GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMACY A CATALYST TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The transition from nationalism to nationism in post-colonial Africa is fraught with many challenges, among which is the question of sustainable development. Inheriting states created for colonial convenience and not meant for self-propulsion orchestrated the problem of development in Africa, talk less of sustainable development. Statistical data in the domains of development rank her the underdog in the global stride toward sustainable development. Colonial legacies and the tumultuous international context might have contributed in no small way to this seemingly irreversible underdevelopment of Africa, but this finger-pointing and victim-image cannot certainly be a panacea to this anathema particularly as the best help is self-help. In this perspective, more than six decades after independence, most African governments are eyesores to their citizens. This is of course the fallout of constant military takeovers, electoral fraud, political apathy, rampant corruption and hereditary successions. All these have tremendously tampered not only with their credibility, but have withal rendered Africa an agglomeration of failed states. Really, most African governments have lost legitimacy and have become threats to their own sustainable development. This paper therefore hypothesizes that government's legitimacy is a sine qua non of development and the legitimating of African governments can therefore be catalytic to sustainable development. It contends that illegitimate governments devoid of general acceptability jeopardize their very stride for sustainable development given that sustainable development, ipso facto, is people-focused and the participation of the citizens is indispensable for it success. In the main, where such willful participation is perpetually compromised because the government is not legitimate, then the whole concept of sustainable development in the realm of such social construct becomes a farce.*

Keywords: Government, Legitimacy, Citizens, Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is development-focused interventions that seek to promote and enhance the socio-political and economic welfare of the people within an ecologically sustainable context at all levels of social organization. In praxis, therefore it assigns the highest priorities in those local, national, regional and international activities that guarantee the basic social and material needs of the people everywhere without necessarily compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Human progress in this regard becomes the very essence of sustainability as UNDP's report (1992:13) confirmed "The fullest possible human development can be thought to be the means and goal of sustainable development". But Thomas Hobbes (1651) posited that men to avoid chaos consented to abdicate their rights in favour of absolute authority of government. This opinion was later shared by Jean Jacque Rousseau (1762) in what he termed the *Social Contract*. In this light, since sustainable development is people-based, the government, true representative of the very people should incarnate sustainability. In the main, the success of governments in effecting these policies rests on their credibility in the eyes of the people with such qualities themselves reliant on the government's legitimacy. Void of such legitimacy, the *Social Contract* becomes volcanic and erosive to sustainable development measures. In Africa for illustration, it is common knowledge governments are not of the people, talk less for them or by them. In these scenarios, the concept of sustainable development becomes a mockery. This is basically because governments' policies are not people-focused as dictated by the concept of sustainable development and if such governments even thought in that direction, application will be complicated because they are eyesores to the people hence government's legitimacy is a lubricant to sustainable development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Analyses in this study were positioned within the confine of the Social Contract theory which stipulates that to avoid anarchy, individuals or groups cede part of their rights to the authority of a government to in turn benefit protection from such government (Social Contract). The theory further insists that if the said governments fail to work for the interest of the very people, source of its existence then the people retain the right for its undoing. In simplistic term, the lifespan of *Social Contract* is linked to the government's respect of the people's will. Advocates of this theory include among others Thomas Hobbes (1650), John Locke (1689) and more especially Jean Jacque Rousseau (1762). In this perspective, sustainable development becomes one of the people-based activities whose success depends on government's acceptability, source of legitimatization.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

This work reveals that any people-based project can only be successful in a government that is people-focused. It also unravels that no matter how well-intentioned a government is, if it is not credible to the citizens, its policies will be utopic. Finally, it shows that African governments should first strive to solve the problem of legitimacy and any development-related goals will be achievable. As a yardstick for the impact of government's legitimacy on sustainable development, an illustrative approach was adopted in the study. In this vein, the *modus operandi* in illegitimate governments was handled without failing to cross-refer with what obtains in a legitimate situation. This juxtaposition of illustrations permitted a synchronized appraisal of the two systems in reference to sustainable development.

TERMINOLOGIES

Sustainable development and government's legitimacy are notions that have been subjected to diverse empirical findings with at times dissimilar conclusions. Both concepts and their meanings have evolved and suffered various connotations in different scientific disciplines hence necessitates their finitisation for simplicity and comprehension in a specific context.

GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMACY

A nation comprises the territory, people and a government. While the territory has no say on the nature of people and government in a state, government emanates from the people and thus owes it very essence from them. The string between the people and government ushers in the notion of government's legitimacy. Government encompasses a chosen few from the people to lead the entire nation and in the words of Charlton R. (1986:23) "government denotes a sphere of influence over the people". Besides, legitimacy in the view of Sternberger D. (1968:244) is " the popular acceptance of an authority usually a governing law or regime" while Dogan M. (2003:181) adds "legitimacy is interpreted as a normative status conferred by a governed people upon their governors' institutions, offices and actions based upon belief that their government actions are appropriate uses of power by a legally constituted authority". Legitimacy can also be seen as the foundational pillars of such governmental power as is exercised both with a consciousness on the government part that it has a right to govern and with some recognition by the governed of that right.

Legitimacy thus involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are appropriate and emanations from the citizenry and meant to be at their service. Legitimacy in the governmental power as a result depends on the ability of the government to protect its people. American political theorist Dahl R.(1978:134-138) metaphorises government's legitimacy as a reservoir that so far as the water level is at an acceptable level, political stability, salutary to development is maintained but if it

falls below a required level, political legitimacy is endangered and upheavals ensue, erosive to developmental strides.

SOURCES OF GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is a value whereby something or someone is recognized as right and proper, but the concept of rightness varies with time and societies. Similarly, government's legitimacy is generally understood as popular acceptance and recognition by the public of the authority of the governing regime whereby the authority has political power through consent and mutual understanding and not coercion. The concept of general acceptability equally anecdotal according to societies and time hence three sources of government's legitimacy: traditional, charismatic and democratic. Traditional legitimacy derives from societal customs and attitudes that emphasize the history of the authority by traditions. According to Dogan M. (2003:210) "Traditionalists understand this form of rule as historically accepted hence its continuity is merely because it is the way the society has always been with the adherents ardently committed to." Consequently, the institutions of traditional governments usually are historically accepted and continuous as in monarchy. Correspondingly, Lipset S. (1983:64) holds that "charismatic legitimacy derives from ideas and personal charisma of a leader whose authoritative persona charms and psychologically dominates the people of the society to agreement with government regime and rule". A charismatic government usually features weak political and administrative institutions because the authority emanates from the persona of a leader and usually disappears with him. Yet such government's legitimacy may thrive if the successor possesses similar charisma.

Finally, democratic legitimacy derives from a system of institutional procedure wherein government institutions establish and enforce laws and order with power emanating from the people and for them. O'Neil P. (2010:36) holds that "it derives from popular explicit and implicit consent of the governed". The argument is that the government is not .legitimate unless it is carried with consent of the governed. In synopsis, irrespective of the sources of government's legitimacy, it denotes general acceptability in the eyes of the people who have an irreplaceable role in the success of governmental endeavours. A government that incarnates legitimacy can successfully implement an illegal action than an illegitimate one implementing a legal one. For instance, Americans supported George W. Bush invasion of Iraq in 2003(Third Gulf War) despite the fact that it was a fragrant violation of international law. Yet there are many excellent African governments' policies whose implementation is marred by legitimacy crisis. Notwithstanding the varied sources of government's legitimacy, democratic legitimacy has stood the test of time. Dogan M. (2003:201) avows "traditional and charismatic authorities are obsolete as forms of contemporary governments" and Dant K. (1993:41) corroborates "Societies behave cyclically in governing themselves with different form of governments. [...]. That democracy thrives as the only source of legitimacy to comprehend the complex relationship that constitutes a legitimate political system in the 21st

century." Intriguingly, it is rather in this direction that most African governments are wanting hence a deterrent to sustainable development endeavours.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The concept of sustainable development first appeared in the Swiss-based World Conservation Union report (IUCN, 1980:4) which called for emboldened and dramatically new conceptions of development that advance the material wants of the present generation without depriving the future generation of the resources required to satisfy their needs. However, such lofty notion failed to receive international acclamation and it had to wait the World Commission on Environment report of 1987, also referred to as Brundtland Commission, in the words of Brundtland G.H (1989:4) that conceptualize sustainable development simply as "paths of human progress which meet the need and aspirations of the present generation without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". The report equally emphasized the interconnections between social and environmental problems, and continued that environmental problems were not limited to particular locale or geographical area hence environmental calamity experienced in one world region in the end; affect the welfare of people everywhere. It finally recognized that it is only through sustainable approaches to development could the planet's fragile ecosystem be protected and the aims of human development needs furthered.

Both in the Commission's report and elsewhere, Brundtland stressed the intimate and inseparable relationships that exist between poverty, development and environmental sustainability. Brundtland (1989:50) concluded:

> The gross mismanagement of our planet has much to do with an inequitable distribution of the benefits of development. Perpetuating this inequity can only mean a continuing drawdown on the world's natural resources and the environment. After a century of unprecedented growth marked by scientific and technological triumphs that would have been unthinkable a century ago, there have never been so many poor, illiterates and unemployed people in the world, and their number is growing. Close to a billion people live in poverty and squalor, a situation that leaves them with little choice but go on undermining the conditions of life itself, the environment and natural resources.

Thanks to this report, a new paradigm in development circles was developed termed sustainable development. It succeeded in uniting widely divergent theoretical and ideological perspectives into a single conceptual frame work. The concept also succeeded in exciting the imaginations of development specialists and policy-makers, governmental leaders and scholars to enter into agreement that seek to promote socio-economic development and

protection of the environment. Today sustainable development is not only multidisciplinary but cross-sectoral.

THE GOALS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It has far-reaching goals with their objectives the transformation of contemporary development theory and practice. Arnold S.H.(1989:3-4) contends that the formulation of new paradigms of socio-economic, political, cultural and ecological development that take rational approaches to development which take into account the long term cost associated with short term improvements, judicious use of planet renewable physical resources, a balance between economic, socio-cultural and physical development and the realization of fully integrated development strategies that bring together all relevant sectors and actors into a common framework of local, national, regional and international actions, are main targets of sustainable development. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 1992:17) identifies the following outcomes as minimum additional requirements. They are elimination of poverty, reduction in population growth, more educated and better trained people, decentralized, more participatory government, more equitable distribution of resources, more equitable, liberal trading systems within and among countries and better understanding of the diversity of ecosystems, including locally adapted solutions to environmental problems and better monitoring of the environment impacts of development activities.

In a nutshell, sustainable development goals refer to the establishment of new systems of personal and institutional renewal that are guided by the quest for peace, increased social justice, the satisfaction of human needs and the protection of the planet's fragile ecosystem. The realization of these goals requires both short and long term measures by governments and quasi-governmental organizations. Though the quasi-governmental organizations are co-equal partners in these endeavours, UNDP (1992:13) highlights the preponderant role of governments as it argued, "Increasingly governments are providing national and international leaderships in sustainable development strides." Nevertheless, how well a government fully and effectively meets these goals is contingent on the degree of her legitimacy. This is guided by the premise that sustainable development is people-based and no miraculous policies can be workable without full support from the very people yet such attachment are dependent on government's legitimacy. An examination of the *modus operandi* of illegitimate governments will be more illustrative.

ONTOLOGY OF ILLEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The term illegitimate government or state is often used by political commentators and journalists to describe a state perceived as having failed in some basic conditions and responsibilities of a democratic government. Such states are usually characterized by loss of monopoly on the use of legitimate power, erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions and inability to interact with other nations on equal bases in international forums.

Charlton R, (1986:31-23) measures the legitimacy of a government in terms of success and failure and concludes " a state is said to succeed if it maintains a monopoly of legitimate power within its borders and when this is broken, the very essence of the state becomes dubious and its becomes illegitimate or failed state." In this light, an illegitimate government is tantamount to a failed state and the contrary holds true for a legitimate government. Obviously every failed social edifice translates into a metaphorical jungle and the core operative principles across it embrace perfectly mimics that native the forest of unreason. With an illegitimate government, the state becomes principally a coalition of the unwilling, a federation of grievances and an agglomeration of hatred and mutual suspicion. In these entanglements, nothing positive can be achievable talk less of sustainable development. Neither the government nor the governed believe in each other and measures undertaken by the government in relation to sustainable development become inapplicable because it is supposed to be a joint venture (government-people). This is but normal because sustainable development goals are peopled-focused and with a federation of aggrieved individuals because the government is not generally accepted, good policies could be taken in bad faith hence reasons why most African government remain economic backwaters despite all the good intentions in some cases to develop people-based programs. For illustrative purposes, the characteristics of illegitimates governments will be treated and with the goals of sustainable development aforementioned, it will be realized the common denominator between the two is incompatibility.

FEATURES OF ILLEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS

Steward F. and Brown G. (2010:12-15) provide ten attributes of illegitimate governments. They include endemic corruption which is erosive to the country's resources, profiteering which leads to gross inequality, progressive deterioration of public services that pushes citizens to defy the very essence of life and misuse the environment, widespread human rights violation that nurtures frustrations and grievances, rise of factionalized elites that promotes nepotism, foreign intervention into the internal affairs of state that compromises the source of legitimacy, chronic and sustained human flight that results to brain drain, legacy of vengeance-seeking groups grievances leading to political upheavals, civil wars, military takeovers and secession, massive refugees resulting to health and social crises and finally demographic pressure that leads to land- related conflicts. Lipset S. (1983:41) corroborates "illegitimate governments have been rendered ineffective and are not able to enforce their policies uniformly because of high crime rates, extreme political corruption, impenetrable and ineffective bureaucracy, judicial ineffectiveness and military interventions in politics". In a governmental system that operates on these pedestals, sustainable development is a fiasco because the state cannot even care for present generation. The *modus operandi* in an illegitimate social construct will equally reveal an environment very frosty to sustainable development.

METAPHYSICS OF ILLEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS

An illegitimate government is an amorphous piece of territory governs by anarchy. In this arena, survival is of the fittest while might is right. Law and order is alien and nothing is predictable. If peace exists, it is a calm pond with subterranean of turbulence and dissension boiling like a volcanic lava underneath and a slightest tension is catastrophic. For example, little did people know the humiliation of a street hawker in Tunisia could set the entire region ablaze and the price to pay for illegitimacy crisis was enormous, for within months, the entire region and beyond was decades backtracked in development perspectives. In any illegitimate social edifice, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, refugee crises, misuse of natural resources, political witch-hunting and unfriendly environmental practices are norms. Analyzing the situation in Nigeria, Ogbunwezeh F. (2005:5) argues:

> That Nigeria has illegitimate governments is evidenced by frequent military takeovers and no governments' social or economic policies have essayed to impact positively on the lives of the people. The governments keep on finding ways of laundering their images and blowing their trumpets while hunger, inexcusable poverty harass the people daily. Nigeria the 6th largest producer of crude oil in the world lacks evidence based on solid achievements to show for the billions of dollars she has earned from the crude oil sale. Over 70% of people are living below poverty, 67% are illiterates and less than 1% of the population hold more 80% of country' s oil wealth.

It is obvious that in this present dispensation, the citizenry lacks the basics of present because not being people-focused, the government has failed to develop population-based policies for mere survival say less of the future. Rather resources are wasted or siphoned to sustain other areas where they derive and sustain their stay such as the military, political profiteering and foreign governments. Failing to have support from the people because of legitimacy crisis, huge, clandestine and cloudy contracts regarding the exploitation of country's non-renewable resources are signed with foreign imperialistic governments and multinationals with little benefits to the people and with no due considerations to the impact they have on the environment.

For example, the Ladgo and Bamendjim Dams built to supply electricity in Cameroon are the cause of incessant floods in the North and North-West Regions that carnage millions of souls and destroyed considerably the environment yet the monopoly of electricity supply is confined to AES-SONEL, an American multinational. The Chinese, USA and the French are notorious in signing contracts with African governments bearing little or no consideration to the people and the environment nevertheless, these governments are silent because they derive their legitimacies from these imperialists and not the people. Unable to have their fair share of these resources, disgruntled citizens become rebellious leading to war and secession

like in Sudan, terrorism like the Niger-Delta rebellion in Nigeria, civil war in Chad and Democratic Republic of Congo and political upheavals as in Ivory Coast and Mali.

Despite these internal problems, these illegitimate governments succeed thanks to these foreign exploiters (imperialists and multinationals) who will do everything to sustain their stay and continue to exploit the resources without compassion for people and environment. However, to these imperialists who profit from Africa's predicaments, Ndiho P. (2005:2) has this advice

> "I think it is egregious that the USA, China and France get in bed with dictators and the illegitimate governments we are talking about. When we look at the top five, four of which are African, the thing that jump out of you is that all the four have dictators that were befriended by USA, France and China because they are thought as friendly tyrants. So it goes to my arguments that friendly tyrants are no good friends for their countries and I so think that they not good for the USA, France and China because sustainable development concept local or regional problems leave no one unaffected."

To the dictators he recommends, "Leadership in Africa has been terrible, but how do you correct leadership. To my view, a leadership with strong institutions, deriving power from the people and for them, democracy, transparency, rule of law, strong and representative parliaments and devolved power [...] I think it helps good leadership that can result to sustainable development".

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development has become something of a buzzword in development circles. Indeed, it has succeeded in replacing such venerable concepts like growth, modernization, progress and accelerated growth. To view it as a passing fad or yet another feeble effort to capture the imaginations of development policy-makers is to miss the power of the concept. Generally, four dimensions of sustainable development could be identified to reinforce its omniscience. There include, ecological sustainability which entails non-renewable and other resources are not depleted for short term improvements, economic sustainability which implies improvements do not depend on continuing infusion of resources that cannot be maintained, political sustainability requires changes are consistent with emerging distribution of power in the society and finally cultural sustainability which suggests changes must be consistent with core values, expectations and mores of the society.

Sustainable development in this perspective becomes very hospitable to many fields of studies and the goals very desirable that it is incumbent for governments to strive to implement them for the benefit of both the present and future generations. However, in the discharge of

these responsibilities, government's legitimacy is indispensable because the goals are people-focused and the support of the very people is needed for efficacy. Illegitimate governments thus become menaces to sustainable development and since the unsustainable practices could be national or regional yet the impact transnational or worldwide, the legitimating of governments should be the target of all.

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