annunciation Catholic College, Irrua, Edo State (1976-1981), where he passed with distinction. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture (1985), a Master of Science degree in Architecture (1988), and a Master of Science degree in Construction Management (1991) from Bendel State University, University of Nigeria and University of Lagos respectively. He also holds a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Public Policy & Administration (2015) from Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota USA. He is an alumnus of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA, where he obtained a Professional Certificate (2014) in Infrastructure in a Market Economy (Public-Private Partnerships in a Changing World).

In 2000, Onolememen served as an Executive Member of the Interim Management Committee of the Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF), an infrastructure rehabilitation and development agency of the federal government of Nigeria, where he provided leadership to the Directorate of Projects Management. In January 2007, he was appointed Minister of State for Defence, where he had responsibility for supervising the Nigerian Airforce, and all military training institutions in Nigeria. He was also chairman of the Defence Health Limited, and co-chairman with the United States Ambassador to Nigeria of the Nigeria's ministry of defence and the US department of defence military collaboration on HIV/AIDS. He served up to the end of President Obasanjo's administration in May, 2007.

He was principal consultant in the Nigerian architectural and engineering multi-disciplinary consultancy firm, Gomic Consortium International Limited from 1991 to 2011.

From July 2011 to May 2015, he served as Minister of Works of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where he carried out various strategic

reforms in line with the transformation agenda of the President Jonathan's administration. His tenure witnessed massive development of the Federal Road Network, growing the stock of federal roads in good and motorable condition in Nigeria from 4,500 Km in 2011 to 25,000 Km in 2015. He embarked on the dualization of many federal arterial roads across the country and commenced the construction of two main bridges across the two great Rivers that transverse the Nigerian landscape: The new Bridge across River Benue in Loko and Oweto in Nasarawa and Benue States, and the Second River Niger Bridge in Onitsha and Asaba in Anambra and Delta States. He also championed Road sector policy issues at the Federal Executive Council and was a Member of the National Economic Management Team, from 2011 to 2015.

Dr. Michael Onolememen also served as the Chairman, Project Steering Committee of the ECOWAS Regional Highway project (Lagos-Abidjan-Dakar Corridor) constituted by the Presidents and Heads of Government of West African Countries, from 2012 to 2015.

In 2014, Dr. Michael Onolememen was honoured with the prestigious National Award, Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON), by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in appreciation of his meritorious services to the nation.

Arc. Mike, as he is fondly called by friends and well-wishers, is a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Architects [FNIA], as well as a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Management [FNIM]. A Knight of the Order of Saint Mulumba (KSM), he has been honoured by several professional bodies in Nigeria as Fellow of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors (FNIS); Fellow of the Nigerian Mining and Geosciences Society (FNMGS); Fellow of the Academy of Entrepreneurial Studies (FAES); Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (FNIQS) and Fellow of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (FNSE).

He is also recipient of other honours, including:

- The Academy of Entrepreneurial Studies (AES) Minister of the Year Awards for 2012, 2013 and 2014;
- Pilot Newspapers Minister of the Year Award for 2013 & 2014, and
- Nigerian-American Chambers of Commerce 2013 Minister of the Year Award.

Dr. Michael Onolememen was inducted into the African Leadership Hall of Fame in Atlanta, USA in June 2015, and received the State of Georgia Congressional Black Caucus Commendation Award for his services to his Fatherland.

On March 28, 2016, he was honoured by the Uromi Traditional Council, under the headship of the Ojuromi of Uromi Kingdom, with the prestigious title of the Adolor of Uromi Kingdom, thus becoming the second recipient of the highly reverend title first held by the late Nationalist, Chief Anthony Enahoro, one of the founding fathers of independent Nigeria.

Dr. Michael Onolememen is happily married to Mrs. Bibian Onolememen, and the marriage is blessed with children.