

POVERTY AND LEADERSHIP FAILURE IN AFRICA: AN APPRAISAL

by

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Abstract

Africa faces chronic poverty and leadership failure. Other continents of the world such as Europe, the Americas, Asia and others have successfully minimized or reduced the impact of poverty in their continents through the instrumentality of regional integration and cooperation. The African continent's leaders transformed the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to African Union (AU) to enable the region eradicate poverty and place the African countries both individually and collectively on the path of sustainable growth and development. However, African integration is yet to bear satisfactory fruits as Africa lags behind in poverty eradication despite the existence of a new economic plan called NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development). The study sets to examine why poverty is difficult to reduce and good governance achieved in Africa. Basically, the study is qualitative in outlook, utilizing mostly secondary data in its analysis. The findings reveal that Africa has the capacity to reduce or end poverty based on the availability of natural resources. What is lacking, however, is the absence of focused, innovative and mobilized leadership which makes good governance difficult. Thus, the study concludes by recommending among other things the creation of civil society organizations that are well focused and proactive to hold African leadership accountable.

Key words: Poverty, leadership, leadership failure, Africa, NEPAD.

Introduction

African poverty is a scar on the conscience of the world. Tony Blair (2001).

Africa is considered the poorest continent on earth despite the fact that the region is the richest in terms of natural resources. Hammel, Tong and Hofer (2019) describe Africa as the world's last frontier in the fight against extreme poverty. Today, one in three Africans – 422 million people – live below the global poverty line; and they represent more than 70 percent of the world's poorest people.

Decades after decades, politicians and international organizations according to Berrebi (2015) have not failed to tackle poverty in Africa, nor have they been able to help generate growth or build basic infrastructures. The high incidence of poverty in Africa is the primary development challenge facing the continent today. Unlike most regions of the world that have halved poverty, African poverty has been on the rise. The poverty situation in Africa is pervasive, intensive, chronic, gender-biased and largely a rural phenomenon.

The total number of people living below the \$1 a day threshold of 46 percent is higher today than in the 1980s and 1990s. This is despite the significant improvements in the growth of African GDP in recent years. The implication is that poverty has been unresponsive to economic growth. Thus, various reasons have been adduced for Africa's lack of response to the threat from poverty and economic growth. For instance, Kabuya (2015) argues that some of the factors that account for Africa's disappointing poverty include: income inequality, conflicts, location, natural disasters, ill health and disability, inheritance of poverty, education and skills, and gender discrimination.

To be sure, most writers hardly include leadership failure as responsible for Africa's poverty; rather, they will always trace the root causes to the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism. Commenting on the leadership challenge of Africa using Nigeria as a perfect illustration, Achebe (1984) forcefully asserts that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. According to him, there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.

Similarly, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) traced the poverty challenge of Africa to poor governance leadership. According to them, it has become obvious that it is politics that drive the economies of nations and that the major difference between developed countries and developing countries is in their political evolution. Developed countries have political and economic systems that are inclusive and offer opportunities for most people to create wealth.

However, most developing African economies have political and economic systems that are extractive. Those in the ruling class have strong hold on political power, and use it to channel economic resources to benefit themselves and those close to them. Therefore, colonialism might have contributed to the under-development of African continent by making the region a raw-material exporting zone and an import-consuming continent. Since the wave of independence kicked off in the 1960s till date, what has the African leaders done to make Africa a semi-finished and finished products exporting region?

The colonial trend of exporting raw materials to Western Europe and America according to Bob-Milliar (2005) is still ongoing. Ghana exports hard timber logs to Europe and not furniture (tables, bed chairs etc), Nigeria exports crude oil not refined to Europe and America. Ethiopia, Angola, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda export coffee beans to Europe, North America and Japan, why are they not exporting finished cocoa products such as cocoa powder, chocolate and other cocoa beverages?

The non-focused leadership in Africa has resulted in a situation where African borders are not factors of cooperation the way it is in Europe and America; rather, it is a factor of conflicts amongst African states. The growing proliferations of conflicts pose serious threat and challenge to the region, exacerbate human suffering; threaten peace, security and sustainable development. The results of all these leadership problems are entrenched poverty and bad governance in Africa.

At the African Union's Summit in Addis Ababa in January, 2016, President Buhari of Nigeria lamented that:

We have all shed blood for Africa to be free, but the irony is that, today, we are now killing each other. Rather than facing the

development challenges confronting us, we are spending our scarce resources killing our children and inflicting unspeakable horrors and unimaginable hardship on our brothers and sisters. That is truly a tragedy and it must stop. Enough is enough!

In this paper, we shall critically look at the concepts of poverty and leadership failures in Africa. To achieve this objective, the study has been divided into a number of sections. With this introductory overview, the study briefly looks at the paradoxical thesis in Africa; a continent filled with diverse forms of natural resources, yet, poverty and squalor are its hallmarks. Section three will examine the concepts of poverty and leadership failure in Africa. The fourth section will be on the policies or responses of the African leaders towards ending poverty in Africa. And lastly, the paper concludes with recommendations.

African Poverty: A Paradox

In terms of natural resources, Africa is the world's richest continent. According to Shahadah (2012), Africa has 50% of the world's gold, most of the world's diamonds and chromium, 90% of the cobalt, 40% of the world's potential hydroelectric power, 65% of the manganese, millions of acres of untilled farmland, as well as other natural resources. Yet, despite this vast resources, the bulk of African people live as if they were citizens of deserts. The resources of Africa are not evenly distributed between regions, countries and within local populations.

While there are enormous opportunities provided by the natural resources on the continent, appropriation as well as the application of these resources to the advantage of the continent has remained a perennial problem. It was this failed situation that made Ayittey (2005) to lament that the problem of Africa should be located on the inferiority status of the leaders. In his analysis, Ayittey asserts that the technology importation without adaptation and contextualization is instructive in this regard. For him, African post-colonial leadership style was simply a copying mentality which he called the 'so-too-must-we' syndrome. This shows a lack of innovativeness, creativity and originality in thought, a continental leadership bereft of creative imagination such that authentically African solutions could be sought for African problem. It was this scenario painted above that made Castells (2000) to declare that Africa is no longer a third world but a fourth world considering its marginalization from world's international economic order.

The paradox that summarizes the hapless state in Africa is that it is over-rich and at the same time over-poor. Africa has enormous minerals and other resources that can be harnessed in order to transform the present poverty-stricken conditions of its citizens to the stage of wealth, but the missing link has always been effective leadership. As at the end of the 20th century, no state in Africa can claim to have had good leadership; the type that is an agent of development. Most of Africa's leaders are selfish, corrupt, sensuous and wasteful. It is little wonder that Africa is still backward and underdeveloped. The pattern of leadership today is a continuation of the visionless leadership of old (Akpan, 2003).

Conceptual Analysis

Poverty

Poverty as a concept has no single definition. As a result, a plethora of definitions exist, mostly influenced by disciplinary approaches. Poverty in its simplest form is a state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support. Sengupta (2003) defined poverty as not only having an insufficient income to buy minimum basket of goods and services but as the lack of basic capabilities to live in dignity. This definition recognizes poverty's broader features, such as hunger, poor education, discrimination, vulnerability and social

exclusion. Similarly, the International Bill of Right (2001) asserts that poverty is a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

To be sure, poverty comes in different forms: (a) absolute poverty, (b) relative poverty, (c) chronic poverty, and (d) transient poverty. Absolute poverty is subsistence poverty when a person is short of basic foodstuff, shelter, and clothing and adequate or sufficient health care. Relative poverty is what a person lacks in relation to others. Relative poverty is often defined based on comparison of particular aspects of life such as household expenditure, family budget, and household livelihood. When poverty is handed over to individuals and families from generation to generation, it becomes chronic or generational poverty. People can be in transitory or situational poverty because of one unfortunate event. People can help themselves out of this type of poverty quickly if they are given a bit of assistance (Kabuya, 2015).

Poverty as a concept has its characteristics. For instance, a survey conducted in Niger Republic in 2002 according to Compassion International (2016) provides the following as the features of persons living in poverty:

- **Dependence**, always having to seek out others or to work for somebody else
- **Marginalization**, a poor person who is alone, has no support, doesn't feel involved in anything, or is "never consulted"
- **Scarcity**, having nothing to eat, lacking the means to meet clothing and financial needs, having nothing to sell
- Restricted rights and freedoms
- **Incapacity**, the incapacity to make decision, to feed or clothe oneself, or act on one's initiatives.

Again, we also have to note that there is no international consensus or guidelines for measuring poverty. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2003) sets various indicators in its Human Development Index (HDI) to measure poverty in Africa and all other countries in the world. This includes:

- a. Life expectancy at birth
- b. Average school attendance period
- c. Expected school attendance as well as
- d. Per capita income

As the indicators show, education is closely linked to poverty by the United Nations – because those who cannot read and write have little chances of getting a skilled job and build their livelihood. Therefore the eradication of poverty in Africa is to ensure that all Africans are provided with the following: steady source of real income, high purchasing power, abundant good quality and high nutritional food, basic health care facilities, quality education, good drinking water, standard housing units, good roads and other means of transport, stable and affordable power supply, adequate security of lives and property and conducive atmosphere for production and trade (Agbaeze 2010).

Causes of Poverty in Africa

Poverty in Africa has many causes – external and internal causes, man-made and natural. Disturbed that poverty in Africa stayed stubbornly high despite record economic growth, the World Bank Group (2001) commissioned a study which identified the following three factors:

- (a) Less of Africa's growth translates into poverty reduction because of high initial poverty, including low asset levels and limited access to public services, which prevent households from taking advantage of opportunities.

- (b) Africa's increasing reliance on natural resources for income growth rather than agricultural and rural development excludes the 85 percent of the poor population living in rural areas.
- (c) Africa's high fertility and resulting high population growth mean that even high growth translates into less income per person – a point too often ignored in discussions on the sub-continent. Other factors that cause poverty in Africa are:
- (d) **War and Political Instability:** These factors according to Williams (2013) are often tied to histories of colonialism, but whatever the causes of war and political upheaval, it is clear that safety, stability and security are essential for subsistence and beyond that, economic prosperity and growth. Without these basics, natural resources cannot be harnessed individually or collectively, and no amount of education, talent or technological know-how will allow people to work and reap the benefits of the fruits of their labour. Likewise, laws are needed to protect rights, property and investments, and without legal protections, farmers, and would-be entrepreneurs and business owners cannot safely invest in such a region.
- (e) **National Debt:** Many African countries carry significant debt loads due to loans from wealthier nations and international financial institutions. In addition, structural adjustment policies by organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund often require poorer nations of Africa to open their markets to outside business and investors, thereby increasing competition with local businesses and, undermining the potential development of local economies.
- (f) **Corruption:** The high poverty levels in Africa are caused by corruption. A survey conducted by world anticorruption agency according to Nyakangi (2013) reveals that there were very high corruption cases in African nations. Among the respondents who were interviewed, 42 percent confirmed that they were asked to give bribe in order to be employed. This is due to the fact that many people in Africa believe that family relations are more essential than country identity. Therefore, those in power use bias and bribery for the gain of their relatives at the expense of their country.
- (g) **Over Population:** Over population is a severe problem in Africa which has worsened the level of poverty. There is low employment due to lack of enough employment opportunities. Therefore, the number of people depending on those who are employed is so high which leaves a majority of the people in poverty. For instance, when calamities like famine occur, the high need for food in well-off cities draw foods from needy areas leaving the aged, the incapacitated and children in poverty.
- (h) **Dependency Syndrome:** The dependency syndrome in Africa established its beginning after gaining independence, which has resulted to poverty. The dependence syndrome involves looking outside for other people to help them. This has made people to lose the skills of being enterprising. Therefore, if there are no donors they remain wallowing in poverty.

Consequences of Poverty

Poverty is a difficult cycle to break, often passed from one generation to the next. Typical consequences of poverty include: alcohol and substance abuse; less access to education; poor housing and living conditions and increased levels of disease. Heightened levels of poverty are likely to cause increased tensions in society as inequalities are realized. These issues heighten crime rate in communities or regions affected by poverty (Investopedia (2016).

Leadership and Leadership Failure

When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty. Thomas Jefferson.

Leadership is a dynamic or changing process in the sense that, while influence is always present, the persons exercising that influence may change. Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization or state in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership attributes, such as beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills.

The concept of leadership itself has undergone many changes over the centuries starting from the religious sectarian setting of primary relationship where emphasis was much laid on individuals like Moses, Jesus Christ and Mohammed. By the 20th century, leadership came to be viewed not as a set of fixed traits and attributes, biologically peculiar to some individuals, but as a role that satisfies mutual expectations of leaders and followers. The leadership role then is found to vary with situations. Leadership therefore is a nexus of need fulfillment that binds situational demands and group membership (Otoabasi, 2003).

In his conceptualization of leadership, Eze (2002) posits that all over the world, leadership is the most important number one factor that determines whether a nation or region can develop. He argued that a leadership that is free, brave, patriotic, people-oriented, destination-bound; the leadership that understands the psychology of leading and applies it to the development of the people must be at the affairs of men.

The basis of good leadership is honourable character and selfless service to one's organization or state. Respected leaders concentrate on what they know (such as beliefs and character), what they know (such as job, tasks, and human nature), and what they do (such as implementing, motivating, and providing direction). In his discussion on leadership, Lee Kuan Yew, the celebrated father of modern Singapore wrote in his book – *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965 – 2000* that:

We need good people to have good government. However good the system of government, bad leaders will bring harm to their people. On the other hand, I have seen several societies well governed in spite of poor systems of government, because good, strong leaders were in charge.

It is pertinent to note that the continent of Africa over the years have been short of ideal leadership and leaders as exemplified by her Human Development Index (HDI). African condition is low on the HDI ratings due to economic underdevelopment, conflicts, crime, militant non-state actors with international networks, resource depletion, the rise in Islamic fundamentalism, high levels of debt, endemic corruption, unemployment, political alienation and exclusion, large numbers of internally displaced persons, structural poverty and cyclical food insecurity (Omale and Amana, 2014).

Describing this state of affairs, Mazrui (2013) refers to the Africa political system as patriarchal, that is, a political father figure emerges as the symbol of the venerated elder and patriarch. Thus, Mazrui contends that:

This often resulted in personal rule and personality cults (such as Toure, Banda, and Mobuto), and the phenomenon of “long distance men”. African political (state) leaders are, on average, older than leaders elsewhere in the world. Namibia's President, Hifikepunye Pohamba, for example, turns 70. His predecessor, Sam Nujoma was 75 when he left office. The Cameroonian President, Paul Biya, turns 74, his Egyptian counterpart, Hosni Mubarak, was 79 in 2007 while Mwai Kibaki of Kenya is 76. Some of these “long distance men”

declared themselves presidents for life (like Zaire's Mobuto Sese Seko), Emperors (like Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic). God (Ali Solihi of Comoros), Brother Leader (Muammar Al Qaddafi of Libya). Others amended constitutions to stay on (like Namibia's Sam Nujoma and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe). In Ethiopia, the emperor was called *Seyum Egziabher* (Elect of God). Nkrumah of Ghana was also accused of actively promoting a cult of his own personality, ie the cult of Nkrumahism.

It is on record that Europe and America have produced leaders with honourable characters and selfless services. Their good leadership qualities translated to good governance, and good governance and good policies ended poverty in their continents. Has Africa evolved good leadership? Are there coordinated efforts by African leaders to end poverty and usher in good governance? The non-existence of good leadership in Africa ushered in the opposite --- leadership failure.

Failure in Leadership is not all about mismanaging funds. It is about putting bad people in prime positions. People who have neither the passion (sincerity) or qualifications (skills) to do the job. Leadership failure is crippling Africa's development. A good example of this leadership deficit in Africa can be seen in this illustration from Zimbabwe where an inexperienced man was appointed Director of Youth Development Centre. Shahadah (2012) lamented thus:

The blind cannot lead the sighted, the uninformed cannot lead the wise, and the unskilled cannot direct the skilled. And those that are deaf cannot define sound. As with everywhere in the world, the current structures rarely rewards merit, so the guy running the centre for the youth is squandering not only trust, but the potential of those he manages. He is not only wasting opportunities, but the future of a nation.

The failure in leadership and lack of spirit of nationalism amongst various African leaders have led to the crisis of leadership and thus the situation of a failed or failing states in Africa. The burden of leadership failure is so huge in Africa to the extent that its effects have resulted in the following: underdevelopment, dictatorship, poverty and economic stagnation, insecurity, corruption, and loss of reputation in the eyes of the international community.

Having examined the concepts of poverty and leadership failures and their consequences in Africa, our attention shall now be turned to the efforts geared towards eradicating poverty and leadership failure in Africa.

African Policies toward Eradicating Poverty

Some intervention efforts have been geared towards eradicating poverty in Africa and they include: the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)

The New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) came into existence July, 2001. Before then, the African leaders had met in the South African Port City of Durban and adopted the Constitutive Act which established the African Union in July, 2002. The general purpose of NEPAD is to overcome the problems of Africa that were unsolvable for long and to defeat the backwardness of the continent by achieving sustainable development. Although it is seen to focus on economic integration and development, its ambitious goals also include making political and social reforms and maintaining good governance in every country.

NEPAD's primary objectives are listed in its official website as follows: to eradicate poverty; to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on the path of sustainable growth and development; to halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy; to accelerate the empowerment of women.

NEPAD's framework declares that there are preconditions for sustainable development in Africa. These are peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic management. However, there are serious opposition to NEPAD being a viable option for Africa's development. One of the champions of the African Union, Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh voiced out his resentment by declaring that:

People are sick and tired of African beggars. Nobody will ever develop your continent for you. I am not criticizing NEPAD, but the way it was conceived to be dependent on begging (De Wall 2002).

Oshita (2010) cynically called NEPAD a "KNEE PAD". According to him, NEPAD invokes the image of Africa with knee pad, kneeling and seeking economic succor from industrialized countries. This is a play back of nude image of a malnourished African child with swollen belly, large head, and tiny limbs signifying abject poverty, hunger, disease, and war, usually depicted in western media.

However, in as much as we may not claim that NEPAD satisfies all the previous requirements for Africa's development and eradication of poverty, it can be safely argued that NEPAD offers the general framework for Africa's comprehensive economic development.

African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was established in 2003 to complement the impact of NEPAD. Membership of the APRM sets and measures standards of political and economic governance, is voluntary. The aim of the mechanism is to help countries address democratic deficits and create economic transparency needed to attract investment and nurture growth. In particular, the APRM has initiated dialogue between private and government stakeholders and civil society actors on areas for improvement and challenges such as corruption, capital flight, and tax avoidance.

The mechanism has further overseen progress on governance, tax, and electoral reforms, and has usefully focused political attention on important events that have challenged African governments – for example, xenophobic violence in South Africa; and violence that accompanied national elections in Kenya in 2007/2008.

The countries participating in the APRM have been made aware of their strengths and weaknesses. However, engagement in the process is costly. A lack of government and civil society capacity – for example, the dearth of institutions of oversight such as ombudsmen – has further hindered the implementation of recommendations after APRM reviews have been conducted. In addition, the mechanism is governed by a memorandum of understanding and its findings are not legally binding on its member governments --- although a good rating from it may increase access to donor support. Broad participation of the private and civil society sectors in the implementation of Africa's regional mechanisms could enhance the accountability of national governments to them (African Union at Ten 2012).

From the on-going analysis, we can infer that African leadership failure is also noticeable in their policy institutions. For instance, all the 8 recognized Regional Economic Communities (RECs) Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Southern African Development Community (SADC), all have plans on how to

make their sub-regions self-reliant and poverty free in Africa. The development policies in Africa suffer from a wide gap between intent and actual practices.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that African leaders and the international organizations have failed to tackle poverty in Africa, nor have they been able to help generate growth or build basic infrastructures. These stark realities facing Africa was addressed by the African Union leaders at the AU Summit in 2014. The former Commission's chairwoman, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was straightforward when highlighting the AU's shortcomings to date. She said that AU needs to take hard look at its activities, accepting few tasks but carrying them out more efficiently and economically. Dlamini-Zuma according to O'Connor (2014) said that the organization and its predecessor had taken a number of decisions over the past 50 years. She told the AU Executive Council that the challenge that the Union and the Commission face is the capacity to implement all these decisions.

Breaking the vicious circle of poverty in Africa would require building an effective state which mobilizes both domestic and foreign resources that would enhance public and private investments to achieve inclusive sustained economic growth and eliminate poverty in Africa. Thus, the paper suggests the following measures:

- i. Address the cause of income/wealth inequality through effective fiscal and monetary policies
- ii. Increase public investment in human resource development
- iii. Increase public investment for the transformation of the agricultural system from low productivity to high productivity
- iv. External debt cancellation and access to markets of developed countries for exports from Africa (Tewolde and Weldeyohannes, 2018). Other recommendations include:
 - v. Creation of civil society organizations that are well focused, mobilized and proactive to holding the African leaders accountable
 - vi. Independent and impartial judiciary will help curb the problem of corruption
 - vii. Insecurity, civil conflicts and the proliferation of small arms must be addressed and tackled
- viii. African leaders must increase their investment in education in order to produce an enlightened citizens

The World Bank has an ambitious target of eradicating poverty by 2030. For this to be achieved, African leaders must work together to implement strategies that improve the living conditions of the poor Africans in order to bid poverty farewell in the continent.

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