



Measuring democracy and 'good governance' in Africa: A critique of assumptions and methods

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Since the end of the Cold War the world has witnessed significant political and economic developments with far-reaching consequences for global order. For instance, the democratisation processes and outcomes in some countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa have benefited from the triumph of globalisation. Also, the new neoliberal global order under the influence of the United States has created a favourable environment for the spread of western liberal democracy to other parts of the world. Generally, the new global setting has provided the opportunity for the consolidation of neoliberalism. The efforts to export neoliberal values beyond the frontiers of western societies have recorded some successes in certain respects. Today, there is increasing global consensus on the legitimacy of such western values as individualism, liberty, human rights, equality before the law, free markets, the rule of law and, most significantly, liberal democracy. As can be expected, one of the consequences has been the emergence of the west as the undisputed vanguard of the global 'democracy crusade'. However, in effect, this is no more than the spread of liberal democracy and the triumph of the neoliberal model.

The neoliberal global order generated significant pressures on Africa's authoritarian governments, which set the latter on the path of reform that culminated in different forms of liberal democratic transition (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997). It is plausible to argue that the political reform programmes were inaugurated in response to internal pressures. However, it is the international donors and development agencies that were accorded the credit in western literature, while the role played by domestic social forces in the struggle for democracy was played down deliberately. Readers are invited to recall, in particular, the activities of civil society organisations, professional groups, student and youth movements, and many other pro-democracy groups whose political actions, ranging from civil disobedience to mass protests, made political transition imperative for several African authoritarian regimes (Gyimah-Boadi 1996). Unfortunately, the transition processes did not run their logical courses in most of the African countries. Instead, they were fast-tracked by discredited African power elites that tactically diffused the rising social consciousness among the masses and then facilitated the inauguration of foreign-aided reformist agendas, which positioned them as torch bearers of liberal democracy.

For their part, western countries were not only eager to share their ideas and experiences but were also set on reproducing liberal democracy by giving overwhelming support for the installation of western liberal social values, expressed overtly as respect for rule of law, individual freedom and civil liberty, electoral competition, etc. Consequently, bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as international development agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP), made their facilities available to governments and NGOs in order to ensure democracy and good governance in developing countries. For those countries needing aid, trade concessions and other forms of development assistance, however, it means that they now have to satisfy western political conditions and, in most cases, adopt liberal democratic principles. It was within this context that many African countries made the transition from authoritarian and dictatorship-type regimes to ones based on liberal democracy.

The initial euphoria about the possible global success of liberal democracy was short-lived. The world recorded significant growth in the number of elected governments, but many new democracies – most of them in Africa – have been labelled by the west as ‘incomplete democratic transitions’ and ‘illiberal democracies’. The democratic ‘experiments’ in several African countries recorded unimpressive results despite the introduction of constitutions, legislatures and electoral systems. The transition did not result in better and improved living conditions for the citizenry. The Economic Commission for Africa’s (ECA’s) *African Governance Report (AGR) II* stated:

Since the foundational elections of the 1980s there have been numerous elections in Africa. But many countries have not had quality elections. Overall there has been notable progress on political governance in some countries, while improvements have been blunted or reversed in others. On balance the progress on political governance has been marginal. (ECA 2009: 17)

Indeed, there have been many similar assessment and evaluation reports on democracy and governance in Africa by other international donors, as well as a growing number of anthologies on the ‘failure’ of democracy in Africa. The central question is why ‘the democratisation wave’ that swept across the world in the 1990s has recorded less impressive accomplishments in Africa than, for instance, in countries in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. Western donors and other observers of trends and developments in democratisation processes in developing regions, including Africa, have observed that the outcome of regime changes in many countries in these regions has been everything *but* a consolidated democracy (Diamond 1996). The ECA’s report on Africa corroborates this verdict that ‘the consolidation of democracy is still in its infancy in a majority of African countries’ (ECA 2009: 19). Although we might recognise and to a large extent share some of the concerns that western donors and analysts have raised in their reports on the failure of democracy in Africa, there are still sharp differences in the assumptions, methods, conclusions and policy prescriptions in those reports.

In this chapter, I discuss the limits of liberal democracy as well as the assumptions and methods used for measuring democracy and good governance in Africa by international donors and western analysts. I undertake a critique of liberal democracy, aided by the works of Omafume Onoge (1997), George Nzongola-Ntalaja (1998, 2002), Thandika Mkandawire (1999, 2001), Archie Mafeje (1995, 2002), Issa Shivji (2003), Claude Ake (1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2002) and others. I argue that many of the findings and conclusions in the donor-funded assessment reports on democracy and good governance in Africa are concerned essentially with regime type rather than the nature of the state and its relationship to the processes and outcomes of democratisation. Also, most of the reports fail to appreciate structural contradictions as major constraints inhibiting the actualisation of democracy in Africa.

Overview of the discourse on democracy in Africa

The central issue in the discourse on democracy in Africa is whether democracy is feasible in Africa considering the region’s social and economic conditions (Ake 2002). Academics and international development experts have assessed this issue from different perspectives. On the part of western

scholars and analysts, the main issue is the 'failure' of the western model of liberal democracy and the absence of positive signs of democratic consolidation in most African countries. A review of this discourse will outline some of the arguments made by western scholars.

The culturalist/traditionalist perspective focuses on the African past and tradition, including the implications of its overwhelming 'culture of informality' on African polities (Chabal & Daloz 1999). This perspective is conceptually aligned with the 're-traditionalisation of society' and the 'instrumentalisation of disorder' frameworks, and its emphasis is on autocratic tendencies, corruption, chaos, anarchy and violence, all of which are wrongfully linked with the traditional (Bayart 1996; Bayart et al. 1999; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Ellis 2005). Chabal and Daloz argued that 'the state in sub-Saharan Africa (sic) is nothing other than a relatively empty shell' (1999: 95). Disturbed that 'the real business of politics is conducted informally and more stealthily, outside the official political realm', they hastily concluded that within 'such apolitical "order", in which there is little meaningful institutionalization, the notion of corruption as habitually defined in Western polities, is of little significance' (Chabal & Daloz 1999: 95). Their argument is similar to the assumption of the modernisation school that the pre-colonial culture inhibited political development in Africa through uncivilised values and practices, which served as a bottleneck to the emergence of democratic governance, hence the search for 'anti-democratic and anti-developmental traits in the cultural tradition' of African states (Onoge 1997: 19).

The thesis of the culturalist/traditionalist school in relation to democracy in Africa can be summarised thus: African traditional political institutions are autocratic, personalised and corrupt, and therefore cannot provide appropriate historical and cultural foundations for democracy in modern societies. In contrast, traditional African societies' governments are open and inclusive. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard pointed out that 'the structure of an African state implies that kings and chiefs rule by consent' and that 'ruler's subjects are as fully aware of the duties he owes to them, as they are of the duties they owe to him, and are able to exert pressure to make him discharge these duties' (1987: 135–136). Also, indicators of a wide spectrum of inclusiveness are observable in the decision-making process of traditional African political systems.

In the traditional system generally, evidence abounds to show a heritage of transparent and accountable governance. Traditional African societies place a high premium on accountable governance to the extent that leaders are not only answerable for their actions, but in the past were also made to explain natural events such as famines, epidemics, floods and droughts, for which many were forced to go into voluntary exile or 'asked to die' (Ake 1991: 34). Also, a political culture that abhors corruption is found among the Kanyok people of the southern Congo – the famous Luba story in which the Kanyok approve of 'community spirit' and 'deplore selfishness' shows the anti-corruption content of the political culture of the Kanyok people (Yoder 1998). It is a common belief among the Yoruba in south-western Nigeria that their social misconducts can invoke the wrath of their progenitors. This has served to check and regulate social behaviours among the Yoruba. Many such examples of democratic values and orientations characterise political and social life in traditional African societies.

Archie Mafeje (2002) argued that 'traditionally, Europe was a land of corrupt absolute monarchs and predatory and callous feudal lords' and that it was possible for liberal democracy to supersede the influence of traditional European institutions and record success in Europe only 'under changed socio-economic conditions'. In contrast, attempts to reproduce western models of liberal democracy in post-independence Africa failed because they only produced 'one-party dictatorships under a veneer of European bureaucratic structures and procedures' (Mafeje 2002). On the basis of these historical facts, I am inclined to argue against the misleading and prejudicial position of the culturalists/traditionalists that associates African culture and tradition with non-democratic politics. In addition, they have elevated cultural factors to such a degree that culture is imbued with the power to explain everything.

More importantly, the traditionalists/culturalists adopt a perspective that ignores a fact of history – that no culture has ever successfully operationalised itself on the basis of anti-democratic tendencies.

The democratisation and modernisation discourse adopts Francis Fukuyama's (1992) unilinear view of historical development to explain political developments. The central thesis of his discourse is that liberal democracy will become the only form of government for all states as a mark of the 'end of history'. Thus, to follow the path of modernisation and democratisation, indigenous cultural values, practices and beliefs in non-western societies must be replaced with western liberal values, such as the triumph of free markets, rule of law, and separation of powers. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama (1992) argued that not only are all modernising societies going through basically the same process, but that an almost inevitable outcome of the process is political democratisation. According to him, the advent of liberal democracy may signal the end point of humanity's socio-cultural evolution and the final form of human government (Fukuyama 1992). Samuel Huntington (1991, 1997), however, challenged the unilinear view of modernisation, as well as the fallacy that modernisation equals westernisation. He argued that while all cultures experience certain similarities in the modernisation process, cultures still retain their unique characteristics. Also, he pointed out that the temporary conflict between ideologies is being replaced by the ancient conflict between civilisations, and that it is the dominant civilisation that decides the form of government. Although Huntington argued against regarding western values as permanent universal values, he too implicitly alluded to the fallacy that 'west is best'. However, there is growing concern, especially among African scholars, about transplanting non-universal values from one cultural milieu into another.

Some have argued that African regimes remain highly patrimonial and neo-patrimonial practices have been the core feature of post-colonial politics in Africa (Bayart 1996; Bratton & Van de Walle 1994; Lindberg 2003; Reno 1995, 1998, 2006; Villaion & VonDoepp 2006). The central argument is that the neo-patrimonial nature of regimes in Africa is at the base of corruption, which in turn affects the process of democratisation. The focus is on patron–client relationships and the personalisation of power as the basis for structuring social relations in Africa. Also, the conceptual framing of the 'economy of affection' strengthens the assumption that many Africans participate in social networks of the extended family, clan and village community that operate outside formal structures and institutions and are not bounded by them (Hyden 1976). This in turn creates the conditions for lawlessness, poor governance and corruption. The main limitation of this explanatory framework, however, is that in a bid to explain everything, it ends up explaining very little.

It is generally acknowledged that the failure of democracy in many societies is due essentially to weak democratic structures and underdeveloped political institutions. This stand is well captured in a statement by Jacques Attali of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, who once stated that 'a democracy without institutions is anarchy and a market economy without institutions is a Mafia' (in Van Hoek 1993: 67). The weak governance environment in Africa is characterised by underdeveloped institutions of democratic accountability, and this situation presents an extraordinarily high risk for democracy. Underdeveloped political parties, weak civil society, an over-concentration of power at the centre, non-separation of the branches of government, and lack of transparency and accountability characterise political life in many African countries. Indeed, there is a fear that this trend could undermine the foundations of democratic transition. It is in response to this trend that international donors provided support for empowering institutions critical to the establishment of the rule of law and the improvement of representative government in developing countries.

It is a valid argument that democratic 'experiments' have suffered major setbacks in almost all of Africa's new democracies and that, due to the non-functioning or total absence of relevant institutional frameworks, the quality of political systems has not improved. The solution, however, does not lie in

transplanting institutions of western democracy to Africa. A historical reference to Latin America best illustrates this point: in the early nineteenth century, Latin American countries adopted republican institutions and liberal political values, including elections and open legislatures. However, the establishment of viable democracies in the region was not accomplished until the second half of the twentieth century because of a delay in the emergence of dominant coalitions around the liberal values of competition and respect for civil liberties (Przeworski 2009). Africa's new democracies present a more contemporary example. A number of born-again democrats in Africa made declarations promoting democratic values, and inaugurated new constitutions and legislative assemblies. However, after being elected, these same leaders manipulated procedures, abused power and engaged in non-democratic practices which resulted in authoritarian reversals rather than democratic transitions. The note of caution by Steven Finkel et al. is appropriate: 'the adoption of particular institutions (elections, legislatures, universal suffrage, and so on) is...a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the establishment of democracy' (2008: 15). The struggle for democracy in Africa, therefore, must resist the idea of transplanting principles and institutions of western democracy.

Internal deficits, weak constitutions, and strong institutions that are captured by interest groups that undermine public interests all contribute to the problems of poor governance in Africa (Reno 1995, 1999; Rotberg 2003). William Reno (2006) argued that state failure has been a characteristic feature of African politics since the dawn of the neoliberal global order. It is also the view in some circles in the west that weak and 'shadow' states that are characteristically bedevilled by internal conflicts 'can no longer deliver positive goods to their inhabitants' (Rotberg 2003: 1). Part of the argument is that the governments of these failed states 'lose legitimacy, and the very nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes illegitimate in the eyes and in the hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens' (Rotberg 2003: 1). To bolster the claim that failed states are utterly incapable of performing the basic functions of the state, the logical policy prescription advocated by international donors and western development experts is increased intervention of external agencies to foster development in the countries in the 'bottom billion' (Collier 2007). This logic underlies increased donor intervention in developing countries. The United States and other bilateral donors in the west – as part of their support for democratic development around the world, especially since the collapse of communism in the late 1980s – have provided a significant amount of assistance for the promotion of democracy (Finkel et al. 2007). However, despite massive donor assistance to African countries, the lot of the people has not improved significantly. More than ever, there is growing concern among bilateral and multilateral donors about the value of international democracy assistance in developing countries.

The above explanatory frameworks have dominated the discourse on the processes and outcomes of democratic experiments in Africa. The policy prescriptions advanced in these frameworks are largely expressions of blind support for neoliberalism. It is therefore necessary to place the main theses in these frameworks alongside other arguments that throw more light on the benefits and limits of neoliberal democracy in Africa. In this regard, the perspectives and propositions made by western scholars and analysts on democracy in Africa fail to consider a number of critical issues, including the nature and role of the state in the struggle for democracy, the relationship between the state and democracy, the relationship between democracy and development, and the role of domestic and international social forces in promoting or inhibiting democracy. There are also other considerations, such as the level of social conflict in the country, the nature and orientation of the dominant class, the direction of class struggles, and the alignment and realignment of social forces at the domestic, regional and global levels. All these are key variables determining the direction of the processes and outcomes of democratisation in Africa.

Liberal democracy and its aftermath

In Africa, the 'third wave' of democratisation in the 1990s contributed to positive changes: the end of apartheid and the inauguration of majority rule in South Africa in 1994; expansion of the political space in a number of one-party states; the end of personal rule by the likes of the late Mobutu Sese Seko in then Zaire, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, and the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda in Malawi; and the end of oppressive rule in a number of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. Today the continent celebrates the era of multiparty elections. This new brand of democracy has, however, produced more contradictions than it has solved.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the success of multiracial elections has not fully guaranteed the incorporation of all social groups into the democratic system. In Nigeria, in spite of the success of the celebrated 'second transition' following the 2003 elections, and most recently the 2007 elections, agitation for the 'democracy dividends' is still very loud in almost every part of the country (Lewis & Alemika 2005: vi). In Kenya, the disputed 2007 elections triggered violence that resulted in the death of many. The incumbent president, Mwai Kibaki, allegedly 'stole' an election believed to have been won by the opposition led by Raila Odinga. In Zimbabwe, violence broke out in March 2008, triggered by serious electoral flaws and human rights abuses by the government. This illustrated that democracy requires more than merely holding multiparty elections. A power-sharing arrangement was put in place between Robert Mugabe and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change to avert further bloodshed. This arrangement, like that in Kenya, tests the commitment of Africa's new democracies to constitutionalism and rule of law, both of which are key tenets of liberal democracy. In Mauritania, the idea that military rule is no longer acceptable was belied when soldiers overthrew an elected government in spite of threats and warnings from Nigeria and other members of the Economic Community of West African States. The soldiers were quick to declare their preference for a new power-sharing arrangement with civilians. The situation in Niger, where the incumbent president ruthlessly pursued an agenda for tenure elongation, which subsequently provoked a successful military coup d'état, and the brutal and repressive activities of the military junta in Guinea are indicative of authoritarian reversals in West Africa. Compared with other countries of the world, only a few African countries – Mauritius, Botswana and, most recently, Ghana – can be said to be following the path of genuine democratic political development.

On the whole, in spite of their experimentation with processes and procedures of liberal democracy, democratic outcomes have eluded many countries in Africa. Ake (1966: 6) commented that 'this type of democracy is not in the least emancipatory especially in African conditions because it offers the people rights they cannot exercise, voting that never amounts to choosing, freedom which is patently spurious, and political equality which distinguishes highly unequal power relations'. In many instances, electoral democracy has served as a breeding ground for kleptocratic regimes. Also, corruption remains one of the biggest challenges in many African countries, including those that have been rated highly in terms of the quality of their democracy, notably South Africa, Ghana and Senegal. Given the high rate of corruption and its negative effects on governance, especially the delivery of public goods, the description of 'democratic regime' does not hold for many African governments.

The version of liberal democracy introduced through the democratisation processes in Africa has been indifferent to the nature and character of the state. Experimentation with the liberal model has been primarily about how democratic elections will help determine who will be chosen by the people to exercise the power of the state. The consequence has been the survival of a state that lacks autonomy yet dominates and supervises the political process. This has serious implications for democratic development, as substituting 'democrats' for dictators through multiparty elections has not brought about democratic progress in several African countries.

Using public opinion data from a 2008 survey conducted in 19 African countries, the Afrobarometer Network assessed the extent of Africa's democratic development and evaluated whether the new African 'democratic' regimes are consolidating or not, as well as if 'various countries are approaching a stable equilibrium between [the] demand and supply' sides of the democratisation process. The conclusion from the survey was that 'public attitudes toward democracy are on the increase' but that only a 'few of Africa's diverse political regimes are consolidated' (Afrobarometer Network 2009: 1). Apart from the conclusion that Africa is characterised by 'a diversity of political regimes', it was discovered that most political regimes in Africa are 'unconsolidated hybrid systems' (Afrobarometer Network 2009: 2). However, some regimes are consolidating, but not always as democracies despite exhibiting some features of democracy. It is now generally acknowledged that a transition to democracy is not necessarily a transition to a stable, consolidated democracy (Diamond 1996, 1999). There is a lingering debate on what factors explain democratic consolidation. The notion of 'democratic consolidation' is often used in reference to a political transition process accompanied by major changes in socio-economic structures; one in which the political system includes the economic and social correlates of democracy. Gerald Alexander's (2002) hypothesis, based on a general theory of regime preference formation, was that democratic consolidation depends critically on whether the major right-wing political actors perceive the political left as predictably moderate. Raymond Suttner opined that 'whether democracy is consolidated depends also on the extension and deepening of democracy, the involvement of people in politics during and between elections, the viability of participatory democracy and the existence of autonomous organizations of civil society, organs of direct democracy' (2004: 769). Wonbi Cho and Carolyn Logan (2009) associated democratic consolidation with power alternations made possible through frequent multiparty elections. However, they later pointed out that there are so many uncertainties about 'many of Africa's struggling electoral political systems' (Cho & Logan 2009: 12) that reduce the prospect for democratic consolidation measured in terms of the frequency of alternation of power.

Liberal democracy has produced a social context in Africa that has continued to work against the emergence of a democratic developmental state in various countries in the region. This has further immersed the state in social contradictions that render it unable to effectively intervene in the development process, especially in terms of a regime's responsiveness to its citizenry, justice, accountability and the provision of public goods. For example, most governments in the new democracies in Africa – especially those that had previously adopted the structural adjustment programmes – embarked simultaneously on both political and economic liberalisation programmes, with unimpressive results. The implementation of neoliberal economic reform programmes, notably economic deregulation via the free market, provided the context for the consolidation of liberal democracy alongside its limitations and defects.

The interaction between economic and political reform programmes in Africa's democracies soon became problematic for the state, which lacked the necessary capacity to successfully design and implement economic reform programmes. As soon as the state realised its inability to successfully impose the economic conditions required for liberal democracy to thrive, the stage was set for a retreat into authoritarianism marked by a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the people, abuse of power, repression, disrespect for the rule of law and procedures, exclusion of the people from decision-making processes, etc. Lacking in legitimacy and political capacity, the state in many African countries has become increasingly exclusionary. In many instances, the management styles of new 'democratic' governments have alienated the majority of citizens, whose living conditions have not directly benefited from reform policies and programmes.

Citizens responded to the authoritarian reversals with a lack of trust and confidence in the institutions of governance, which are riddled with corruption and lack of accountability and transparency. Citizens

also complained about the burden of economic reform programmes and, as access to goods and jobs deteriorated, they became less supportive of the state and more involved in social and violent conflicts, as well as other forms of criminal behaviour. The absence of democratic growth, non-performance in the delivery of public goods, and the prevalence of abject poverty are major risk factors for violent conflicts in many African countries.

In the absence of democracy, many potential conflicts, which were previously forcefully suppressed under authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, have intensified with increased destabilising capacity. Poverty and deteriorating living conditions have exacerbated identity conflicts along communal, ethnic, religious and regional lines. Since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed more than 500 separate incidents of communal conflict; some 11 000 lives have reportedly been lost (Lewis 2007: 1). In Sudan, there is constant tension between black people and Arabs, just as there is between Christians and Muslims. At the root of the disaffection and suspicion among the various groups is the manipulation of identity-based issues by the elites. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja observed that 'a transformation is not possible in situations of violent conflicts and/or those in which the institutions and processes of governance are unresponsive, unaccountable, or simply ineffective' (2002: 8).

Critique of liberal democracy

One of the major political developments of the twentieth century was the spread of liberal democracy. However, the evolution and development of liberal democracy is associated with a particular culture and environment, which belies its claim to universality. Given this major constraint, its transferability to different cultural contexts has generated many problems, especially for non-western societies. The purveyors of liberal democracy ignore the differences in the process of historical development and change in different regions of the world. Also, the preference for a state-centric legal-bureaucratic basis of authority that is tailored after the experiences of western societies does not hold actual or potential benefits for non-western countries.

Liberal democracy exhibits cultural particularity. Ake drew attention to the fact that liberal democracy is a 'product of a socially atomized society where production and exchange are already commoditized, a society which is essentially a market. It is the product of a society in which interests are so particularized that the very notion of common interest becomes problematic hence the imperative of democracy' (1993: 242–243). The adoption of liberal democracy, as the dominant ideology of political order, makes room for liberalism to 'determine the nature of the state (formal, abstract), its structures (separate from the autonomous civil society, a clear separation between public and private), its rationale (protection of the basic rights of its citizens) and its basic units (individuals rather than groups or communities)' (Parekh 1993: 165).

This version of democracy 'specifies who constitutes the legitimate government and wields the authority inherent in the state (the elected representatives), how they acquire authority (free elections, choice between parties) and how they exercise it (in broad harmony with public opinion)' (Parekh 1993: 165). In this way, the concern and main focus of liberal democracy is on whether the regime is authoritarian or representative. This explains why the democratisation project in Africa is essentially dominated by an emphasis on the type of government in place, with little or no consideration for the 'authentic participation of the people' (Onogo 1997: 5).

Within the context of neoliberalism, democracy is no more than 'a form of political regime in which citizens choose, in competitive elections, the occupants of the political offices of the state' (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997: 13). Conceived in this way, a transition to democracy is deemed to have occurred

'with the installation of a government chosen on the basis of one competitive election, as long as all the contestants accept the validity of the election results' (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997: 13). In this regard, the main concern is whether elections are conducted 'within a matrix of civil liberties' (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997: 12). It has been argued that democratic performances are associated with the electoral cycle, and that elections add value to democratisation processes and outcomes. The idea that the mere repetition of elections strengthens the quality of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa was celebrated by Staffan Lindberg (2006), among others. However, many elections have failed to produce democracy in Africa (Teshome-Bahiru 2008); instead, they produced fraudulent leadership while contributing to the erosion of legitimacy. Also, an ECA report notes that 'the quality of elections remains suspect in many countries. Often they are less a peaceful means of transferring power than a trigger of conflict' (ECA 2009: 3). The experiences in Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Togo, and Zimbabwe have shown that holding elections is not a sufficient condition for democratisation.

Although it is claimed that 'the consolidation of democracy in the long run, involves the permanent establishment of many other valued institutions such as civilian control of the military, independent legislatures, and courts, viable opposition parties and voluntary associations, plus a free press', liberal democracy still restricts the 'necessary condition of democracy' to national elections, and some still argue that it is 'the first step without which democracy cannot otherwise be born' (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997: 13). This disembodied conception of democracy makes little or no attempt to focus on the larger picture of democratisation, and also ignores the fact that development takes place only through political empowerment that comes through democratisation. Ake's remarks aptly draw attention to this conceptual confusion:

The trivialization of democracy has in turn trivialized notions of what democratization entails and what it takes for others to support democracy; it has led to the confusion of democratic processes with democratic outcomes. Thus external support for democracy has tended to be focused on multi-party elections, easy tolerance of non-competitive electoral contests and the presumption that voting amounts to choosing. (2002: 30)

A paradox in the experimentation with liberal democracy in Africa is that stakeholders in the west are quick to point out its failure, marked by the rise of 'hybrid regimes' on the continent. No doubt the situation in many countries is indeed a far cry from democracy. However, despite common agreement among advocates of liberal democracy that non-democratic politics dominates in Africa, I argue that liberal democracy is restricted and tends to de-radicalise democracy. Instead, I advocate for genuine and substantive democracy which, for instance, emphasises broad-based participation, popular sovereignty, and meeting needs and aspirations on a self-sustaining basis. Once again, Ake's advice is pertinent: 'Africa requires somewhat more than the crude variety of liberal democracy that is being foisted on it, and even more than the impoverished liberal democracy' (1994: 129). The imposition of 'impoverished liberal democracy' has not resulted, as can be expected, in the end of authoritarian regimes in Africa. Isa Shivji (2003) puts the matter of social change and transformation beyond the neoliberal discourse on democracy: the 'struggle for democracy is ultimately rooted in the life-conditions of the people'.

Critique of assumptions and methods

Measuring democracy and governance is a field that has developed rapidly with the support of multilateral donors and development agencies like the World Bank and the UNDP. The World Bank governance indicators and the ECA's *African Governance Report (AGR) II* are fast acquiring a reputation in this respect. With substantial inputs from academic communities, donors and development agencies, significant progress has been recorded in the development of governance assessment tools

and governance-related indices. However, there are still many challenges in effectively measuring and analysing democracy and governance, including how best to meaningfully measure governance, the inadequacy of indicators for measuring key governance processes, and 'lack of agreement over who is best placed to provide insights as to the quality of governance in a country and how it compares to the situation in other countries' (Court et al. 2002: 1).

A number of different intentions underlie the efforts and initiatives to measure democracy and governance. Various political science indices have been developed for the purpose of examining correlations between democracy and economic development, and international donors and development agencies are increasingly showing an interest in using democracy and governance assessments to identify how recipients of development assistance are likely to manage resources. Also, democracy assessments provide citizens with critical information about processes, outcomes, results and impacts of democratisation. Citizens' perceptions need to be accurately reflected in governance assessments. Governance is an area where the demand for greater country ownership of the development agenda is a challenge to realise (ODI 2007), as most governance indices and assessments are closely tied to donor agencies' preferences, which presents problems of credibility and legitimacy.

It is important to note that the assumptions, methods and other related processes in these donor-sponsored assessments and evaluations of democracy and governance are inextricably linked to the minimalist conception of democracy. In this context, the issues of human rights, civil liberty, rule of law, free and fair elections, good governance, and public participation are parameters for measuring democratic progress. The debate about what attributes to include in the minimalist definition of democracy is quite rich. While some scholars are satisfied with 'the smallest possible number of attributes that are still seen as producing a viable standard of democracy', others add 'fully contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, combined with effective guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly and association', as well as conditions such as 'the criteria that elected governments must have effective power to govern' (Collier & Levitsky 1997: 431). Even so, these attempts at conceptualising democracy have not fully addressed the challenges occasioned by the global wave of democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in Latin America, Africa, Asia and in Eastern Europe where a great diversity of national political regimes arose.

Certain assumptions about democracy underlie donor support for the promotion of liberal democracy in developing countries. For example, bilateral donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and multilateral donors such as the European Union have primarily given support for the installation of the Euro-American version of liberal democracy, expressed overtly as support for the rule of law, individual freedom and civil liberty, and free and fair elections. Also, rather than treating the people as the agency of change, the programme design and implementation approach of many donors has tended to relegate the people to mere helpless victims of bad governance. In collaboration with the new 'democratic' regimes in Africa, donors have sought to 'deliver the people' through the introduction and consolidation of neoliberal reform programmes.

The methods and procedures for measuring growth and economic development have found their way into the field of measuring democracy and governance. However, unlike economic growth, which enjoys relative universal consensus on indicators for measuring progress, democracy remains an 'essentially contested concept' (Gallie 1956), and the business of measuring democracy, especially the issues of methods and procedures, is nowhere close to enjoying universal consensus. For instance, year after year, evaluators of good governance have struggled unsuccessfully to address the inexactitude that bedevils the discourse on democracy and related concepts such as democratic transition, democratic consolidation, and sustainable democracy. Thus, measuring democracy and

good governance has become associated with subjectivity. In some cases, it has degenerated in utter confusion, for instance in the distinction between liberal and electoral democracy, representative and participatory democracy, market and social democracy, as well as in the exact and functional relationship of democratisation to human rights and the rule of law.

Beyond characterising democracy using political attributes and criteria, the minimalist conception of democracy assumes the existence of a causal link between democracy and economic performance. This perspective regards modernisation as a complex process involving the evolution of economic and social as well as political systems, with economic development usually preceding political democracy. Thus, western donors emphasise the relationship between economic development and democracy, after the experience of western societies, in the design and implementation of democracy assistance programmes in developing countries. However, given that many of the societies that experienced democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s are in different stages of economic development, questions must be raised about economic development as a prerequisite for democratisation. Also, the thesis that projects the 'west is best' ideology as the only path to democracy for the modern world needs to be questioned.

Sources of evaluation data

Sources of data for several of the evaluations and assessments of democracy and good governance in Africa range from the desk study approach used by USAID, to several country impact assessments by bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, such as the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the European Commission and other development assistance providers whose mandate includes promoting democracy and good governance in the non-European world. For example, USAID launched a series of studies in 2000 to determine the impact of its democratisation assistance on political change. The framework employed by USAID to guide democracy and governance assessments and shape assistance strategies is focused on such questions as whether political power is concentrated in the executive branch or not, whether the legislature is able to perform oversight functions, and whether there is transparency in electoral processes. Also, the framework pays attention to other issues such as the rule of law and judicial systems, and whether they are susceptible to political influence (see USAID 2001).

Data from sources such as Human Right Watch, Amnesty International, and Transparency International are regularly used as indicators for measuring democratic progress. For example, data from Freedom House's annual country ratings for political and civil rights are 'often used as proxy for the level of democracy' (IDEA & SIDA 2007: 27). However, some analysts have pointed out limitations, citing, for example, the entry for Freedom House's Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, presented in the UNDP's *Governance Indicators* (UNDP n.d.). The approach of the Bertelsmann Foundation is similar to the methods and procedures used by Freedom House. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index evaluates countries on the basis of 23 criteria that are, in turn, based on 62 indicators. The status index criteria include political participation, rule of law, level of socio-economic development, market regulation, regulation of competition, and social security. The criteria used to assess governance performance are efficacy of policies, effective use of resources, and capacity for consensus-building and international cooperation. These parameters for measuring political performance are silent on the social and economic conditions in the countries concerned; neither are they targeted at determining the nature of the state beyond the neoliberal assumptions.

Methods of measuring democracy and good governance, by western donors and analysts, draw data from interviews with stakeholders, case studies, evaluators' own observations made during field visits

and opinion surveys. Networks of personal contacts and local newspapers have also been used by researchers and evaluators to get information that may not be easily available; however, there are challenges associated with these sources. For instance, personal contacts come with the demand for confidentiality, and information from newspapers and magazines is susceptible to bias and prejudice. It is not likely that foreign consultants and expatriates who are involved in the assessment business stay long enough in Africa to be able to filter through journalistic sources and make objective assessments. Apart from the concerns about possible prejudices and biases that may be associated with the use of newspaper reports and other local sources, the external orientation of the approaches used in donor-driven assessments, as well as the issue of ownership, have been of concern in some circles.

Since the late 1990s, reports of opinion surveys conducted among a sample of the population on African political issues have been added to sources of data for the assessment of democratic governance. One such is the barometer surveys used to measure the performance of new African democracies since the 1990s. Referred to as Afrobarometer surveys, the general objective is to determine the perceptions of a sample of the population in the new democracies on the nature, scope, cause and consequences of political and market reforms, with a focus on policy measures and institutions of governance. Typically, issues surveyed include levels of knowledge about democratic values; levels of popular support for democracy and citizens' estimates of the performance of the government; levels of satisfaction with democracy; levels of political participation and interest in politics; levels of knowledge about leaders and political parties; levels of support for market reforms; and public perceptions about the socio-economic situation in the country. The Afrobarometer Network's surveys compare responses across African countries, and also attempt to explain variations in responses. As part of its strategies to promote good governance, the World Bank sponsored surveys in some developing countries to measure political issues such as good governance, corruption, public goods delivery, etc. These surveys investigate the role of corruption in governance, especially in the delivery of social services. Usually, deliberate efforts are made to ensure that the survey data and findings can be used for comparable analysis across countries.

Critical analysis of the several empirical surveys and studies on the performance of new African democracies reveals many gaps. For example, the various indicators used for surveying political issues in the new democracies are rarely suitable for Africa. Also, there is no clarity on what is being measured: processes or outcomes? Beyond these issues of conceptual relevance are other technical problems in the survey of political issues to determine the level of democratic consolidation in Africa. For example, most of the assessments rely on a quantitative survey approach, which is still largely underdeveloped in many African countries. Even where expatriates are recruited by international agencies and donors to carry out such surveys, the population in many African countries needs more time to become familiar with the survey methods.

There is a shortage of systematic information for measuring democracy and good governance in Africa. Until very recently, the media remained the dominant source of information on African politics. As noted, this has its limitations. While the media are important sources that report facts as well as form public perceptions of democracy and governance, they are prone to bias. Firstly, the media tend to give priority to more spectacular stories, paying less attention to less dramatic but more common practices of democracy and governance. Secondly, and more importantly, the amount of information reaching the public on democracy and governance is influenced significantly by the degree of press freedom, journalistic professionalism and the structure of media ownership and available resources. In many African countries where the media are only partially free and lacking in professional competence, high levels of bias characterise media reporting, especially on political issues. The effect of bias on approaches that rely on media sources for measuring democracy is likely to be serious. Data and information used for measuring democracy and governance should be based on direct and first-hand observation by unbiased observers. This kind of empirical data hardly exists in African countries;

however, there is an expectation that things will shift to engender improvements in the generation and availability of such data in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, beyond the experimentation with democracy in most of Africa – as ‘a model set of rights and institutions’ supported by westernised principles of modernisation theory – African citizens have not experienced genuine democracy, thus their lack of faith in liberal democracy and declining trust in the new multiparty regimes that purveyors of neoliberalism are helping to instal in Africa. Also noted were the conceptual and theoretical limitations and deficiencies in the assumptions, methods and conclusions of the several donor-driven assessments of democracy and good governance in Africa, as well as some technical and environmental constraints.

Africa is undoubtedly one of the regions where democracy has had a precarious existence. In spite of the replacement of authoritarian regimes in Africa, there are still powerful constraints on the advancement of democracy on the continent. However, beyond the hasty conclusions in several assessment reports on democracy and governance in Africa by western donors and analysts, there are questions about the suitability of liberal democracy for African countries. I submit that the political culture of African people, with its communal orientation, cannot easily coexist with liberal democracy’s projections of possessive individualism as characterised by western societies. Rather, African countries should strive toward a democracy that provides for African values to be embedded in the developmental state. I denounce the ongoing propaganda of democracy without prefixes and suffixes – that is, a model of democracy that fits into all contexts and situations – and call for decisive acknowledgement of African cultural peculiarities in the democratisation processes on the continent. In his book *A Theory of Universal Democracy*, Khan (2003) argued that the secular liberal democracy that Fukuyama espoused in his *End of History* cannot be the end of human history, because we are not at the end of human intelligence. Every human society has the right to construct its own conception(s) of democracy in response to its religious, economic and social needs.

Khan’s main thesis, to which I subscribe, is simply that liberal democracy cannot be universalised. Forcing Africa to adjust to liberal democracy is like divorcing democratic governance in Africa from its concrete communal origin. For reasons of comparison, it is useful to point out that the declining civic culture in the west is partly attributable to adherence to ‘individualism’. Robert Putman’s thesis on the ‘declining of American social capital’ and the general decline in the vibrancy of American civil society somehow brings out the growing preference for ‘the isolated individual’ as against ‘the group’ (Putman 1995: 76). According to Putman, one of the main causes of the decline in civic engagement among Americans is the weakening of family, among other things. Putman (1995) further argues that the reign of individualism in American society has rendered the family and civic associations less effective in political socialisation and the transmission of norms. Given that Africa’s political and social order is rooted in democratic values and orientations such as communitarian orientation and the principles of social inclusiveness, consensus and representation, it is inconceivable that the struggle for genuine democracy will require Africans to abandon their age-old commitment to a sense of community in favour of individualism. The communitarian orientation among the African peoples of Nigeria and Tanzania caught the scholarly attention of Hyden and Williams (1994), who observed that ‘a distinctively communitarian idiom of politics prevails’ in Nigeria that is similar to what obtains in Tanzania where, with the adoption of the ideology of *Ujamaa*, Nyerere’s notion of a communitarian idiom of politics was systematised.

Regarding the failure of Africa’s democratic experiments, I recommend that scholars revisit the issue of what the patterns and forms of democratisation are for Africa. Discourses on democracy and

democratisation processes should pay due attention to Africa's unique socio-cultural realities. In addition, such renewed intellectual efforts should avoid blanket generalisations about the experiences of African countries, which vary from one country to another, reflecting the lack of uniformity in the way political change occurs in different countries, the specificity of their political histories, their unique internal dynamics, and the differences in the intensity of their struggles for democracy. Unfortunately, these considerations are missing in most of the existing models and frameworks used for assessing Africa's democracy and good governance. African intellectuals have responded in various ways, ranging from critiques of liberal democracy to outright rejection of external intervention in all its forms (Chole & Ibrahim 1995; Lumumba-Kasongo 2005). On measuring democracy and good governance and deciding what methods to use for the measurement, it is imperative that ways be explored to respond to the inadequacies of the prevailing approaches, with the recognition that people are the focus of any and all democratisation processes and outcomes.

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