

In the Service of Common Good: Towards the Reversal of Executive Rascality in African Political Governance

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Résumé

En dépit des recommandations louables de l'Union africaine (UA) - particulièrement dans l'Agenda 2063 et le Rapport sur la gouvernance en Afrique de 2019 - qui traçaient une voie nouvelle pour le continent africain, l'analyse philosophique du problème de la gouvernance en Afrique n'a pas reçu suffisamment d'attention de la part des chercheurs africains. Partout en Afrique, le problème des démocraties est celui de la corruption du pouvoir exécutif. L'article porte sur ce problème et montre comment il éloigne de l'objectif de la réalisation du bien commun de la société. En insistant sur le bien commun, l'article attire encore plus l'attention vers les recommandations de l'UA comme la voie à suivre pour un avenir radieux l'Afrique. L'article examine d'abord la question de la corruption de l'exécutif en Afrique en partant du cas du Nigeria. Il analyse ensuite le concept du bien commun. Enfin, il contient quelques recommandations de l'UA qui articulent le bien commun des nations africaines.

Abstract

Despite the laudable recommendations of the African Union (AU) – particularly in *Agenda 2063* and the 2019 *Africa Governance Report (AGR)* – that seek to chart a new course for the African continent, African scholars have paid little attention to the philosophical analysis of the problem of governance in Africa. Across Africa, the problem of democracies is largely that of executive rascality. The article uncovers this problem and investigates how it deviates from the common good of the society. By focussing on the common good, the article re-directs attention to the recommendations of the AU for a roadmap to a more brilliant future for Africa. The article first examines the issue of executive rascality with specific attention to Nigeria. It then analyses the concept of common good. Finally, it provides some recommendations of the AU as articulating the common good of the African nations.

Key Words: Africa; Africa Governance Report; African Union; Africa We Want; Common Good; Democracy; Executive Rascality

Introduction

There is need to confront executive rascality if the fight against corruption is to be achieved and common good upheld. In an essay written in 2000, Matthew Hassan Kukah remarks that corruption is “perhaps the greatest threat to democratic stability in Nigeria”, and that over the years it has gradually grown to become “the oxygen for an indolent, rent-collecting ruling class supported by the military” (Kukah 2000: 22). This claim of over two decades is still true and can sometimes be addressed through the promotion of good governance and legislative oversight (Okeke 2020: 64-65). Rascality, especially executive rascality, is a vice in governance that grossly affects the common good of the society. The African Governance Report (APRM & AGA 2017) adopted within the framework of the African Union (AU) contains several recommendations to address bad governance for the common good of African people in the “Africa that We Want” AU *Agenda 2063* (African Union 2015: 1).

This article deals with common good, executive rascality that undermines common good, and good governance. It addresses the central question: How can the idea of common good be promoted in democratic governance in order to eradicate executive rascality and its effects? The approach in this article consists of threefold structure of analysis. The first involves exploring extensively the concept of common good and its various forms. The second is to address executive rascality and its manifestation in governance process in Africa. The third and final task is to critically review the Africa Governance Report and its recommendations as an attempt by the AU at reversing executive rascality in order to improve political governance and better serve the common good of the people. The ultimate objective is to achieve the “Africa We Want” as described in the AU’s seven-point Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 4: “An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights and rule of law” (African Union 2015: 7).

Reflections on the Common Good: From Aristotle to Aquinas

Aristotle (384-322 BC) as well as Plato (427-347 BC) both theorized on the notion of the common good, but it is Aristotle’s account that is adjudged as the earliest formal articulation of the concept.

In his *Politics*, Aristotle argues that the city-state as a specific form of community is “established for the sake of some good” (Aristotle 1998: 1252a, 2). He insists that the good is not just about the conditions of merely living within a community but that of living well.

There is thus a moral qualification that transcends political expediency in Aristotle's understanding of the common good. He applies the concept of *koinon agathon* ("common good") and perhaps his most preferred term *koinêi sumpheron* ("common benefit"/ "common advantage") throughout his analysis of the good of the city-state in *Politics*. Aristotle seems to have focused on the idea of "noble actions" (Aristotle 1998: 1281a, 2-3). as the core of the common good, and this implies that "the pursuit of happiness requires participation in public life and the cultivation of virtue, rather than, say, the maximisation of wealth" (Jaede 2017: 2-3).

There is a tendency to focus on the idea of virtue in Aristotle's concept of common good. This has the danger of reducing his intention to a private or individual affair rather than having a totalizing implication. Hence, the question of whether Aristotle's idea of common good is to be understood "individualistically or holistically" continues to surface. But as Reeve comments in the introduction to his translation of the *Politics*, "some views espoused in the *Politics* suggest that Aristotle had fairly significant holistic or organicist leanings" (Reeve, 1998: lxix). Mark Hoipkemier offers another reading of Aristotle that shifts attention from the individualistic virtue-centeredness. Hoipkemier contends that Aristotle's notion of "common benefit" does not necessarily equate with the good life as mostly assumed. Rather the notion emerges in Aristotle's work as "a standard for evaluating political justice in the light of what the city 'actually is'" (Hoipkemier 2018: 547). Hoipkemier's argument is justified by Aristotle's claim that "the political good is justice, and justice is the common benefit" (Aristotle 1998: 1282b, 17-18). Justice happens within the city-state and is presented as being of common benefit to both individuals and the community. This does not reduce the idea of justice of justice as a moral good or a virtue but rather puts emphasis on the community as the theater of good for all.

In this sense, common benefit or common advantage would refer to the ultimate good that serves both persons and city-states. It is thus a standard for evaluating regimes and is considered "less stringent than human virtue" (Hoipkemier 2018: 548). One recognizes that the idea of common good in Aristotle is predicated on political justice, and more precisely on his conception of city in his time. Today, the evolution of nation states and the rather discordant versions and practices of liberal democracy may impinge on Aristotle's understanding of the common good. It must be noted that within African philosophy the conceptualization of the common good shares a lot with Aristotle's since it is predicated on the totality of both persons and the society.

For Molefe the common good emerges as a person's responsibility "to secure the well-being of all human beings" provided "the good of *all* human beings is the moral responsibility of all" (Molefe 2019: 147). This is consistent with the African Ubuntu worldview which is anchored on relationality in a way that balances both the good of the individual and the community (Murove 2014; Mabovula 2011).

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in examining the idea of common good, accentuates the notion of personhood. Like Aristotle, Aquinas placed high valuation on the practical order as well as on virtues. However, while Aristotle was less interested in analyzing the concepts of will and choice, Aquinas (and of course, Augustine also) was able to make such distinctions. The distinction between individual and person would play a significant role in Aquinas understanding of the common good. According to Thomas Gilby, the concept of common good has three meanings in Aquinas' *Summa*: "It is applied first to a quasi-collective group or organic whole, second, to a political and juridical community, and third to God because of his comprehensive final causality" (Aquinas 1963: 28:172). While the first is a "collectivist" understanding and the third is theological, the second belong to a political definition. Within the context of this political definition, the common good constitutes therefore "the good estate of the civil community or State, responsibly shared in by those who belong to it, who are called citizens" (Aquinas 1963: 90-97).

Aquinas's focus on the person as already indicated above advances the discourse on common good further than Aristotle's. This is enabled by the input of Christianity in the scholarship of the time. Aquinas, and following in his tradition, Thomas De Koninck and Jacques Maritain, presents God – the final causality – as the common and ultimate desire of all human persons, and by that measure, communion with God becomes the common good of all. They stress that, "the common destination of all persons, their common good" are "not to be forgotten in stressing the personal good of each free person" (Novak 1989: 31).

Thomistic understanding of the common good emerges thus as a more complex and nuanced understanding. It takes away the ultimate measure of "good" from humans without denying them their right to control and responsibility. It creates a gradation of the understanding of common good on the basis of either "individual vs person" or "human person vs divine person" and positions the common good as an ideal of some sort.

The question is whether this conceptualization of common good can function within a de-Christianized context in which the idea of God is either non-personalized (Judaism or Islam) or completely extinct (atheism). Meanwhile, a problem that emerges from all this is how such emphasis on the person can easily promote individualism to the detriment of the common good.

For African philosophy, a balance between the individual's and common interests must be maintained through the principles of relationality. Hence, Molefe would argue that "social relationships are decisive in the moral discourse of personhood" (Molefe 2019: 110), another way of interpreting Lutz who describes the African understanding of the common good as an invitation to person "to recognize that they can attain their own true good only by promoting the good of others" (Lutz 2009: 314). There is more to be said about the common good from a philosophical perspective, but it is important to examine its practicality within the confines of constitutional democracy.

Exploring the different dimensions of the Common Good

The "Africa We Want" rests on the presumption of an ideal democratic system of governance as a necessary component of the roadmap for its achievement. And so, it is important to explore the multi-faceted idea of common good within democratic in responding to the question that grounds this article.

The concept of common good will be examined from four critical dimensions. This will be done first in the context of constitutional democracy given that democracy has many iterations; second in consideration of the justice system and its promotion and protection of fundamental human rights; third in terms of the economic system of inequality in Africa, and finally in relation to the ethic of solidarity that is at the center of African worldview of interrelatedness of reality and community consciousness.

Common Good in constitutional democracy

Constitutional or deliberative democracy has the common good as part of its ideal and foundation. Hence, Jürgen Habermas's claim that "in addition to the hierarchical regulations of the state and the decentralized regulations of the market, that is, besides administrative power and individual personal interests, solidarity and the orientation to the common good appear as a third source of social integration" (Habermas 1994: 1), is not totally out of place.

Habermas's statement is, however, made within the context of an understanding of contemporary democracy in which economy and politics play significant roles. It is also a context of ideological divide between the liberals and republicans. In democracy, the constitution is the *grundnorm* and the definer of belongingness and participation. The constitution stands an articulation of the common good, and as the principle that ought to guide every piece of legislation and every act of governance. Thus, Habermas' attempt to bridge the ideological idea by insisting on participatory democracy, guided by the constitution, is a step in the right direction.

There is a link between constitutional democracy and common good. The concept of "constitutional democracy" has often been considered as a contradictory term (Habermas 1994). This is because while the understanding of democracy as the "rule by majority" on a "one person, one vote" formula persists, it consists by these very facts a limitation in the sense that it is not a "rule by all". Yet the constitution does not segregate the way that democratic participation does since everyone is bound by the constitution. However, in the practice of constitutional democracy, all the elements are brought together – whether in the Federal or Parliamentary system. One clear element of this form of government is the mutually-controlling institutions, namely the three tiers of government – executive, legislative and judiciary – each designed to function both in a complementary and independent manners. Jon Elster explains the functioning of the three arms this way, "The assembly embodies popular participation; the Supreme Court embodies constitutional constraints; and the executive embodies the need for action" (Elster 1988: 3). Constitutionalism also implies some form of limitation to what is justiciable and what is not. Its limits are often self-imposed whether in substantive or procedural processes (Elster 1988: 2).

By its very nature as participatory, constitutional democracy aims at arriving at the common good of all through a process of deliberation among legislative representatives of the people, through the constitution-bound actions of the executive and through adjudicatory responsibilities of the courts. Values such as human rights, justice, development, education, freedom, security, and so on which are parts of the common good are meant to be guaranteed by the democratic participation.

The status of political authority within constitutional democracy is very vital in achieving the common good. This is also important because it is particularly under political authority that executive rascality thrives. When a political authority deviates from the common good, chaos emerges in the polity.

George Duke provides three reasons why political authority is justified by the presence of common good within democracy:

First, the common good is the right kind of value to serve in a direct justification of political authority insofar as it is a normative reason that provides a convincing answer to the question ‘why have authority at all?’ Second, the common good allows for a justification of political authority that pertains to a complete political community rather than subjects taken individually. Third, the common good allows for a reconciliation of two apparently conflicting features of political authority, namely, that (1) its ultimate role is to serve the good of individuals and (2) it can require the subordination of the good of the individual to the good of the whole community (Duke 2017: 883).

Thus, while the existence of a political community necessarily requires authority or leadership it must be framed in such a way that the good of the community subsists. To impose the individual will over the good of the community is to truncate democracy and democratic norms. This would require breaking the Rule of Law and the entronement of anarchy in both subtle and profound forms.

Common Good, the justice system and human rights

Justice is at the heart of the common good as commonly agreed by most political philosophers (Rousseau 1726/1997; Hegel 1967; Rawls 1971). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Frederick Hegel and John Rawls maintain that a fundamental system of private property is required by justice and constitutes an important element of the common good. In the same way, Australian legal philosopher John Finnis links human rights to justice and holds that “the maintenance of human rights is a fundamental component of the common good” (Finnis 1980: 218).

In fact, Finnis would even extend the argument to bear an ontological imprint.

One's identity (as a person with interests some at least of which are truly intelligible goods) all the way back to one's embryonic beginning (with the radical capacities whose ultimate objects – those same intelligible goods – one now participates in and deliberately intends) is the ontological (that is, factual) foundation of one's human rights, because it is the foundation of one's judgment that 'I matter' *and* of one's duties to respect and promote one's own good, *and therefore* of one's judgment that 'others matter' and of one's duties to other persons to respect and promote their good (Finnis 2011: 20).

Human rights as a common good is assured by justice. This justice is sought within the provisions of constitutional democracy, enacted by legislations, defended by the judiciary, and carried out by the executive. All these are to happen within the constraints that are provided by the constitution as a safeguard to the abuse of the same human rights. Of course, this is quite paradoxical, but the rationale can only be seen from the benefit of hindsight. Estler puts it this way: "Imagine that a majority untrammelled by constitutional constraints decides that an external or internal threat justifies a suspension of civil liberties, or that retroactive legislation should be enacted against 'enemies of the people'" (Elster 1988: 9). Indeed, the result of such an event is only left to the imagination. The effects would be seen not only on the victims, whose eventual demise robs them eternally of any promise of justice, but also in the displacement of the majority by tyranny.

It is exactly due to the possibility of such danger that the proposition of justice by Rousseau, Hegel, Rawls and Finnis remains insufficient in defining the content of common good. Common good is broader than forensic justice that rests on argumentation in the courts. Part of the reason for its far-reaching implication is that, according to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "it describes a pattern of inner motivation, not just a pattern of outer conduct", and "it may incorporate facilities and interests that are not general requirements of justice." Justice narrowed down to human rights or private property situates itself within the aspect of common good materially considered. For African's aspirations, there is need for a broader understanding of justice as social justice, which includes not only the individual needs but also addresses the systems of social and economic inequalities, ecological justice, and conditions for peaceful coexistence within countries and across the continent.

Common Good and the economic system of inequality

In the face of multidimensional poverty across Africa, the common good principle considered in the context of Agenda 2063 would require that everyone enjoy access to the basic needs of life. These basic needs would include shelter, food, clean water, clothing, healthcare, and primary education.

Even the constant agitation for minimum wage is based on this need to ensure the economic good of all. It therefore implies that imbalance in wage structure, the eclipse of the middle class, and the disproportionate gap between the rich and the poor form a critique of how the societies have been governed in the last hundred years. A society whose interest in coming together is to realize the common good has no business with a scandalously uneven distribution of goods or wealth. Where this is the case, then such a society has failed. These inequalities demand that we “rethink the attitudes and ideas that shape the way we live together” (Hollenbach 2002: 56), and these are hinged on the three factors of economy, social and environment (UNDP Africa 2017).

Indeed, the imbalance in economic prosperity in the world today, particularly as it affects most African nations calls for some questions. Some of these interrogations, on the one hand, would require a critique of the external factors including the perennial consequences of colonialism that persist till date. These are evident in the unjust trade policies as well as the colonial contracts that continue to impoverish most African nations while enriching the West; or the opaque and unproductive “financial aids” that perpetuate the cycle of dependency, or the control of the political space as way of maintaining a hegemonic leash on Africa by the powerful nations (Alemazung 2010; Langan 2017).

On the other hand, the interrogations must focus on the inability of most African states to claim their history (notwithstanding its distortedness) and resolve to move forward, and on the apparent “state capture” (Utomi 2020) that has continued to crumble both the democratic space and financial flourishing. Africans cannot ignore the need for a sustained intellectual revolution that is required to emancipate the people from internal forces of domination, stagnation, and incompetent leadership. Until these critiques are made and efforts in reversing the trend begin to yield results, the common good of everyone would still be trapped in the contestations of power. What this means is that poverty, diseases, unemployment, inflation, and so will continue unabated.

The other side of the link between the economy and common good is the effect of finance-dominated capitalism and consumerism. It is true that the “common good seeks the flourishing of all individuals and communities” (Roche 2009: 95), yet an uncontrolled form of economic flourishing pushes us into other forms of ethical challenges. Today, we find these challenges in the form of capitalism that is driven solely by profit.

Once capitalism is no longer motivated by ensuring that the potentials of human beings are harnessed for the good of all, then we are faced with an obsession with profit for profit’s sake and toxic competition among others (Tanner 2019). Another effect is that of consumerism in which one’s well-being is reduced to material acquisition without production and creativity. Consumerism also “thrives on competition between individuals and groups” (Roche 2009: 95) just like capitalism. The ideal setting for common good in the society is built on collaboration and creative competition rather than simply on competition, and an unhealthy form of it.

Common Good and the ethic of solidarity

The nature of common good requires the practice of solidarity among citizens which is strongly connected with the African ethic of interrelatedness. Even a very simple analysis of the concept ‘common’ as evoking “communality”, “commonness”, “community” indicates a political entity that thrive on the solidarity of each one for everyone.

In fact, the incidence of the COVID-19 global pandemic has provided us a form of global solidarity can be traced to the pursuit of the common good in recent history. In such a setting a private concern is transcended to the point where it is combined with concern for the other. The reasoning is that the society is one unique whole in which each of us forms a part. Aristotle alludes to this when he argues that it is the solidarity of the community that constitutes “a household and a city-state.” Furthermore, he analogically argues thus:

The city-state is also PRIOR in nature to the household and to each of us individually, since the whole is necessarily prior to the part. For if the whole body is dead, there will no longer be a foot or a hand, except homonymously, as one might speak of a stone “hand” (for a dead hand will be like that); but everything is defined by its TASK and by its capacity; so that in such condition they should not be said to be the same things but homonymous ones” (Aristotle 1998: 1253a, 19-26).

Continuing, he insists that

anyone who cannot form a community with others, or who does not need to because he is self-sufficient, is no part of a city-state – he is either a beast or a god. Hence, though an impulse toward this sort of community exists by nature in everyone, whoever first established some was responsible for the greatest of goods (Aristotle 1998: 1253a, 29-32).

Human beings necessarily tend towards community as their primary mode of existence. And a community is not a community if it is not built on solidarity for and with one another. This is also the whole essence of Ubuntu which highlights the interrelation between the individual and the community (Murove 2014: 37).

Solidarity within the community is evident in some of the very material concerns or needs of everyone. In that sense it is intuitive and belongs to the realm of practical reasoning. Jean-Jacques Rousseau would in this sense argue that a well-ordered political community reflects “a form of association that will defend and protect the person and goods of each associate with the full common force” (Rousseau 1762/1997: 49). A “full common force” refers to the common good of the community, which at first is intentionally considered before being materially considered. And in practical terms, it would imply that “one cannot injure one of the members without attacking the body, and still less can one injure the body without the members being affected” (Rousseau 1762/1997: 52).

One finds this form of solidarity and mutuality of concerns in Africa’s understanding of communal life in general. Unfortunately, the service of common good in many African countries is undermined by many factors including executive rascality of those who take up the authority role within democratic settings. It is thus expedient to address this problem in the quest to promote the common good that is at the crux of *Agenda 2063*.

Executive rascality and its manifestation in governance processes

For the sake of clarity, executive rascality simply put is another way of expressing the lawlessness that is exhibited by individuals in-charge of governance at various levels in the society (Ekwenze 2019; Jayeoba 2019).

The very idea of “rascality” points to mischievousness, and a chronic dishonesty in the exercise of political authority. There is no doubt that executive rascality undermines both the principle of democracy or good governance and the sense of decency in the public sphere. All over the world, examples of executive rascality abound, by the abuse of office and the disrespect of the constitution. One clear consequence of executive rascality is the emergence of totalitarian regimes within what ought to be a democratic environment.

“Emergence” is used because once a nation slips into full-blown dictatorship, the dictator becomes the lawmaker, the judge, and the executive. Of course, governance as well as its perversion through executive rascality is not limited to political settings but also extends to religious, cultural and cooperate environments.

With its roots in the Greek *kybernan*, and later Latin *gubernare*, meaning “to pilot, steer or direct” (Levi-Faur 2012: 5), the concept of governance has been over-theorized to mean so many things. These are categorized into four: “a structure, a process, a mechanism and a strategy” (Levi-Faur 2012: 8), but the application in this article incorporates these four senses as long as it has to do with political leadership that ought to direct or steer the citizens to the common good within a democracy. It therefore follows that the application of the idea of executive rascality in this article is only foreseen within the context of a democratic system with all the many facets of governance. Going forward, we shall explore three forms of executive rascality with the objective of highlighting how they vitiate the goal of common good in democracy. These include a) fiscal rascality, b) the abuse of human rights and the disregard of the Rule of Law, and finally, c) economic control.

Fiscal rascality

Fiscality has to do with the deliberate and intentional misappropriation of financial regulations in governance. In a way, this is the main form of executive financial corruption that one finds in government both at the Federal and the federating units. Fiscal rascality manifests explicitly in three areas.

First is in the budgeting process that require realistic expenditure proposals and revenue projections to maintain fiscal discipline, strict compliance with financial regulations, as well as allocative and operational or technical efficiency (Udoh et al 2017; Mbaku 2007).

Unfortunately, the executive arms of government in most African countries tend to sabotage the budget process, and this is evident in a) lack of political will and commitment to fiscal rules and guidelines, b) high incidence of extra budgetary expenditure, c) chronic budget deficit, d) off-budget resource allocation, and e) executive and legislature horse trade resulting in so many delays in arriving at a consensus (Udoh et al 2017: 1).

Second is the cost of governance, which is linked with the budget process. A bloated budget that favours the executive or legislators implies a total disregard of the cost of governance that stifles funds for the common projects. The cost of governance is, however, a debate that is not only reduced to the budget processes and content. Dambisa Moyo had in her 2018 book, *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth – and How to Fix it* argued that political office holders should be paid well to get the best results. The question of whether to cut cost or not also touches on what is either good for the society or not. Two schools of thought emerge on this question. The first school of thought argues that “large government participation hurts efficiency, growth and productivity in the system” (Udoh et al 2017: 3). This would mean that there is need to cut costs since government services are not responsive to the market forces that shape the economy (Goldsmith 2003; Oladeji 2022).

The other school, which is evidently pro-government, would insist on “the need for the provision of public goods, which is a failure of the market economy arising from externalities” (Udoh et al 2017: 3). A governance system that is focused on the common good as its guiding principle would carefully weigh the options available to it and focus on judicious use of public funds. The third form of fiscal rascality is seen in the execution of capital projects. Certain factors impinge on the common good of all at this level, and these include a) the lack of ‘due process’ in the awarding of contracts, where nepotism and political compensation constitute the principles of governance; and b) the outright deception of the public whereby budgeted capital projects are awarded to phony companies that are non-existent. In both instances, the absence of transparency provides cover for impunity (Kopits & Craig 1998; Wantchekon 2002).

In fact, what happens at this level is a daring usurpation of the power to control the common good and even turn it into a private good. This abuse of power points to a passive citizenship. Worthy to note that these three forms of fiscal rascality are linked in the sense that once the budget process is compromised then one discovers the effect in the cost of governance as well as in the execution of capital projects.

Abuse of human rights and the Rule of Law

Power corrupts and, in its corruption, it becomes desperate when critiqued. There is no doubt that most civil spaces are shrinking in Africa. The idea that an executive, president, or governor has the right to prosecute and withhold the rights of any civic or political opposition is an abnormal occurrence in any democracy. We have seen this in many authoritarian regimes across the world, but to allow such within a democratic space is the very undoing of democracy itself.

Narrowed down to several African nations, including the Nigerian democracy of today, it is evident that the polis is no longer a free agora for the expression of thoughts envisioned by Plato in his *Republic*. There have been many cases of election manipulation, intimidation of the press and protesters, as well as continued incarceration even after bail.

In fact, the claim by a former president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, to assume that the ‘common good’ (‘national interest’) as determined by the executive is more expedient than the Rule of Law is quite disingenuous and signaled the emergence of a certain form of pseudo-jurisprudence. Today the effect of such an unchallenged statement is seen in the number of missing or exiled critics, the attempt to muscle the social media, the controversial “hate speech” bill that even suggest a penalty of death by hanging, and the violence that trailed the 2023 general elections. A society in which citizens cannot express themselves freely cannot claim to uphold the common good, because common good requires a participatory democracy that is inclusive.

Economic control

Since political power comes with a measure of economic power, particularly in terms of fiscal economy and the drafting of economic policies and regulations, there is always the tendency of an over-reach by the executive. This explains why economic competence is very important in governance today.

To elect someone who does not understand the basics of economic principles is to jeopardize the common good especially when it comes to the well-being and flourishing of all. When not properly guided, the decisions of such a political leader would have adverse impact on the education, health, security, trade, and commerce sectors of the economy. This may further be worsened by deliberate efforts at using the executive power over the economy to one’s advantage.

The downturn in the Nigerian economy and the eventual relapse into “economic depression” with an unabating inflation is caused not only by the failure to invest in the infrastructure by past administrations, but also by the sheer incompetence and corruption within government (Igiebor 2019: 505; Egunjobi 2013). Such incompetence, which allows for a double exchange rate to the Dollar, the closure of borders, and the financing of government spending through *ways and means* (namely the unauthorized free printing of local currency without collateral) has caused an untold hardship on the one hand, while on the other hand enriched the cronies of the people in power who had access to cheaper exchange rates. If economic prosperity for all is a common good, then a system of the economy that favours a privileged group over the others is nothing but against the common good.

The question that is left unanswered is how we can reverse the culture of executive rascality among political leadership to achieve the common good. To attempt this, I shall refer to the recommendations of the 2019 *Africa Governance Report* (AGR) as a reliable guide and framework for improved governance.

AGR, Common Good, and the reversal of executive rascality

The 2019 *Africa Governance Report* (AGR) is a joint product of the *African Governance Architecture* (AGA) and the *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM) whose overall responsibility is to “play a monitoring and evaluation role for the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030.”

The African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government gave this task to the two agencies during its 28th Ordinary Session that took place in Addis Ababa (30-31 January 2017). The aim to provide “comprehensive baseline” for various governments to improve governance across Africa. The realization that a peer-review mechanism is perhaps a way to enhance governance in the continent is a commendable initiative. Quite interesting is the fact that there is no external compulsion in this new approach to governance within the continent.

African leaders need not be taken to The Hague before they are able to deliver the common good to their people. One thing is very clear, there must be a constant civic vigilance upon governance if it is to be directed to the common good. If the recommendations of the AGR are to be adhered to by various Member States, we are sure to witness a reversal of the effects of executive rascality, because it would reduce drastically. This reversal and reduction would give way to the realization of the common good.

Comparatively, while the *Agenda 2063* of the AU articulates a vision, some sort of utopia to be attained, the AGR is rather a mechanism that relies on available data in evaluating governance across the continent. In other words, the AGR is to rely on the *Agenda 2063* as an ideal against which to measure off the rate of compliance by various nations or the failure thereof. The recommendations of the AGR in relation to the idea and realization of the common good in Africa relate to the inevitability of transformational leadership, constitutionalism and the rule of law, peace and security, and development.

Inevitability of transformational leadership

Common good within the society is either realized or given up based on leadership. With the right leadership, the common good is made realizable. And that is why political leadership ought to be transformative and not just limited to its bureaucratic components (Mthuli, Singh & Reddy 2022: 17).

Transformative leadership “drives progressive change and has attributes or qualities including vision, innovation, integrity, inclusivity, responsiveness and effectiveness” (APRM & AGA 2017: 12). It is thus recommended that political leadership in Africa should eschew all forms of discrimination and should become more and more inclusive. There is need to “promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance” as well as the need to “promote and protect human and people’s rights” (APRM & AGA 2017: 12).

Insistence on constitutionalism and the Rule of Law

AGR narrows down the constituent elements of the constitutionalism and the rule of law as comprising

- (a) respect for law; respect for the rights of human beings; (b) the separation of governmental powers; (c) public participation in governance; (d) accountability of the three arms of government to the public (e) independence of the legislature and the judiciary; (f) accountability and effectiveness of the bureaucracy; and (g) access to justice (APRM & AGA 2017: 13).

AGR appraised some conformity in some states but also noted that there are still some challenges. These challenges would require actions, such as “(a) the member States establishing strengthening mechanism to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of integrity and anticorruption programmes and strategies; (b) incorporating local and customary practices in their formal criminal justice systems; and (c) the Member States consistently submitting the periodic reports required by the instruments they have committed to” (APRM & AGA 2017: 13). These suggestions align with C.E. Okeke’s insistence on legislative oversight functions, although this function can be abused by ignorant legislators in the pursuit of selfish interests (Okeke 2020: 65). The overall idea should be to ensure compliance with the Constitution and the rule of law by the various arms of government.

On sustainable peace and security

There is the recognition that with the incessant cases of violence and conflict, the common good of peace and prosperity cannot be realized. This is evident in the 2020 AU document “Silencing the Guns” which is aimed at ensuring sustainable peace and security in the continent. No one flourishes in a state of war and conflict. It is true that a lot of inter-state wars have declined, yet there are significant cases of violence from Cameroon to Nigeria, to Congo to Guinea as well as military coups across the West African sub-region. Every blood of the African should matter and the commitment to this extends beyond the content of the AU document (Mlambo 2021).

A strong commitment to peace must be seen as both a direct and indirect realization of the common good. For while peace itself is a common good, the benefits that accrue to a peaceful nation in terms of healthcare, economic prosperity, tourism, and happiness index are equally part of the common good. The AGR however made some recommendations that are worthwhile and these demand that the member states should “sign, ratify and domesticate all the crucial instruments”; they are also to “improve harmonization of function between the AU and RECs (Regional Economic Communities)” as well as “fast-track the rapid development capability of the Africa Standby Force” (APRM & AGA 2017: 13-14).

Unleashing development in the society

Development is a common good (Deneulin & Townsend 2007). But development is closely tied to governance. With bad governance development is stalled. The recommendations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the *Agenda 2063* are aimed at ensuring a sustainable future for all.

As expected, the AGR tailors its recommendations to the SDGs and the *Agenda 2063*, imploring member states to align their various national development schemas to these already existing recommendations. It also charged them to “make plans and programmes that aim at inclusive human development” and to “formulate realistic plans that ensure prudent and sustainable utilization of scarce natural resources” (APRM & AGA 2017: 14). In that sense there is an attention to the future generation, as this is part of the intention of the SDGs.

There is, however, an interesting part of the AGR that seems to anticipate the question of how to get governments to do the needful in the realization of the common good of all. In this case, the AGR assigned the RECs some form of “watch dog” role. The RECs are “voluntary associates that have functions relating to continental unity, development, economic cooperation and integration, and promotion of democracy and peace and security” (APRM & AGA 2017: 14).

In a way, their work is all embracing. They help in the actualization of shared values, and this accentuates the need to focus both on shared values and local values. This is a way to respond to the critical needs of the people. The AGR thus proposes that there is need “to enhance collaboration between the AU and RECs, in line with the decisions of the African Union Assembly” and “to ensure that all the RECs align development plans with the AU Agenda 2063 and the UNSDGs” (APRM & AGA 2017: 14).

Conclusion

The recommendations of the AGR point to an African solidarity as a form of common good within the continent. A critical reflection of how executive rascality contributes to the social ills that we witness in the continent calls for a strategic solidarity. This is a form of solidarity that is not sentimental but intellectually reasoned out and pragmatically oriented.

Already one must acknowledge the different forms of strategic solidarity that are already happening across the continent championed by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and aimed at enforcing citizen-led accountability system in the continent. These would include efforts by organizations like *BudgIT Organization* founded by the duo Joseph Agunbiade and Oluseun Onigbinde with aim of facilitating budget reforms and critical civic engagement and accountability through technology.

Today BudgIT is present in five nations: Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and United States. Another organization is the *Follow the Money* initiative a subsidiary of *Connected Development* (CODE), founded by Hamzat Lawal and Oludotun Babayemi in 2013. The initiative promotes transparency and accountability in government and is today spread across 10 African countries with impressive results. There is also the *YIAGA Africa initiative* founded by Samson Itodo and Cynthia Mbamalu. YIAGA which stands for the *Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement* promotes political engagement and advocacy for young people across Africa. The organization focus on the promotion of democratic governance through transparent monitoring of elections, the promotion of human rights and civic engagement.

Finally, there is also the *#FixPolitics Initiative* that is founded by Obiageli Ezekwesili, which is a research-based organization that is aimed at promoting the political engagement of citizens from an informed background. The initiative has led to the emergence of the *School of Politics, Policy, and Governance* (SPPG), which has the ambition of training the next generation of African politicians who will be well-equipped to govern differently. There is need to promote more of these citizen-led initiatives that will bring about transformational leadership across Africa.

Returning to the AGR's recommendations, one critical question remains the possibility of enforceability given that there have always been similar recommendations in the past. Which mechanisms has the AU put in place to ensure compliance?

Of course, the use of the RECs is an intelligent move but what are its limits in terms of the sovereignty of each member state? To conclude, I still consider the critical area of electoral reforms missing in the entire scheme. Given the history of the emergence of nations in Africa the disruptions of ways of choosing leaders have always been problematic. Fixing this problem across board will strengthen African democracy, and with it, other forms of African co-existence and the common good as well. The AGR holds the promise of a better future for democratic governance in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, if it is consistent in measuring governance and bold in presenting its critical reports on performance without interference.

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