3 Making Governance Work for All Africans: Responsibility of Ordinary Citizens

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The Context: The Post-colonial/Post-structural Adjustment State, Liberal Democracy and Africa's Political Leaderships

In the light of the crude and raw existential realities that most Africans endure good year, bad year (from the point of view of the hugeness or otherwise of national earnings and agricultural harvest from one 'democratically elected', people-unfriendly government to another, realities that have made their citizenship at once vacuous and ambiguous) perhaps the crafting of our theme of reflection is wrong-headed. For, implicit in the theme is a twin idea, namely, the existence – or the possibility of existence of – a culture of reciprocal accountability between Africa's political leaderships and ordinary folks and the notion of social contract embedded in the idea of citizenship. Yet, whatever the heuristic value of extant legal-political theories and fine constitutional artefacts, there is no denying the brutal fact that the relationship between those who govern and the governed in much of Africa has hardly played out according to formal constitutional and ethical rules of the game. State domination tends to gnaw away at the fabric of citizenship to the extent that rights and entitlements are subject more to the whims, fancies and caprices of transient political regimes and leaders. The people are treated more as subjects and less as citizens. Governance and, ultimately, development are carried on without them and behind their back insofar as they are collectively ridiculed as being untutored and unschooled in the Western frames and paradigms of education and modernity and their cultures and attitudes denigrated as anti-developmental. African states and governments often forget that 'on ne développe pas, on se développe', to appropriate Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo, the renowned Burkinabe historian. That is to say, development, no less than governance, is a function of human agency and is neither intelligible nor possible without human beings.

In political theory, citizenship is a relational concept-as well as an extremely rich notional category. Unlike the concept of population which is policy-oriented, descriptive and empirical, citizenship resides in the domain of theory and carries 'a normative burden' whilst having an 'ethical connotation of participation and sovereignty of the state' (Chatterjee 2002:57-58). With the decline of politics as both a public vocation in the Weberian sense and as 'the pursuit of justice and collective welfare under conditions of democratic development' (Jinadu 2004) and the resultant ascendancy of the administration of things, 'governance (has become) less a matter of politics and more of administrative policy, a business for experts rather than for political representation' (Chatterjee 2002:58). The result is alienation: the state's reasoning process is neither deliberative nor open but is, rather, 'an instrumental notion of costs and benefits'. Similarly, 'its apparatus is not the republican assembly but an elaborate network of surveillance through which information is collected on every aspect of the life of the population...' (ibid.).

The umbilical cord between the governors and the governed, whose apparent golden years lasted only a fleeting decade of the 1960s before the arrival of monoparty and militarist jackboots, was broken. Since then, there has increasingly between little of a caring and welfare state. By the same token, citizenship in terms of civic, political and social rights has been abbreviated. The striking similarity with the Indian subcontinent can hardly be ignored. Again, we turn to Chatterjee (2002:61): 'most of the inhabitants... are only tenuously and even then ambiguously and contextually rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state'. This is not to imply that the people are outside of the political precincts of the state or wholly excluded from the political realm; only that whereas there are political relationships, these are more informal than formal, to the extent that they do not always obey constitutional stipulations. The result is emotional, spiritual and physical distance of leaders from the people such that it is not enough for Mohamet to come to the mountain just to fulfil all righteousness, but Mohamet is duty bound to cultivate a passionate, engaging and enduring relationship with the mountain. Citizen Sipho Santjie, acting as the spokes-person for the Kliptown Concerned Group in Cape Town, South Africa urged government officials, in June 2005, to visit informal settlements to see how the people live, lamenting, in the process, that 'it is sad that our government claims to have brought Parliament to the people but they have locked themselves inside a hall instead of talking to us' (*Mail and Guardian*, July 1– 7 2005:19).

Bereft of constitutionalism, the hollowness of liberal democracy comes into sharp focus in the continued study of the African continent not in terms of its own history, but only by analogy with the West or the Global North. 'The net result of (this perspective)', writes Englund (2004:2) 'is the virtual disappearance of African concerns from the purview of analysis'. This process is ably aided and abetted by the bulk of the continent's political leaderships for whom democracy is nothing but a strategy of power and hegemony construction. The embrace of a largely legalistic and denuded form of democracy in its liberal variant explains the gross incapacity of the people to limit power, socialise electoral democracy and democratise welfare. The mere localisation of liberal democracy-rather than its nationalisation and domestication – has snowballed into its de-legitimation and criminalisation. For liberal democracy, not only do the people not matter, it is routinely made evidently manifest to them that they do not matter. It is not in the nature of the political correlate of the market to place human needs before profit. On the contrary, 'private profit and power come before universal human needs and rights' (Wilkin 2003:659). Ultimately, rather than democracy being perceived as 'politics from the point of view of the governed' or as the realisation of 'the universalism of the theory of rights', the historical (re)democratisation of the African public spaces in the 1990s has hardly led about popular expression of power by the people (Ake 2000:7) or it is empty shell. Democracy makes eminent social sense only if it is apprehended and comprehended as the relationship of elected governments to the social experiences of their people with a view to serving their social needs and learning how the people would like to govern themselves and be governed (Ake, ibid and Chatterjee 2002:71).

The foregoing dialectical relations between the internal and external dynamics of bad governance by elected governments have been further worsened by the politics and economics of structural adjustment programmes. The latter, initially articulated in the early 1980s by the Bank and the Fund, as a once and-for-all-recipe to revamp ailing African economies on the brink of the precipice and collapse, have gone on and acquired a veritable life of their own with all the negative consequences they have brought in their trail. SAP regimes have, everywhere they were installed, effectively ensured a disconnection or de-linkage between public policy and social needs, thus jeopardising the social welfare of the people. The 'abdication by the state of its most basic responsibilities toDiagne : Philosopher pour une Afrique nouvelleAfrique : Réaffirmation de notre engagement the citizenry' has had the unintended, though salutary, effect of posing the poverty question as a serious political problem and as an eminently 'ethical issue concerned with injustice (and with) the distinction between right and wrong' (Olukoshi 2003:155; Good 1999:185).

What Role for Ordinary Folks Within this Matrix?

It would seem that the role ordinary folks would assign to themselves within the matrix of an endless and perpetual confrontation with a big and weak state (one that is a veritable lame Leviathan much present in coercive and extractive terms, but conspicuous by its absence in relation to their social welfare) is likely to be a function of a number of factors. One, their own understanding of their position in the labyrinth of the political economy which furnishes the structural basis of their relationship with the powers that be, both within and outside the frame of the nation-state. Two, the balance of power between them and the visible/invisible and tangible/intangible leaders and social forces with which they have to contend as well as the aggregate of the means, political and otherwise at their disposal to do so. Three, the chances of winning or not losing or, perhaps more correctly, achieving a zero-sum game with political leaderships they have been tutored, both by experience and by usage, not to wholly trust or not to trust at all.

It seems to me, furthermore, that the foregoing factors would be exacerbated or minimised, as the case may be, by the following considerations:

- If ordinary folks have not seen and experienced, several years into liberal democracy, any qualitative difference in, say, service delivery or the arrogance of power or indifference or insensitivity to the plight of the proverbial 'common man' or to the opinions of the political other, etc between the ancient authoritarian regime of yesteryear and the 'democratically elected' government of today;
- If conditions for the recovery of citizenship rights and entitlements are gradually aggregating for people who have been used to seeing the state and its agents/agencies forcibly extract obligations from them in an era when their rights were nothing but putative and illusory;
- Whether or not there are redeeming features in the character and nature of the 'democratic' political leaderships with which they are saddled: would the latter be willing to commit class/political suicide or at least put on the garb of enlightened self-interest in order to make good their promissory note of life more abundant for the people on their inauguration day? This is an important issue in view of the creeping argument in the literature that beyond the concern about governance structures and practices that, in much of the continent, are hardly accountable, transparent and participatory, to the extent that much of the continent's political leadership have no more than a scant understanding of its mission whilst failing to appreciate and ennoble 'a deeper knowledge of its people', leadership is the people's greatest problem (Nyamnjoh 2004:66);

- The extent to which ordinary folks are willing to get involved in political struggles for the purposes of recovering their citizenship and force political leaders to discontinue with the practice of according the people only non-justiciable rights, on the imperfect grounds that the state, including otherwise rich oil and mineral economies, lacks the financial muscle to do otherwise. To all appearances, only ideologically-driven, well-focused and sustained political struggles will turn the table against the oppression and the oppressors of the people. Political struggle is the pivot of the relations of ordinary folks with the state. The aim necessarily has to be the transformation of 'the social order towards one that places human need before private profit' (Wilkin 2003:666). This struggle will also entail the creation of new networks of protests to work for social change insofar as 'the spread of democracy has never been simply an elite-driven process' and to the extent that 'historically, the paths to democracy have emerged through periods of intense social struggles and war' (ibid 167). But will the people, in their various communal, primordial and security societies, be willing to go this hog? When confronted with the psychology of a futuristic political ascendancy that seeks to not jeopardise one's brilliant tomorrow in the corridors of power on the altar of today's political struggle as well as the anti-revolutionary/transformation politics inherent in millenarian religious revivalism and fundamentalism, what will be the choice of ordinary folks both as disparate individuals and as collectives?
- Progressively, the development of a culture of civility in relations between political leaders/government officials and ordinary folks as a social desideratum. My argument is that, on account of the nature of the continent's political economy, political civility will be consequent upon political struggles. In essence, if the people-in strategic alliance with relevant sectors of civil and political societies-work towards transforming revolutionary pressures to revolutionary actions, they are likely to stagger political leaderships out of their lethargy with a view to giving ordinary folks space to influence decisions and agendas of governments. Their voices would go around the world in favour of people-friendly and people-driven policy-making and governance structures. Sooka (2005:18-19) has made the important point that:

> – It is not enough to speak on behalf or for the poor but to facilitate their opportunities to speak to power on the issues that affect their lives.

It is imperative that ordinary folks recover their voices which, historically, they lost in the labyrinth of a cacophony of voices of some of their more fortunate, western-educated compatriots who intellectualise on them and on everything related to them in the public space. And perhaps unknown to the continent's

political leaderships, it is also in their own long-term interest that ordinary folks do not see themselves, nor constitute themselves or be constituted, as the enemy of the state.

Finally, the recovery of the people's African communal consciousness to which several decades of de-linkage between the governors and the governed has done violence should engender a renewal of the social contract that is anchored on a mutually reinforcing commitment to the 'desirability and necessity of participation as a collective enterprise', to paraphrase Claude Ake. Gradually and, hopefully surely, the active involvement of the people as full-fledged citizens in the decision on common goals and how to achieve them will help transform constitutional rights into social rights.

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