THE DEMOCRATISATION AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND THE AFRICAN CIVIL SERVICE: ISSUES RESOLVED OR MATTERS ARISING?

by

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“Our situation on this earth seems strange. Every one of us appears here involuntarily … for a short stay, without knowing the whys and the wherefore.”

- Albert Einstein, 1932

Introduction

By its nature, the civil service is not suited to the tasks of building democratic institutions and creating wealth. As a bureaucratic organisation, its structure and operational ethos tend to be at odds with both the pluralist thrusts of democracy and the entrepreneurial impulses of wealth creation. Yet, under proper conditions, the civil service is capable of playing a significant role in the implementation of comprehensive programmes of good governance and accelerated growth. It is the absence of these conditions that accounts for the African civil service’s poor performance to-date as a partner in the democracy and development project. Specifically, the development partners (i.e., the domestic state and civil society institutions, the career bureaucracy and the external donors) have yet to pursue in a serious sense the goal of empowering the people to make life’s critical choices and control their own destiny. Instead of tailoring intervention programmes to realities prevailing within the continent, the development partners have relied on prescriptive economic formulas to tackle complex and deep-seated development challenges.

In developing the argument, this paper begins with a framework tracing the links among concepts such as democracy, development, equitable wealth creation, and the civil service. Besides tracing the links between the contemporary global tendency towards “social Darwinism” (i.e., the tendency to view human “development” in evolutionary terms and as a perpetual struggle for survival) and the challenges facing the African countries, it examines the traditional African society’s notions of governance and development. With the values of the traditional society and the “imported” governance and development models as a point of departure, the paper, in the third and the fourth sections, assesses the role of the civil service in political and socio-economic development respectively. As a counterpoint to the overwhelming influence of economics in the contemporary study of governance and development, the paper suggests, in the fifth section, a new role for the public administration fraternity.

I. Role of the Civil Service in Democracy and Development:
   A theoretical excursion

When the terms “bureaucracy” and “civil service” are mentioned, the images that flash through people’s minds are hierarchy, centralisation of authority, red-tape, secrecy, lethargy and inefficiency (Henderson and Dwivedi, 1999: xiii; Balogun and Mutahaba, 1999:190). It is therefore not surprising that when pro-active issues (like those of democracy and development) come up for discussion, the civil service bureaucracy tends to be quickly dismissed as irrelevant. Neo-liberal economic theory or policy has but minimum tolerance for government, and by implication, for civil
service, intervention in the economy. It took years of unfulfilled expectations to bring the advocates of structural adjustment reforms to the realisation that the dream of economic turn-around in Africa would remain distant until the civil service was sufficiently strengthened to play its “facilitative” role in development. Even then, under the current climate of liberalisation, privatisation and public sector “down-sizing”, the civil service has to live with the grudging acceptance of its developmental role, with the minimalist philosophy ruling the waves at the national and global levels. The argument in this paper is that under certain conditions, the civil service can be a potent force in the struggle for democracy, development, and equitable wealth creation. To put the debate in perspective, it is essential to define, and trace the logical links among, the key terms. The concepts that are crucial to our understanding of the civil service’s role are democracy, development, and equitable wealth creation.

The Civil Service and the Coalition for Democracy and Development

Ever since the early 1990s, liberal democracy has been touted as civilisation’s contribution to organised government, and as the only reliable method of resolving the tension between the rulers and the ruled. As argued in this paper, if the intention of democracy is to empower the people, its “liberal” variant should be regarded as work in progress. In other words, “representative” democracy is not synonymous with “people empowerment” that is at the heart of the contemporary good governance advocacy. And before entertaining the illusion that “development” is all about “poverty eradication” and wealth creation, we should stop to reflect on the possibility of its (that is, development) serving objectives other than the improvement in the material and spiritual wellbeing of societies. The gap between the welfare and what may be termed the power accumulation objectives of development widens as the world becomes increasingly “globalised” and policies are driven by Darwinist survival-of-the-fittest considerations. Suffice it to say that the difference that the civil service makes to any of the concepts depends on how each is defined.

Democracy: Whose Democracy?

Let us take democracy, for instance. It could mean, as it does in the animal kingdom, rule by the strong over the weak. If this is all there is to democracy, the civil service, particularly in a rapacious or patrimonial state, will not have much difficulty oiling and greasing the patron-client machine needed for the state’s survival. Nonetheless, this narrow view of democracy does not conform to classic or contemporary usage. In its classic sense, democracy means rule by the citizen body (or demos in Greek). The idea evolved in ancient Athens where free-born, combat-ready and property-owning citizens of the masculine gender drew lots to decide on who filled what administrative or judicial vacancies, and where elaborate systems were devised to hold incumbents accountable.

With all its pluralist and citizen participation features, the Athenian democracy was far from being fully representative. Those eligible to participate in the deliberations of the “demos” did not include the majority of the poor, particularly, women and slaves (Dunleavy and O’Leary, 1987:4). Still, the Athenian concept of democracy is far less restrictive than the “liberal” variants surfacing in the seventeenth and eighteen centuries’ literature. Unlike the former that involved the citizen body in decision-making, liberal democracy was, and remains to-date, an individualist creed (Ake, 2000:10).

While diluting people’s power – by transferring it to their “representatives” – liberal democracy would not necessarily find a ready ally in the civil service bureaucracy. The two terms – bureaucracy and democracy, are by no means, mutually consistent. First, unlike liberal democracy, “bureaucracy” (meaning “government by un-elected officials”) leaves no space, no matter how constricted, for popular participation. Secondly, in contrast to the routine civil service decisions that become effective once the prescribed legal-rational conditions are fulfilled, making authoritative and politically binding decisions in a liberal democracy requires the explicit and/or the implicit endorsement of the people.
Explicit endorsements (or repudiations) take the form of the votes cast on specific constitutional issues at plebiscites and referenda, or at periodic general and mid-term elections held to fill legislative and executive positions. Although the liberal democratic arrangement does not permit citizen interference in day-to-day administration, it at least provides a wide range of opportunities to hold the decision-makers to a performance standard, and therefore, to account. The “constitution” in its written or unwritten form serves as the final arbiter between the rulers and the ruled when they disagree on vital issues. The Bill of Rights that the average liberal democracy enshrines in the constitution enables the citizen to register his/her support or distaste for a particular line of action. The freedom of association clause enables the citizen to associate with, or dissociate, from a political party or group. Freedom of speech or of the press leaves policies and programmes open to criticism at lawful assemblies or in the print and electronic media. A citizen that is aggrieved by the mode in which a discretionary decision was taken has recourse under the law to challenge such a decision, citing *exces de pouvoir* (under the *ultra vires* principle) or *abus de pouvoir*.

The underlying goal of democracy, it must be remembered, is to associate the People with the governance of their community or at least, obtain their consent and acknowledge their preferences in taking critical governance decisions. Liberal democracy, as noted earlier, has not contested the People’s right or claim to sovereignty, but has simply moved that sovereignty and placed it in the hands of elected representatives. In other words, the sovereign power that the Athenian *demos* exercised directly in citizen assemblies, is transformed by liberalism into a mandate that is subject to periodic renewal. In place of a riotous body, liberal democracy provides for the creation of a state apparatus vested with formal law making, executive, and judicial powers.

In fairness to the liberal philosophy, an arrangement that allows every citizen to participate in all manners of public decisions is likely to be chaotic, and, in complex societies, impracticable. However, while substituting indirect citizen control (i.e., control through elected representatives) for direct participation in governance, liberal democracy has to reckon with some internal contradictions. First, the method or process by which the sovereign power exercised “in the name of the People” is acquired may be anything but democratic. Specifically, rather than acknowledge and consolidate the power of the People, liberal democracy runs the risk of turning the power over to individuals and groups with the capacity, resources as well as the will to manipulate “the system” to their own advantage. Secondly, once the power is acquired, there is no guarantee that it will be *faithfully* exercised, that is, applied to the ends dictated *ex ante* or approved *post ante* by the People. We shall later examine these puzzling attributes of democracy within the context of the of Africa’s experience.

In the interim, it is important to note that the interpretation and practice of liberal democracy vary from one society to another. Taking power as the common denominator, it is obvious that methods by which it is acquired will vary depending on prevailing circumstances. Among the critical factors in the acquisition of power are access to resources and information, knowledge of, and interest in, political and governance issues, and the dominant socio-cultural ethos.

In theory, liberal democracy places no restriction on individual citizens with political ambitions. Indeed, it is the right of every bona-fide citizen to compete for power at free and fair elections. Yet, the right that the liberal theory confers is frequently restricted or completely emasculated by inequality of access to resources and information. Gailbraith (1973:29-30) puts it in the following terms:

“It is a well-established point that the citizen who votes ten times in an election has, all else equal, ten times more power than the citizen who votes but once…. And similarly the man who spends (or can afford to spend) $70,000 in the course of a year speaks to the market with ten times as much authority on what is produced as does the man who disposes of but $7,000.”
Where the bulk of the people wallow in extreme poverty, therefore, only a tiny minority would be able to sponsor, or stand as, candidates for political offices, exercise a significant amount of influence on the content and directions of public policy, and “speak” authoritatively to the political and economic markets.

Even when inequality does not serve as a constraint, plain lack of interest in politics may water down the pluralist and political engagement formula in liberal democracy. While some citizens have the urge to participate actively in politics, other citizens might not be so inclined, thus reinforcing Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels, 1959).

The dominant social ethos may serve as yet another barrier to political participation. For instance, dissent is permitted in egalitarian – the so-called stateless - societies but frowned upon in societies characterised by hierarchy, deference to age and authority. In the former, child-rearing practices stress those qualities normally associated with direct political action – initiative, foresight, persistent questioning of the status quo. By contrast, individual progress in hierarchically structured societies depends on respect for traditions, loyalty to superiors, obedience to authority, and sycophancy.

**Bureaucracy, Democracy and the People**

Regardless of the factors responsible for restrictions on citizen participation in politics, the civil service bureaucracy tends, in such circumstances, to assume important roles. The explanations for this are not far to seek. As a corporate body with its own operational ethos and attributes (hierarchical conformation, unity of command, functional specialisation, political non-partisanship, unity and chain of command, rule of law, repository of official secrets) the bureaucracy can claim to be an embodiment of the state and a custodian of its abiding values. If, on the one hand, the state is democratic in the real sense of term, the bureaucracy becomes its “instrument”. If, on the other, the state is of the patrimonial, patron-client, and rent-seeking type, the bureaucracy is likely to reflect in its structure and interventions these anti-liberal tendencies. In any case, as the bureaucracy attempts to barter its influence for raw political power, it is likely to turn into a battleground between rival groups, particularly, between the political or policymaking class, and members of the Higher Civil Service, and between one intra-bureaucratic “vested interest” and another.

The diverse character of the bureaucracy makes conflict among various interests inevitable. As a professional body, it tends to be staffed by individuals whose education, training and world-view mark it apart not only from the rest of society, but also from the state functionaries recruited through the political patronage network. Riggs alludes to this in his 1964 work. According to him, the bureaucracy in the developing countries tends to convert the strengths it has over other social institutions (professionalism, specialised training, access to technology) into power that it promptly abuses (Riggs, 1964; Riggs, 2000). Without buying into Riggs’ overarching “prismatic” theory, Subramaniam holds that, as products of elite schools, the career officials could not but be a minority in an economically backward society (Subramaniam, 2000:564-5). This alone is enough to put the bureaucrats on a collision course with politicians who went through the “school of hard knocks” and were probably closer to the grassroots than the bureaucrats could ever hope to be.

Besides managing the conflict between the politicians and the Higher Civil Service, the bureaucracy has to reckon with other forms of diversity – particularly, the diversity between the generalists and the specialists (Subramaniam, 1968), between senior civil servants and members of the lower cadres, and between officials of one ethnic background and those of another. The gender dimension is also becoming important as an increasing number of women who had hitherto been excluded compete for the limited places at the top echelons (Balogun, 2001).

The question is what becomes of the People while the internal struggle for the control of the bureaucracy intensifies. Almost invariably, the disconnect in liberal democracy between political
“representation” and genuine citizen participation in governance not only encourages the type of political and bureaucratic adventurism alluded to above, but also distracts the rival groups from the substantive goal – which is looking out for the citizen’s interest (Balogun, 2001). As the politicians and career officials jostle for power, and the informal groups within the bureaucracy fight turf wars, the citizen-customer should consider himself fortunate if his presence in front of the service counter is as much as acknowledged by the service delivery agents.

Curiously, and if liberalism is to be believed, the citizens are the “owners” of the state enterprise – and the institutions – while the politicians and the civil servants are the “employees”. In other words, the citizens constitute the “principals” leaving the state officials in the role of “mere agents.” However, as the employees – i.e., the “agents” or “hired hands” – struggle for supremacy, the owner most frequently gets sidelined and his/her interest, completely forgotten. The New Public Management (NPM) finds such a situation grossly unsatisfactory. How can the state justify its existence without reference to the citizen? However, NPM’s attempt at redressing the situation has been anything but successful. The new school of thought is not naïve enough to regard the citizen as the “owner” and the state official as the “employee.” As it struggled with words, NPM stumbled upon two from the economic literature, i.e., “consumer” or “customer” and “supplier”. It promptly adapted both to the study and practice of public management (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

The customer-supplier schema is unlikely to take us very far in understanding the complex and problematic relationship between democracy and the civil service bureaucracy. For one thing, unlike the tradable goods and services supplied and consumed in the private sector, the public goods supplied from time to time are not always directly linked to “effective demand” (Pegnato, 1997:397). Secondly, and this is related to the first explanation, “demand” in the state sector is sometimes “supply-driven.” Indeed, three types of “demands” have been identified (Balogun, 2002), i.e.,

(a) purely individual, (micro-level) demands: e.g., demand for medical care, school places, seats on national airline’s commercial flights or municipal bus services, water and electricity supply;

(b) community-imposed (intermediate-level) demands (demand for military intervention or for negotiation, civic rights, economic and social security, racial/gender equality, gainful employment, clean air);

(c) state-sponsored (macro-level) demands (e.g., economic stabilisation and austerity policies/programmes, zoning ordinances and bye-laws, vehicle permits, business licences, police anti-riot and sundry emergency powers, membership of supra-national bodies and accession to their treaties, covenants and conventions).

If, as noted earlier, poverty limits the citizen’s input into the policy process what chances are there that s/he would be able to influence the quantity of outputs as well as the quality of delivery? Even in the most liberal of democratic societies, and for the reasons adduced earlier, policy outcomes do not always mirror the preferences of every individual citizen (Balogun, 2002). Besides the inequality of access to economic resources (i.e., the money with which to back up demands “effectively”), the accountability processes in government tend to be highly complex for the average citizen (Moe, 1994). In any case, an oligarchy bent on projecting its world-view as the “will of the majority” (or as the “consumer demand”) may turn to systematic dis-information and autosuggestion techniques. This is the case in undemocratic, neo-patrimonial and politically under-developed systems.

Development and Democracy: Role of the Civil Service
If the purveyance of shoddy public services is a symptom of under-development, what do we mean by “development”? In the Cold War era, development was often viewed from ideological standpoints. To some, it meant grafting western European-cum-north American economic, political and social models onto under-developed or “developing” societies. To others, development was synonymous with “Sovietisation”, by which is meant the adoption of the Soviet command model of economic planning together with the underlying one-party rule - euphemistically labelled “people’s democratic” system of government.

One thing is clear: development is about power, more specifically, about relations between the adherents of one value-system and those of another, between the mastery of technology and the lack of access to it. Even with all his distaste for economics without a human face, Stiglitz could not help equating development with the overturn of the existing order. To quote him (Stiglitz, 1998),

“…development is more than just the accumulation of capital and the reduction in distortions (inefficiencies) in the economy; it is a transformation of society, from traditional ways of doing things and traditional modes of thinking.”

Stiglitz’s definition is, however, open to challenge. If capital accumulation does not define development, neither does transformation. To “transform” is to head in one direction in preference to another. This poses a major dilemma – that of determining from a scale of preferences what the final direction would be. In the contemporary world, such a dilemma will almost certainly be resolved, not by poor societies making their own independent calculations and choices, but by the resource-endowed and powerful nations, curiously referred to as “development partners.” The possibility is therefore there of tension arising between democracy (crudely defined as “people’s power”) and development (meaning, movement from a position of weakness to one of strength).

In recent years, and under the impetus of “globalisation”, development has taken a new meaning. With the collapse of the Soviet empire, capitalism has waxed increasingly triumphal. Erstwhile die-hard communists have renounced their ideology in favour of free enterprise. A global coalition has emerged around an ideology under-girded by what may be termed “de-constructed morality”, i.e, the morality of the market place. The new morality frowns on kidnapping, homicide, and fraud, not because the crimes go against the Ten Commandments and Divine injunctions, but because they inhibit “perfect competition”, render the “investment climate” insecure, and hinder economic prosperity. The “this-world” thrust of the new morality is reflected in the increasing premium placed on materialist, consumerist, and individualist pursuits. Any creed, thought, or action that is at variance with the new moral order is viewed at best, as “primitive” and “barbaric”, at worst, a blemish on human civilisation and a threat to world peace.

The new interpretation of development has characteristically sparked off negative reactions from different quarters. Its secular stance has pitched it against the so-called fundamentalists in the three monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Its social Darwinist features – particularly, untrammelled competition, the annihilation of the weak by the strong, and the disconnection of earthly morality from its “other-worldly” roots – have made the weakest sections of the world community, as well as their supporters, highly uncomfortable. Its global thrusts have been resisted on the one side, by neo-Nazi, racial hegemonic, and other extreme right groups, and on the other, by labour unions fearful of exploitation by multinational firms. Above all, its attempts to export the pluralist, liberal democratic forms of government to the developing countries have suffered frequent setbacks.

From the standpoint of the African civil service, the contemporary global debate on development (and what it entails) should not be dismissed as a mere academic exercise. For a start, the debate is on a challenge for which the civil service was created, but which has to-date, remained impregnable. Specifically, the debate reveals the magnitude, depth and complexity of the challenge facing the developing economies of Africa. It shows that the civil service no longer operates in a
friendly and stable world. While some economies are growing, others, particularly, in Africa, are shrinking. This fuels a sense of desperation among the poor and of insecurity among the rich. In the prevailing climate of Darwinism, the most significant consideration in inter-group (and, for that matter, inter-personal) relations is the quantum of power one wields over the other, not the fear of Divine intervention or retribution.

As materialism launches a relentless attack on, and seeks to dominate, the human spirit, institutions and values that have served the human race for centuries begin to crumble. This explains to a large extent the growing incidence of terrorism noticeable within and across countries in recent years. Ironically, while individuals and groups commit acts of aggression and unleash violence and destruction, the state’s capacity to impose order is restricted by the growing and insistent demands for civic rights and for the expansion of the democratic space. Suffice it to say that as a key institution charged with the responsibility for economic management and for containing the socio-political consequences and “fall-outs”, the civil service needs to be on top of this challenge.

The second explanation for the prominence given to the development debate is the failure up to now to reconcile the contemporary global and uni-linear conception of development with the growing clamour for diversity of perspective and for domestic control. The issue is not whether consumerism is right or wrong, but whether individuals and groups in “under-developed” societies have a choice. The frustration in many parts of the developing world lies in the confiscation of the people’s freedom to decide on, and strike an acceptable balance between, earthly pursuits and afterlife expectations. This confiscation of “people’s power” takes various forms. It ranges from the direct imposition of “conditionalities” and policy packages on aid-recipient countries (World Bank, 2000), to the world media’s concentrated attacks on local initiatives that deviate from “the globalisation norm.” Local communities have little or no say on a vast range of internationally-sponsored initiatives the “demand” for which is frequently instigated or manufactured by the unelected local officials in collaboration with their counterparts outside national borders.

At a time when diversity and pluralism are prescribed as remedies for the economic and political maladies afflicting developing countries, it behoves the world community to create an environment enabling the weaker nations to have a minimum degree of control over their destinies. At the very least, matters that are close to home should be decided at home. After all, as Amartya Sen rightly observes, development and human freedom are synonymous (Sen, 2000). Development is capital accumulation plus. Contrary to the assumption among economists, development goes beyond the pursuit of economic wealth. It, at the minimum, entails discovering processes and technologies that create enough wealth to tame poverty and remove shackles to human freedom.

The African civil service has to-date not been good at promoting or backstopping local initiatives and freedom-enhancing opportunities. Distracted as it has been by internal power struggles, it has become an instrument not for democratic participation or development, but for the “marketing and distribution” of foreign development designs, technologies, and finished goods. If the continent is to be placed firmly on a course of self-sustaining development, the civil service would have to exchange its “trading-post” for a more pro-active and people-oriented role. More than ever before, it should assist the policy makers in crafting alternatives to contemporary development policy, and particularly, to the on-going “poverty reduction” schemes. One of such alternatives is an equity-based, and ethically oriented programme of wealth creation – one that learns from the past by exploiting the genius, building on the energies, and moving with the momentum, of local communities. As argued below, it is only by acknowledging the People’s right to choose that the civil service could build the consensus necessary to recapture the lost policy initiative and promote self-sustaining growth. This requires being in tune with the society in which it operates, and showing great appreciation for society’s strengths and weaknesses.

II. The African civil service and society
It is tempting to conclude from its hierarchical nature that the traditional African society shares the bureaucracy’s status quo and anti-democratic tendencies. If this is the case, the society, like the bureaucracy, could not but be at odds with the ideals and practice of democracy. However, at least, in the case of the African traditional society, this negative image needs to be re-examined. When viewed as an autonomous entity, each society in pre-colonial Africa had a viable system of government – one that rested on the implied consent of the citizen and provided opportunities for popular participation. The contention of this paper is that cracks in governance philosophy and practice appeared only when one society, with its own culture and way of life, merged with another to form what is now known as a “nation-state.” Managing the ensuing conflict is essentially the challenge facing the post-colonial Africa – a challenge that has, in some countries, proved unmanageable.

Strange as it may sound, governance in the traditional society was rooted in a world-view with a clear and, some would argue, rational, logic. It is true that unpleasant occurrences tend to be attributed to the machinations of “enemies” acting in league with “the Devil”. In many parts of Africa, the fear of evil spirits is pathological. Among the Bakiga of western Uganda (Edel, 1957: 129), the world is supposed to be infested with “ghosts of recently departed ancestors (abazimu) who trouble their own descendants and make them ill…smiting them, their kinsmen and even strangers with all sorts of horrid afflictions.”

However, there are societies that look for deeper and rational explanations for day-to-day occurrences. Besides the Hausa-Fulani and other Islamic societies whose teachings frown on “shir’k” (or polytheism), the Abaluyia of Kenya believe that nature does not operate capriciously. Accordingly, if people fall ill, if human settlements are rendered inhabitable by floods and other disasters, and if the body politic becomes unstable, the Abaluyia are likely to hold that the natural order has been “disturbed” by the “unnatural” and abnormal behaviour of human beings (Wagner, 1960). The deduction that can be drawn from this is clear: just as an individual person’s good health could be endangered if s/he engages in abnormal and unnatural activities, a political order could be upset if the actors deviate from Nature’s laws.

In terms of community participation in governance, the traditional African society has much in common with the Greek city state. It is true that in highly centralised states, the ruler was the one that the oracles credit with the most potent “life force” on earth. It was this “life force” that placed him at a higher spiritual level than any ordinary citizen, and legitimised his rule. He could not be sworn in until he had been “elected” either at an electoral college (of traditional king-makers), and confirmed by the oracles (with the latter casting the decisive “vote” based on the hidden knowledge of the contestants’ potent forces). Cheikh Anta Diop (Diop, 1974: 138-9) puts it as follows,

“According to those beliefs, the fertility of the soil, the abundant harvests, the health of the people and cattle, the normal flow of events and of all the phenomena of life, are intimately linked to the potential of the ruler’s vital force.”

However, the monarch’s power was neither absolute nor eternal. If there were signs that his life force was on the wane and society’s natural order risked being “disturbed”, the people reserved the right to get rid of him – sometimes in a violent manner. Some communities, particularly, the Mbum of Central Africa, even imposed time limits beyond which the ruler’s life force would have fizzled out (Diop, 1974: 139).

Where the ruler was not put to death, he was liable to be dethroned and banished into exile if found guilty of unseemly conduct – one that was unbecoming of royalty. While powerful kingdoms could and did exact tributes from minor chiefdoms, the latter were largely administered as autonomous units. This was the case in the Old Oyo Empire that failed in its attempts at bringing the Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti, Ondo, Ijebu, Egba, and Lagos Yoruba under its control (Ajayi, 1998:9-15). It was the case
among the Bushmen, Bergdama and Hottentos of southern Bantu, and the Zande of the former Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Schapera, 1956; Reining, 1966).

Access to the traditional ruler was in no way restricted. Unlike modern day government ministries that the citizen views with awe and approaches with trepidation, the palace doors were open round the clock to the various sections of society. Examples of those that the ruler received with or without prior appointment are parties to domestic feuds, plaintiffs and respondents in farmland encroachment cases, individuals and groups seeking answers to unusual climatic or atmospheric changes, and groups embarking on community development projects.

In the so-called stateless societies, community governance closely, though not entirely, mirrored the Athenian model. In such societies, a wide variety of tasks (e.g. participation in night patrol, defence against local criminal tendencies or external raids, construction of palaces and shrines, and contribution of labour and material to communal self-help projects) devolved on community members at large rather than on professional “civil servants”. Besides the members of age grades and totem groups, the guilds of medicine-men, herbalists and hunters took turns to discharge various “public administration” responsibilities (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1970; Balogun, 1983:55-58; Ottenberg and Ottenberg, 1961:27; Fadipe, 1970; Basden, 1966).

Some societies carried the revulsion against central authority to extreme limits. Among the Tiv of Nigeria’s middle belt, elders, age-grades and other social groups exercise control over the behaviour of individual members. That, however, is about all the external control that the average Tiv is expected to stand. Individuals are free to dispose of their earnings in the way they deem fit. A Tiv woman, for instance, does not have to surrender her earnings to her husband, let alone to a distant traditional authority. A politically powerful individual could not by virtue of his position, exact tributes from others (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968:143).

At any rate, it was not unusual for rulers given to arbitrary or immoral conduct to face civil insurrections. This experience was relived in 1969 when, under the leadership of a charismatic leader, Tafa Adeoye, a movement named Agbekoya (meaning, “Peasants Reject Tyranny/Oppression”) went on the rampage in parts of western Nigeria, citing systemic corruption and mismanagement in government offices. During the civil disturbances, local government employees were chased out of their offices, documents were set on fire, and supernatural forces were enlisted to subdue heavily armed security personnel (Ayoola Commission, 1969).

The appeal to the supernatural is of particular relevance to state-society relations in contemporary Africa. In pre-colonial society, wars were won or lost depending on the potency of the charms and the amulets employed by the combatants (Adefila and Opeola, 1998:219-230). Regardless of the credibility of their claims, individuals or groups opposed to the government have sometimes fallen back on traditional knowledge or mysticism, and have demonstrated their readiness to apply it in rectifying perceived inequities or in settling scores. Among groups that have built their fighting strengths and morale around supernatural forces are the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, the Odu’a People’s Congress and the Egbesu in Nigeria’ south west and Niger Delta respectively. The “Bakassi Boys” (a non-government security apparatus) have enlisted the support of powerful medicine-men to counter and vanquish the mystical forces employed by the armed gangs terrorising rural and urban communities in different parts of Nigeria. The underlying question is whether this traditional society’s parallel to the “loose nuke” bodes well or ill for contemporary Africa. If this extraordinary power is really there, the challenge ahead is in discovering it and enlisting it in the service of good governance and development. This is definitely no mean challenge.

Still, if accountability of the rulers to their subjects was an integral part of African traditional systems of government, what explains the rapid dismantling of the check and balances that were built into the post-colonial constitutional and governance arrangements? According to this paper, it
is inadvisable to read too much into the pre-colonial governmental arrangements for the simple reason that they varied from one society to another. Accordingly, the success of efforts at entrenching the norms of democracy in a number of African countries depends, not on the viability of a specific governance tradition, but on the ability to panel-beat parts from the conflicting African traditions into a consensual system of government and public administration. This in turn hinges on the willingness of the various parties to subdue narrow, sectional, loyalties in favour of allegiance to an artificial creation called the state.

For instance, it is the high degree of unanimity on the essence of the state that enabled the political leadership class in Botswana to focus on major nation-building tasks. By the same token, the communality of vision at the political level enabled the country’s civil service to take its development management role seriously. In contrast to this experience is that of the civil service operating under a hazy political environment – an environment characterised by constant wrangling over political goals, over the legitimacy of governance institutions, and over the appropriateness and/or adequacy of responses to development challenges.

The civil service operating in the latter category of environment is likely to have been created as part of the process of the integration of formerly autonomous, perhaps, mutually antagonistic, ethnic nationalities into nation-states. Examples are the civil service in Angola, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria. The last example provides an interesting case study in diversity. Unlike, say, Botswana, Swaziland, and Libya, that are relatively homogeneous, the Nigerian federation is an amalgam of societies that in the pre-colonial era existed as autonomous units. These include the Kanem and the Bornu Caliphates, the city-states of Zaria, Kebbi, Zamfara, Kano, Katsina and the succeeding Sokoto Caliphate in the north, as well as the Ife, the Old Oyo, the Ijesa, the Ijebu, the Egba, the Benin, the Itsekiri, and the Opobo kingdoms in the south. The so-called classless societies (e.g., the Igbo and the Tiv) were also merged with territories with formal, centralised systems of government to constitute the present-day Nigeria. While the Hausa-Fulani groups of the north united behind the banner of Islam, the other societies retained their conflicting identities. Rather than leave their religious, cultural, linguistic, and other differences behind in the past, the united Hausa-Fulani and the other fiercely independent societies of pre-colonial Nigeria, all the same, brought these differences to the new nation-state.

A high degree of consensus is an essential but not a necessary condition for the viability of political and administrative institutions. At the same time, excessive fragmentation is highly unlikely to help the smooth operation of the institutions. In the absence of trust- and consensus-engendering measures, the integration of autonomous groups into modern nation-states frequently generates conflict, promotes cynicism, and emboldens officials and citizen groups to commit acts of indiscretion while simultaneously evading responsibility. In such circumstances, an individual that is accused of lapses in judgement is likely to turn the table on his/her accusers by labelling them (the latter) “enemies of our tribe”. High illiteracy rates tend to encourage such type of thinking – “fictive” as opposed to what Auguste Comte terms “positive” or scientific thinking (De Graft-Johnson, 1986:225).

Aiding and abetting fictive thinking in post-colonial Africa are the conflicting belief-systems. The continent is home to many local deities with sharply divergent moral cues and mutually exclusive codes of good conduct. In almost every African society, it is “bad” to commit murder or adultery; it is “ungodly” to tell lies or steal. However, all these moral injunctions apply within a narrowly defined territory, not to “outsiders” and “strangers”. If a crime is perpetrated outside the town area, the criminal who returns safely and with booty is likely to be “congratulated on his success” (Basden, 1986:39).
Problems of Institution “Heart Transplant”

Riggs’ 1993 observation on the transferability of western forms of government and administration to developing countries provides an insight into the problems facing the contemporary African systems of government and administration. In advocating a problem-solving approach in place of the largely prescriptive models then in vogue he (Riggs, 1963) maintains that

“Insofar as the problems faced by different societies differ, a pattern of administration which solves the problems of one society may by no means solve the problems of a different kind of society.”

Yet this lesson was lost on the colonial administrators and their successors when laying the political and administrative foundation of the new African states. At independence, the majority of these countries copied alien systems of government and public administration – systems that were rooted in the history, culture and traditions of the departing metropolitan powers. After making the necessary allowances for the differences in colonial experience (particularly, experiences under the British, the French, and the Portuguese tutelage), it is possible to list the common features of the inherited political and administrative systems. The emerging secular state was to be founded on the will of the people, run along liberal democratic lines, and guided in its actions by a fundamental law as well as a body of laws regulating day-to-day behaviour.

The new state was also to sit on three pillars. The first, a popularly elected legislature, was to pass laws and perform budget scrutiny and general oversight functions. The second body, an independent judiciary, was to arbitrate on constitutional and legal disputes. The third pillar was the executive branch, headed by a president or prime minister, and charged with the responsibility for law enforcement as well as the implementation of policies and programmes.

The first state organ, the legislature, was to conduct its business in an orderly manner, following the procedure that had evolved over centuries elsewhere (notably, Britain, France, Portugal, and as the search for “modern” systems progressed, the United States of America). The “mace” was to be the symbol of the speaker’s (presiding officer’s) authority, and the gavel, the signal to debaters to make their point or keep the peace.

For its own part, the judiciary was to be staffed by professional and highly respected jurists. Members of the bench were to be set apart from the laity by their heavy robes and wigs, their dignity, bearing and comportment, their erudition in law and jurisprudence, as well as their integrity. Above all, they were to take instructions from no one – least of all, the head of the executive branch. All these proved easier said than done in many countries. With the judiciary’s almost total dependence on the executive branch – especially, for appointment, promotions, office and residential accommodation, court facilities, and as regards the promulgation of decrees with “ouster clauses” – it was not always easy ensuring the independence of the judiciary and upholding the rule of law.

The executive branch – the one of direct relevance to this paper – was not meant to be the lord and master that it subsequently turned out to be in many African countries. It was created to implement the laws duly enacted by the legislature, and, in case of doubt as to the intent and meaning of the law, to be guided by judicial rulings and pronouncements. It soon grew ahead of the other two institutions. The factors accounting for the executive branch’s almost total domination of the legislature and the judiciary are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the civil service factor is crucial to our understanding of the executive’s overbearing influence vis-a-vis the two other custodians of state power, the legislature, and the judiciary.

As conceived shortly before independence and nurtured in the post-independence period, the civil service was one state institution that, through its interventions, was expected to assist the political
executives in realising the objectives of the state. In outward appearance, it looked like the perfect instrument for the job. Its visible features fully recommended it for the newly emerging states’ developmental role: specialisation along functional lines, merit-based recruitment, tidy organisational arrangements (with reporting and accountability lines clearly drawn, and discipline guaranteed by hierarchy and rules), and a decision framework placing high premium on analysis of “facts” and official records. Over time, and with the rapid accumulation of developmental challenges, the bureaucracy’s true nature and inadequacies came to the surface.

As a legal-rational body, the civil service is supposed to hold individuals and organisation units accountable for the achievement of specific objectives, and the application of duly enacted laws. Yet, as noted earlier, the conflicting orientations of the traditional society have not only encouraged cynicism but also made it possible for many a government official to evade responsibility for his actions. As indicated in the next section, the essence and challenge of “good” governance lie in coupling the exercise of the sovereign power of the state with executive responsibility, and of bureaucratic authority with accountability.

### III. The civil service, democracy and good governance

The civil service has not been particularly active in the propagation of democratic values and practices in Africa. This is not surprising. In terms of its internal characteristics and external orientation, it is least equipped to negotiate the twists and turns of democratic populism. This, in any case, is not the only, or perhaps, the real, explanation for the bureaucracy’s limited contribution to democratic advance on the continent. A more plausible explanation is the dynamics of politics and administration in the post-colonial period. Right from the immediate post-independence period in the 1960s up to the early 1990s, the governance of many African countries fell into the hands of a political and/or military elite that was not particularly keen on democracy. This, again, is not to argue that democracy happens only if the leadership class wants it to. Indeed, Africa’s experience in the operation of constitutional systems of government reveals that it was not so much the attitude of the political elite as the post-independence environment that contributed to the fragility of the inherited governance institutions and explained the endurance of autocratic rule. It was this environment, more than any other factor, which impeded efforts at managing the transition from tradition to modernity, howsoever defined.

**Civil service, dictatorial rule, and democratisation**

Overall, the role of the civil service in the decades preceding the era of democratisation was highly supportive of dictatorial, rather than democratic, rule. This is understandable as a significant number of countries were under either one-party or military rule. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, governance in many Sub-Saharan African countries meant little more than:

- (a) forceful acquisition of the sovereign power of the state, such that power sprang not from electoral mandate but the manipulation of the electoral process, or from the barrel of the gun. (Adedeji’s tally (Adedeji, 2000:3) indicates that 80 violent changes of government took place in Sub-Saharan Africa between the 1960s and the 1990s);

- (b) a misdirection of the power of the state; the basic requirement for appointment to positions in the Higher Civil Service, was neither knowledge nor service rendering skills, but the patronage and sponsorship of those in authority;

- (c) systematic disconnection of authority from accountability points;

- (d) emasculation of the powers of the legislature and the judiciary; and
(e) widespread use of public office for private gain (corruption of institutions and miscellaneous ethical violations).

The practice in countries under the single-party system of government was to politicise the civil service and require senior officials to be members of the “ruling party.” In other words, the one-party state turned the career civil service into a direct instrument of control and coercion, and expected the latter to serve no interest except that of the ruling group.

As regards the civil service under the military, the tendency was for the latter to start by relying heavily on the former, but over time, view it (the civil service) as a brigade in the praetorian guard, and turn it into a malleable instrument of military hegemony. In countries like Togo, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the former Zaire, it was to the civil service that the military juntas turned when embarking on the difficult challenge of “suspending” the constitution, dissolving parliament, and ruling by decrees. The decrees (some of which curtailed or abrogated civic rights, and stifled dissent) were certainly drafted by career officials skilled in the language and methods of the law. The decrees, no matter how draconian, were enforced by another branch of the career service, the police or the gendarmerie – a body known for relishing the acquisition of wide emergency powers at the expense of the citizenry. The public utilities were administered by officials directly accountable to the military, and with no obligations whatsoever, to the “citizen-customer” (Balogun, 1997). Decisions which would in normal circumstances be deemed “political” – e.g., creation of state and local government administrations, elevation of departments into full-fledged ministries, revenue allocation, and establishment of constitution drafting bodies – were taken by the military, based on substantial inputs from career civil servants, and after little or no consultation with the “People”.

While the political class and the military elite cannot be absolved of complicity in grand corruption, career officials (e.g., customs inspectors, immigration personnel, police constables and their superiors) are likely to be implicated in cases of petty corruption. The chances for rent-seeking increase where the officials are on low pay but vested with wide discretionary powers.

Promoting or rolling back decentralisation

This is not to say that the bureaucracy’s nation-building role is insignificant. For better or worse, the African civil service contributed in no small measure to the course of political development in various countries. Some of its interventions, as pointed out earlier, clearly retarded the growth of popular participation. Ambivalence best describes its role in the sphere of decentralisation. Let us take, for instance, the policy advice it provided, and the implementation instruments it prepared, in pursuance of power devolution and de-concentration objectives. Proceeding from the general guidelines provided by the political leaders, the civil service designed comprehensive programmes of decentralisation aimed at transferring powers, functions, and resources from the centre to the periphery. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, one country after the other promulgated a variety of local government and decentralisation laws. Examples are Cameroon’s local council law No. 74-23 of 5 December 1974, Zambia’s decentralisation law of 1968, the succeeding local administration act of 1980, and Kenya’s “District Focus” dating back to the mid-80s (Republic of Cameroon, 1974, Oyugi, 2000). Tanzania’s “ujamaa” policy was the brain-child of the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, but getting it off the ground required the active involvement of the bureaucracy (which had, for this and other purposes, to be politicised).

Still, what the civil service gave under political pressure, it took back by bureaucratic stealth. First, it formed a coalition with the central political elite, and citing urgent “nation-building” tasks, persuaded the latter to devise measures aimed at eroding the autonomy and emasculating the powers of local level institutions (democratic local government and the “field” offices of the central government, included). Secondly, it frustrated the basic decentralisation objectives by ensuring that
only those loyal and directly accountable to it were deployed to key local-level positions (e.g., local government chairpersons, “Sole Administrators”, secretaries, and treasurers). Above all, it applied various intrinsically bureaucratic methods (hierarchy, chain and line of command, secrecy, rules and regulations) to consolidate its control over local institutions and reduce the scope for popular participation in community governance and development (Oyugi, 2000; Balogun, 2000).

The result of all these is that instead of being accountable to local communities for the delivery of services, the “democratically” elected local government officials as well as their counterparts in the central government’s field offices answer to minor officials at the national capitals for rule application or enforcement. Where local bodies are constituted, they have served merely as instruments for the mobilisation of support for the centre (Oyugi, 1986). Despite Botswana’s impressive achievements in governance and economic management, decentralisation meant strengthening central control over the periphery and placing central government appointees (the district commissioner) in a position of eminence at the local level (Sharma, 1992).

Notwithstanding the ambivalent attitude towards decentralisation, far-reaching decentralisation programmes were implemented in a number of countries. Among these are Uganda where a five-tier system of local government offered the citizen avenues for participation, and Ethiopia where devolution of powers and resources to regional and local government enabled the various ethnic nationalities to exercise control over their affairs, including control over the tenure of the key office holders. Ghana’s approach to democratisation went beyond the legalisation of multiparty competition and the conduct of periodic elections. It went as far as the establishment of district assemblies that served as a training ground for locally elected officials and the entire citizen body. By and large, however, decentralisation is yet to empower the periphery to act independently of the centre, even when the matters to be decided impinge directly on the life, security, and welfare of the people residing in the former.

The civil service and recent “good governance” initiatives

Since the 1990s, a number of countries have implemented far-reaching governance reform programmes. The core elements of these programmes are:

(a) the legalisation of multi-party competition in place of the erstwhile one-party or military rule (as a result, 42 out of 48 Sub-Saharan African countries organized multi-party elections since the early 1990s);

(b) the gradual expansion of the political space to accommodate civil society participation in the governance and development process;

(c) the apportionment of power among the three state institutions - i.e., the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary – and strengthening of checks and balances;

(d) substantive devolution of power and resources by the central government to provinces, districts, and local communities;

(e) creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation in the economy and protection of individual property rights;

(f) enhancement of the capacity of the judiciary to act independently of the executive, and to promote the rule of law;

(g) enactment of anti-corruption laws, establishment of watch-dog bodies, and enforcement of ethical and accountability codes;
(h) reactivation of the civil service’s professional values, and inculcation of the ethos of responsiveness, transparency, and accountability in service-delivery agents.

The civil service, it should be noted, is no stranger to the design and implementation of governance “reforms”. The transformation in the mid-1960s from the neo-liberal democratic formula to the one-party and/or military systems of government was, in the thinking of the time, a “reform”, if not a “revolutionary” act. The civil service was closely associated with this first wave of “reform”. The half-hearted steps taken in a few countries in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Liberia) to reinstate constitutional government in place of autocratic ones also entailed the civil service designing and supervising the implementation of a variety of “political transition” programmes. In Nigeria, for instance, the Political Department of the defunct Cabinet Office dispensed with the career bureaucracy’s pretence to anonymity by issuing statements on the country’s future political directions, first, under the Gowon regime (1967-75), and secondly, under the Mohammed-Obasanjo’s military administration (1975-79). Similarly, the civil servants in the Babangida’s “Presidency” (the regime’s preferred term for the Office of President) played a crucial role in the regime’s “un-ending transition”. Although civil servants were not involved in the preparation of the draft white paper on the report of Political Bureau set up by the military regime, they were deployed as heads of the secretariats of the two political parties - the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention - created by military decree in anticipation of the return to civilian rule (Olagunju, Jinadu, and Oyovbaire, 1993:163 and 215).

Following previous traditions, the African civil service has been associated with the neo-liberal governance reforms initiated from the early 1990s. It has served as a crucial source of policy advice, prepared white papers (together with draft legislative instruments and implementation plans) and backstopped the work of committees and task forces established by government to follow up specific reform measures, e.g., privatization, public expenditure programming and rationalization, pay and employment policy review, and deregulation of financial market. This confirms an earlier hypothesis – i.e., that the civil service’s role in governance is a function of the prevailing political consensus.

The recent achievements notwithstanding, the civil service still needs to adopt a more proactive stance if democracy is to be firmly enthroned in Africa and the “democracy dividends” multiplied to the benefit of the people. In specific terms, it has to place at the service of the political leaders its analytic and problem-solving capacities so that credible solutions could be found to nagging socio-economic and political problems. Issues that need to be immediately addressed include those of ethnic and religious diversity, grand and petty corruption, and the exclusion of the poorest and weakest sections of society from decision processes. Above all, public service delivery systems need overhauling to restore the confidence of the citizen in government and its institutions. For its own part, the government needs to give serious and immediate attention to issues of civil service morale and motivation as well as of performance and productivity. Whether the “representative” (liberal democratic) formula underlying the on-going reform will serve the basic objective of good governance (that of empowering the people to choose the terms under which they will be governed) remains an open question. The Post of Zambia has strong reservations. In an editorial reproduced in part by the CNN, the newspaper paints a gloomy picture of representative democracy:

“Most of our people have lost faith in leaders, programmes, electoral promises and the honesty of elections. Most of the voters don’t vote” (http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/africa/12/26/zambia.elections.ap/index.html).

Bureaucracy, internationalism, and local control

In any case, if democracy means empowering the people to decide on their life and well-being, the bureaucracy certainly has to re-examine its role in the supra-national arena. In furtherance of
economic development objectives, African governments (through their career officials) have entered into international commitments without reference to their citizens at home. Some of these commitments entail joining supranational bodies, acceding to treaties, conventions, and covenants, and occasionally, piling up debt. Others require dismantling border controls to facilitate the free movement of persons, goods, and capital. All the external “entanglements”, without any exception, put a vast range of decisions – decisions having momentous demographic, social, political, and cultural implications – beyond the average voter’s control. The highly technical and complex nature of some of the decisions, and the generally low literacy rates, in any case, guarantee that only a tiny minority - the specially trained government officials - would be able to participate in the deliberations leading to the decisions’ ratification. And even when the decisions are fairly straightforward, they are rarely brought to the public domain for the electorate’s scrutiny. As observed below, this is the dilemma confronting the weak nation-states of Africa as they move from the hitherto benign international setting to the hostile environment of globalisation.

IV. The civil service and development: a score card

It is generally agreed that the African civil service’s developmental (like its democracy facilitation) role has fallen short of expectation. What is not clear is whether its disappointing performance is a result of unnecessarily high expectations, or of the circumstances in which the civil service has had to operate. The popular view is that too much was expected of the civil service. As the argument goes, its bureaucratic nature and its susceptibility to the constraints of the traditional society both make it better suited to “administering” rules and regulations, than managing economic development projects. Yet, within its relatively short life span, the African civil service has not only maintained law and order, but has also financed and supervised the construction of expensive projects such as dams, electricity and water supply undertakings, ports and harbours. Through a network of highways, it has opened up rural communities and linked urban centres. Besides investing in primary, secondary and tertiary education, it has constructed and equipped health facilities, and developed modern postal and telecommunication systems. Not content with running banks, it has dabbled in the stock market, and, until stopped in its tracks by structural adjustment reforms, engaged in wholesale and retail trade.

Nature and magnitude of SSA’s socio-economic crisis

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to conclude that the public sector over-extended itself in the three to four decades after independence, and that, by so doing, accelerated Africa’s slide to economic collapse and social distress. However, before deciding where to lay the blame, it is essential that Africa’s socio-economic crisis be put in proper perspective. Mazrui’s observation captures the essence of Africa’s development crisis. In his view (Mazrui, 1986),

“Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar-es-Salaam, from Marrakech to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away.”

While the decaying structures and institutions are gradually being rehabilitated, the challenge ahead remains daunting. In terms of total income, the 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are at about the same level as a single European economy, Belgium. The region’s median income of approximately $2 billion puts a whole African country’s output at par with that of a rich north American town of 60,000 inhabitants. Between 1960 and 1990, whatever was left of the minuscule output shrank by as much as 50 per cent (World Bank, 2000:7). Despite the modest gains recorded between 1990 and 2000, SSA’s economy has not bounced from stagnation to accelerated growth (See Table 1).
Table 1: Africa: Macroeconomic indicators, 1990-2000
(Except where indicated, amounts in millions of UA)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real GDP Growth rate (%)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (US$)</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>646</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflation (%)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal balance (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Investment (% of GDP)</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross National Savings (% GDP)</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>18.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Real Export Growth (%)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade Balance (% GDP)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Account (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Trade</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-11.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total External Debt (% GDP)</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt Service (% of Exports)</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
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Africa’s share of world trade accounts for less than 2 percent. The region has over the past forty years lost opportunities for industrial expansion, and now risks being totally excluded from the global information revolution. It is still highly dependent on the export of primary products. With a few exceptions, the SSA economies are “aid dependent and deeply indebted” (World Bank, 2000:9). By the end of 1997, foreign debt stood at $315.2 billion and represented a burden of over 80 percent of GDP in net present value terms. Africa has the lowest savings rate in the world. Rapid population growth and environmental degradation have further depressed the savings rate.

The SSA economy’s free fall has brought in its wake untold human suffering and triggered a large-scale social crisis. While the UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) provides a fair measure of human welfare across countries, one should, for reasons stated later, be wary of reading too much into it. Still, and in the absence of a more reliable cross-cultural comparison of human welfare, the scores provide a fair indication of the gravity of Africa’s social situation. Poverty, for instance, appears to be the region’s lot – after more than four decades of independence and the implementation of countless development projects. More than 40 percent of continent’s 600 million people live below the internationally recognised poverty line of $1 a day, with incomes averaging just $0.65 a day in purchasing power parity terms. The number of poor people has risen rapidly, causing Africa’s share of the world’s absolute poor to jump from 25 to 30 percent in the 1990s. In the 25 years between 1975 and 1999, 22 countries have suffered setbacks in the human development index. Of this number, 13 (i.e., 59 per cent) are in Africa (See Table 2)
Table 2: Countries suffering setbacks in the human development index, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HDI lower than in 1975</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1980</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1985</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1990</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1995</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zambia*</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Botswana*</td>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>Malawi*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigeria*</td>
<td>Russian Fed.</td>
<td>Bulgaria*</td>
<td>Cameroon*</td>
<td>Namibia*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe*</td>
<td>Burundi*</td>
<td>Kenya*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Congo*</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
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<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesotho*</td>
<td>Rep. of South Africa*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Swaziland*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NB: * = Sub-Saharan African countries


In the past 30 years, all the world’s regions (with the exception of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa) have made progress in “human development” (measured in terms of access to material resources). South Asia and SSA lag far behind other regions “with human and income poverty still high” (UNDP, 2001:10). The adult literacy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is 60 percent, well below the developing country average of 73 percent. Life expectancy at birth in SSA is pegged at 48.8 years, compared to over 60 in all other regions. The share of people living on less than $1 a day is as high as 46 percent in SSA, compared with a mere 15 percent in East Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America. Access to electric power supply, internal telephone and external telecommunications services, potable water, and basic sanitation remains highly restricted.

At a time when the health sector has not been adequately funded, the Africa region is confronted with the AIDS pandemic. Of the approximately 36 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide at the end of 2000, 95 percent were in developing countries, and 70 percent in SSA. In six countries – Botswana, Burundi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe – HIV/AIDS accounted for significant drops (up to 7 years) in life expectancy (UNDP, 2001:13).

With widespread poverty have come disparities in income distribution. In 16 of the 22 SSA countries with data for the 1990s, the poorest 10 percent of the population had less than 10 percent of the income of the richest 10 percent, and in 9, less than 5 percent. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to leave poverty behind and move on to affluence. Let us take for instance South Africa. Up to 63 percent of households in poverty in the country in 1993 were still there five years later (i.e., 1998), while 60 percent of households in the highest income category in 1993 were still there in 1998, indicating limited income mobility (UNDP, 2001:18). The majority of households in other African countries have given up hope of moving out of poverty having been trapped there for generations.

A “development” that is threatening the social fabric of SSA countries is unemployment. With the rate of unemployment of between 15 and 20 percent and against the background of global “downsizing”, the region cannot escape the pathologies frequently associated with this socio-economic condition – high divorce rates, high suicide rates, and high incidence of alcoholism (Stiglitz, 2001). The increasing crime wave in many SSA countries is itself a symptom of a deeper malaise, i.e., loss of hope on the part of many able-bodied men and women with plenty of time on their hands but without the slightest clue as to what to do with it. Still, if the formal or informal sector of the economy appears too saturated with skills, school graduates are not beyond taking their skills elsewhere – mostly to under-world “recruiting agencies”. Among the potential “recruiters” are...
masterminds of ethnic and religious riots, drug barons, leaders of armed robbery gangs, con-artists and go-betweens in bureaucratic scams. Even in countries not at war, crime and violence can be a serious drain on the economy. In South Africa, the cost of both (crime and violence) equals an estimated 6 per cent of GDP. In other countries, crime and violence stand as clear obstacles to domestic and foreign investment.

Economic depression and social distress have stirred pent-up grievances and threatened peace and stability in a number of countries. In the first quarter of 1996, 50 percent of SSA countries enjoyed stable political conditions and good governance, while the remaining 50 percent were embroiled in prolonged political crises or armed conflict. By the end of 1998, the situation had taken a turn for the worse, with only 39 percent (i.e., 19 countries) enjoying stable political conditions, 23 percent (11 countries) facing political crises and turbulence, and 38 percent (18 countries) engaging in armed conflict (Adedeji, 2000:3). Armed conflict has impacted negatively on human capital development in different parts of the continent, claiming over 2 million lives between 1992 and 1997. Africa’s refugee population is currently estimated at more than 12 million people – putting it at well over 40 percent of the world total. The continent further holds the dubious record of recruiting a disproportionately high number of child-soldiers – children who have been abducted by military gangs, and under the influence of drugs and voodoo, assigned direct combat roles or posted as sentries and spies. The child-soldiers are not only exposed to unspeakable traumas, but also deprived of opportunities to grow under normal conditions.

Causes of the crisis

According to the neo-liberal minimalist theory, the blame for Africa’s socio-economic crisis should be laid at the doorstep of “big government”. By controlling and misallocating resources, the large public sector has “crowded out” the productive private sector, and denied the latter the resources it needed to discharge its “engine-of-growth” responsibilities. To “clear the way” for accelerated growth, it is absolutely essential that the role of the state be drastically limited, and an enabling environment created for private sector leadership in the development process. This is the rationale for the structural adjustment reforms undertaken between the 1980s and the 1990s to eliminate economic imbalances and “distortions” while at the same time enhancing performance efficiencies. The reforms entailed among other things, sharp reduction in the size (if not always the cost) of government, removal of bureaucratic controls and price subsidies, massive currency devaluation, privatisation of state enterprises, trade liberalisation, and general opening up of the domestic economy to global competition.

As argued in this paper, the real cause of Africa’s development crises is the devaluation of the human person. In the quest for material progress, public and private sector managers focus narrowly on economic and fiscal balances, but neglect, and at times, abuse, the only resource capable of producing wealth – the human resource.

It is now generally agreed that rather than “cure” the SSA economies of their afflictions, structural adjustment contained doses with lethal side-effects. This is the conclusion reached by Adedeji, Mutahaba, Balogun and others in 1992 (Mutahaba and Balogun, 1992), and now confirmed by recent assessments. No less an authority than the World Bank has acknowledged the fact that the reform measures failed to address some difficult underlying institutional problems, and in some cases, “may have worsened them”. It further admits that a few “adjusting” countries (among them, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe) have accumulated high domestic debts, in part because “financial markets were hastily liberalized before fiscal deficits were brought under control” (World Bank, 2000).

With regard to privatisation, recent studies indicate that the process might have served purposes other than those intended. In Kumssa’s view, wholesale and indiscriminate privatisation means creating conditions allowing private foreign monopolies to exploit the consumer and repatriate
surpluses from African economies (Kumssa, 1996). Besides, there are risks of the weaker economies’ enterprises being taken over by foreign nationals, of resource leakage (due to transfer of earnings from weaker to stronger economies), and of susceptibility of the economies to external shocks. Above all, the weak economies stand little chance of competing with the industrialised nations. As long as the rules governing competition continue to be made by the latter, the former could not expect to compete on a level playing field (Kumssa, 2001:55-72).

Of immediate concern to this paper is the danger that privatisation poses to indigenous intellectual property rights. Reference has been in previous sections to the body of knowledge that is behind the mystical powers displayed in the African traditional society. The achievements traceable to the knowledge are legendary: they include rainmaking, incisions to fortify the body against weapon penetration, herbal cure for serious ailments, bone-setting formulas, preparations to cast or ward off evil spells, and incantations for astral/time travel or to “beam up” from danger to save havens. If such knowledge gets into the hands of an itinerant businessman or is battered away for a pittance in the cloudy atmosphere of privatisation, Africa and its unborn generations will be the ultimate loser.

Steps towards proper diagnosis and medication

The enduring nature of Africa’s poverty and underdevelopment is no doubt attributable to the improper diagnosis of the continent’s crisis (Stiglitz, 2001). The way forward therefore lies in promoting a new understanding among the “development partners” on one key issue – the role of the African people in democracy and development. This further requires confronting the cynicism with which the issue has been treated over the years.

Who are the “development partners”? They are the framers of the development agenda, and they include the legislative and the executive arms of government in Africa (the People’s representatives), the career bureaucracy, the organised civil society, and international finance capital. For understandable reasons, each member of this “coalition” has its own agenda. This, however, means that no matter where the “People” turn, they find themselves confronted with agendas other than those they have a hand in drafting. The bottom line in the Peoples’ relations with the local and foreign development partners is power, and the determination of the powerful is to maintain the status quo while giving the impression of support for change.

For instance, by constantly harping on “representation” through the ballot box, and with the formal constitutional guarantee of the basic freedoms, the local elite use the liberal democratic formula to maintain its grip on the People’s allegiance. Yet, the representatives get too easily diverted from the electors’ concerns. In the absence of constant reminders, the representatives are liable to pursue with vigour interests other than those in their Mandate. If the representatives have yet to demonstrate a clear commitment to a policy of people empowerment for poverty eradication, neutrality (an euphemism for indifference) is what sums up the attitude of the career civil service to issues of concern to the People. This second group of local development partners is not beyond coming to an understanding with the People’s representatives and external bodies on “demand” manufacturing schemes, if not on schemes designed to stifle community initiatives. The rest of civil society for whom the democracy and development projects are designed are likely to fall not only for the seductive appeal of “political representation” but also the legal-rational pretences of the career bureaucracy. In all probability, civil society – particularly the organised “NGO” sector – will endorse any project so long as it is likely to attract “donor funding” or “foreign investment.”

The donors deserve special recognition as a class of “development partners.” It is this group that charts development directions and, through the power of the purse, holds out the hope of advancing “backward” societies along these directions. It is an amorphous group made up of governments that disburse aid through multilateral and bilateral channels, international finance and/or development agencies, and, as private foreign investment becomes increasingly crucial, the multinational corporations. It is this group that is behind the structural adjustment reforms instituted in the 1990s
as well as the “conditionalities” attached thereto. According to the World Bank (2000), a share of the blame for Africa’s limited progress lies at the door of the donor institutions which, through constant meddling, have left the Africans “cash poor and project rich.” The Bank notes that some 100,000 foreign experts from donor countries were employed in Africa, “with less long-run impact on development of recipients’ economies” (World Bank, 2000:244).

One major constraint in the excessive reliance on “donor funding” is the donors’ uni-linear view of development. The human race is seen to be “developing” and “developed” when it leaves the past in the past, and move on an evolutionary trajectory to the future. As part of this transformation process, it searches for new technologies, acquires the capacity to record efficiencies in resource use, and promotes increasing access to the wherewithal to make life worth living. These are all noble and legitimate objectives. However, man does not live by bread alone, much less, by the efficient technologies with which it is baked. Indeed, our “developed” wo/man will be less than human if all s/he craves are sensual pleasures and the skill to overpower competitors and eliminate threats to bodily desires. Besides the individually rational character traits associated in varying degrees with “development” (egotism, callousness, greed, arrogance, ill-temper, selfishness, intolerance, xenophobia, deceptiveness, despotism, and profiteering), there is need for genuinely developing societies to retain and nurture traditional moral values (particularly, those of compassion, communal solidarity, honesty, and sanctity of human life).

Not only are moral indicators excluded from the contemporary and externally imposed definitions of development, but the practical policy agendas are also determined externally without regard for local nuances, predilections, and priorities. In theory, nothing is wrong with setting global development targets. As a matter of fact, such targets could spur economic non-achievers into action. However, it is also possible that externally imposed targets have little or no bearing on local realities, and that focusing on them merely serve to divert attention from problems crying for solution. This is one of the difficulties in interpreting the UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI). Although it is becoming a reference point for policy makers and policy analysts in different settings, the Index has to address a few critical questions to serve a useful purpose. In comparing GDP across countries, the Index does not distinguish between, on the one hand, countries that produce items such as alcoholic beverages, psychotic and mind-bending drugs, and weapons of mass destruction, and, on the other, societies that, as a matter of deliberate policy, discourage the production of such “outputs.”

“Basic schooling” (another indicator) will, more often than not be interpreted as what prepares the individual for contemporary socio-economic struggles, and will thus contain strong elements of “reading, writing, and arithmetic”. Yet, there is no guarantee that knowledge of the three “r’s” would enhance the individual’s chances of moving out of poverty or leading a meaningful life. Rather, the evidence available points to the possibility of the half-educated individual becoming functional illiterates and constituting a threat to society’s peace and stability.

There is also the weight given to “life expectancy” in HDI rankings. The assumption underlying this is that “development” and “life expectancy” are positively correlated with each other. Nothing could be farther from reality. Quite apart from the fact that certain religious traditions, rightly or wrongly, perceive “longevity” as a matter beyond human control, it is not unlikely that the incidence of low “life expectancy” is more prevalent among the “developed” and “modernised” Africans than their nature-loving, culture-guided, austere-living and stress-free brethren. As the former becomes locked in earthly struggles of Darwinian proportions, and consumes “modern” (genetically engineered) foods, s/he runs the risk of succumbing to “rich man’s” diseases – diseases that were alien to his ancestors, e.g., hypertension, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease), drug addiction, manic depression, and coronary thrombosis. In the meantime, the “developed” African would have turned his back on traditional medicine and in search of highly expensive pharmaceutical products patented by the big multinational firms.
Industrialisation, another “development” indicator, poses serious environmental threats thus further reducing the (traditional and the modern) African’s “life expectancy”. In pursuance of industrial development objectives, trees have been felled, and manufacturing plants have been established emitting pollutants and excreting solid wastes. New technologies have widened access to material goods, but have also compromised the quality of the water humans consume and of the air they breathe. Life-threatening diseases (e.g. childhood leukaemia, skin and lung cancer, depression and suicides) have been traced to the electro-magnetic emissions from power lines, while the radio-active substances associated with toxic waste dumping have been implicated in the dramatic increase in carcinogenic cases.

V. Democracy, Development and the Public Administration Discipline: The Way Forward

In contemporary thinking, democracy and development are emerging as branches of a new religion – that of secularism. The new religion’s credo is a mix of the individualist dictum of liberalism, the competitive urge of Darwinism, the capital accumulation promise of modern technology, and science’s intolerance of non-scientific beliefs. While its adherents draw their inspiration from the social sciences as a whole, it is to economics that they are likely to turn when faced with uncertainties, and plagued by personal insecurities.

Under the cover of “modernisation” and “progress”, the new religion has made determined efforts to penetrate many a “developing” society. This is where the tension is at its most acute. As one starting off from a different base, the average “developing” society is likely to put up stiff resistance when pressed to adopt institutional arrangements that are in conflict with its own traditional values. It is this gap between externally crafted policies and local preferences that is indeed at the root of the contemporary “ownership” debate.

The public administration discipline has a major role to play in reconciling the secular thrusts of political and economic liberalism with the realities prevailing in the “developing” world. Specifically, rather than relent on the application of the multi-disciplinary approach for which it was once renowned, public or development administration should join up with other social science disciplines to break economics’ tight grip on contemporary study of governance and development. Instead of leaving research agenda and epistemological issues to be decided solely by economists, public administration scholars should team up with the social sciences (and possibly humanities) to spark an inter-disciplinary debate on the current governance and development paradigms. The ultimate objective should be to inject rigour and objectivity into research designs, engage scholars from different backgrounds in a dialogue, and, in the process, arrive at a new consensus on the way forward.

Hopefully, the multi-disciplinary studies should bring to the attention of policy makers, their civil service advisers, and the external development partners the complexity of governance and development challenges facing Africa. At the very least, the studies should further debunk the already discredited thesis that governance is about “fiscal balances”, or that development is all about “capital accumulation”. The research outputs should trace the impact of diversity – ethnic, cultural, religious, gender – on governance, and explore opportunities for promoting citizen participation in politics and in economic production processes. The studies should define the human being from all possible angles, and identify the underlying motivational factors. It is only by taking a holistic view of man (and woman) that we can undo the damage which narrow economic analyses have done to the study of democracy and development in Africa.

Besides posing theoretical and methodological questions, the envisaged multi-disciplinary research should address issues of direct concern to policy makers and civil service managers. Specifically, the studies should focus on:

* the need for, and the essential attributes of, a New Economy (one that proceeds from
the centrality of the human person and his needs to wealth and job creation policies, puts local talent to optimum use, rewards enterprise and productivity, and promotes equitable access to resources);

* the policy, legal, and institutional and other measures to adopt to bring to the “monetised” sector the value-added activities (e.g., sports and athletics) that are currently excluded therefrom, and induce operators in the under-ground economy to come out and trade on the open market;

* the linkages between, on the one hand, the new marketisation measures, and, on the other, plans to enhance productivity in government and in the formal as well as informal private sector (preferably, within the framework of country-wide Productivity Monitoring and Process Simplification Programmes);

* the managerial competencies needed to achieve the goals of the New Economy (including issues relating to the selection of top managers and the evaluation of their performance, the recruitment, training and evaluation of other categories of staff, the merits and demerits of “security of tenure”, especially for law enforcement personnel and other classes of public officials, terms and conditions for contract renewal, and staff motivation and productivity incentives);

* mechanisms designed to broaden opportunities for popular participation in socio-political and economic activities.

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