

“Governance for Structural Transformation in Africa: Leadership and Partnership Opportunities”

Keynote address by Prof. Richard Joseph, John Evans Professor of International History and Politics, Northwestern University, Illinois, USA

Thank you for inviting me to deliver the plenary address at this important conference.¹ In one month, January 2018, I will celebrate the 50th anniversary of my involvement in the study of Africa. It is an odyssey that has taken me to many parts of the continent and enabled me to confront many of its concerns. I speak as an American citizen during a period when many of our political, civic, and socio-economic gains are threatened. I also speak as a former colonial subject in Trinidad and Tobago who emigrated almost 60 years ago to the United States.

I will mention a few events relevant to this address: October 1988, when the African Governance Program was formed under my direction at The Carter Center in Atlanta; October 2006, when I delivered my inaugural address as John Evans Professor of Northwestern University on the topic, “Misgovernance and the African Predicament: Can the Code be Broken?”²; and February 2016, when I delivered the guest lecture at the inaugural conference of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP) in Nigeria on the topic, “State, Governance, and Democratic Development“. I will quote an early remark in that lecture:

Improving governance is recognized as a priority concern of all societies. It is more the case today because of heightened economic competition and increased risks posed by the mismanagement of government revenues. A focus on governance includes government authorities, as well as those

¹ Delivered at the African Economic Conference of the African Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, December 4-6, 2017.

² It was also delivered as the inaugural Faculty Distinguished Lecture of the Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Nigeria, November 2006.

outside the state sphere. Governance concerns how public goals are established, how they are pursued, and how the power to accomplish them is acquired, utilized, and held accountable. The bundle of these practices, and the norms that frame them, we call institutions.

I agree fully with Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank, that “poor Governance and lack of public accountability have always been among the main causes hindering Africa’s structural transformation.” Governance and misgovernance have been at the forefront of my reflections on Africa, especially since I elaborated the concept of prebendalism in 1978-79 in response to the debilitating political practices I witnessed in Nigeria.³ Four decades later, we still wrestle with the contradiction between prebendalism, as a mode of accessing revenues through capturing government offices, and building institutional and developmental capacity. During this period of flux and uncertainty, bold policy initiatives should emerge from Africa to confront these and other persistent challenges. We need a new wave of policy analyses and prescriptions grounded in African realities. This conference, and its central theme, are therefore extremely timely.

After observing the funeral of the late President Quett Masire of Botswana in June 2017, a former student of mine, Professor Amy Poteete of Concordia University, Canada, wrote me: “It felt like the end of an era”. This era began with the liberalizing and liberation movements of the 1980s and the ending of the Cold War. It led to Western triumphalism regarding the prospects for liberal democracy and the unfettered expansion of capitalism. In recent years, however, world affairs have grown more complicated. No system of government, or economic philosophy, predominates. The “liberal international order” in its political and economic ramifications is increasingly contested.

Three decades ago, economic stagnation in Africa contributed to the imposition of the Washington Consensus of reduced state economic

³ *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 1987; Spectrum Books, Nigeria, 1991).

management and pervasive marketization. What Nicolas van de Walle of Cornell University called “partial reform syndromes” resulted in political economies that were semi-liberalized versions of former patrimonial autocracies.⁴ The Singapore industrial policy model, energetically implemented by a rising China, has altered the global calculus. In recent years, moreover, as Western post-Cold War triumphalism ebbed, security concerns have grown.

The Great Recession of 2008-2009 forced many European nations into a decade-long search to reverse declines in employment and social equity. In just two years, Brexit, the American presidential election, large emigration waves from the Middle East and Northern Africa, and burgeoning nativist movements have undermined the coherence and confidence of the Western bloc of nations.

For Africa, there is no bright policy light shining from abroad. With regard to the United States, it is difficult to say where such a torchlight exists. While several large and mid-level powers compete for influence in Africa, none is currently able to impose its political and economic preferences. Apart from securing access to natural resources and pursuing trade and investment opportunities, their efforts usually aim at protecting religious affiliates, strengthening transborder security operations, stemming illicit emigration, and snuffing out nurseries of violent extremism.

How, we must ask, can African countries advance politically and economically in this uncertain environment? Are there windows of opportunity for African organizations, and their external partners, to provide dynamic leadership despite the head- and crosswinds. I will identify several key opportunities and challenges: first, sharply reducing warfare; second, promoting institutional efficiency; third, enhancing electoral integrity; fourth, scaling back corruption; five, protecting the environment; six, guaranteeing basic incomes; and seven, widening access to knowledge. This cluster of

⁴ *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

commitments are embraced by the rubric, “Life More Abundant”, a mantra of the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria.

I Reducing Warfare

Too many of our people are dying in conflicts large and small. We must use known mechanisms, and devise new ones, to reduce warfare. I first traveled to Sudan to join the University of Khartoum as a lecturer in 1974, during the pause in the north-south civil war following the Addis Ababa agreement. And I first came to Ethiopia in 1989 with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter on peacekeeping missions. Dozens of trips were made to Liberia in the early 1990s to try and end that grinding and largely pointless war.

In too many parts of the continent today, lives and livelihoods are cut short by war. What can be done? One suggestion is the need for new approaches to governing Africa’s conglomerate nations. Diverse peoples were thrown together within imperial and colonial boundaries. Secession, as Eritrea and South Sudan have demonstrated, is not a panacea. In many countries, there is a need to reconfigure political systems. In my current internet volume, *The Nigerian Crucible: Politics and Governance in a Conglomerate Nation*,⁵ I am drawing insights from 40 years of study and reflection on the governing of one of Africa’s most diverse nations. These insights can be applied to other plural nations in Africa.

II Promoting Institutional Efficiency

In my Ibadan lecture of February 2016, I posed the question; “Why can Nigerians build and operate mega-churches but not quality public transport, public universities, public energy utilities and other service organizations?” As a consequence of extensive involvement in Nigeria over four decades, I am aware of the widening gap in institutional efficiency between countries with optimizing cultures and those in which they steadily diminish. The issue is perhaps more nuanced because of the variance in such cultures within particular countries. Knowledge bases, inside and outside Africa, can

⁵https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/collections/rb68xb902?utf8=%E2%9C%93&sort=system_create_dts_i+asc&per_page=20

be tapped in search of answers to two fundamental questions: What has been learned about building sustainable institutional capacity for development? Second, how can this learning be transmitted in specific country contexts?

III Enhancing Electoral Integrity

The global crisis of democracy, to use Larry Diamond's assertion, requires responses pertinent to each world region. I referred a few years ago to eddies rather than waves of democratic advances and retreat.⁶ Today, with regard to democratic governance, no specific institutional construct can be forced on the continent. In fact, there is wide institutional variance among established democracies, and even between their central and subnational entities.⁷ Virtually all countries today conduct regular elections but only a handful of these exercises are fairly and reliably conducted. It was a former official of the East Africa Commission who brought my attention to the negative economic consequences of violence and insecurity now unfortunately associated with competitive elections.

The recent electoral disputes in Kenya reflects these dilemmas. If a nation of the size and complexity of India could conduct fair and efficient elections with minimal violence, surely African countries ranging from 1-10% of its population can do likewise. We have to steadily increase the number of African countries that emulate Ghana's transition to conducting fully free, fair, and legitimate elections. Electoral integrity is fundamental to democratic construction in Africa.⁸

IV Scaling Back Corruption

⁶ "Democracy and Reconfigured Power in Africa," *Current History* (November 2011). On the crisis of democracy see Larry Diamond, "The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State", *Foreign Affairs* (March, 2008); and "Promoting Democracy: Enduring Tensions and New Opportunities," in *The Search for Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁷ Jacqueline Behrend and Laurence Whitehead, "The Struggle for Subnational Democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 27, no.2 (April 2016)

⁸ On the achievements of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the leadership of Prof. Attahiru Jega between 2010 and 2015, see <https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/downloads/2v23vt41x?locale=en>

Paralleling the crisis of democracy is the crisis of corruption. The Panama and Paradise Papers provide extensive information about what has already been known in policy and scholarly circles. The balance has tipped significantly with the use of offshore havens, and other wealth-concealing practices, to deprive nations of the resources needed to generate jobs and improve livelihoods. This observation applies also to business corporations and affluent individuals in my own and other western countries.⁹

Innovative mechanisms should be designed to re-channel illicit capital flows to meet the daunting challenges in the continent.¹⁰ There is increased efforts underway to track these illicit flows, and the properties and shell companies in which they are lodged. Their recapturing and re-investment in Africa could increase significantly the stock of development finance. The work being done by intrepid organizations in this regard can be multiplied greatly to stem the outflow of public revenues and return those lodged abroad.

V Protecting the Environment

Two significant windows of opportunity for African innovation concern Climate Change and Renewable Energy. It is well known how vulnerable African countries are to climate change, desertification, ocean warming, and rising sea levels.¹¹ We are also aware of the dire consequences in the form of shrinking livelihoods and the exacerbation of group conflict, and catastrophic disasters of hurricanes, floods, and forest fires. Solar power, hydropower, and natural gas are clean energy sources abundantly available, and under-exploited, in Africa. The transformative potential of these resources can alter the energy profile of the continent, accelerate electrification, and reverse environmental degradation. During this period when climate change and renewable energy are treated as political

⁹ Revelations of the lattice of bank accounts and dummy corporations used by Paul Manafort of the U.S., former agent for many governments, provide a glimpse of these practices.

¹⁰ Alexandra Gillies of the Natural Resource Governance Institute of the Open Society Foundation is writing a book on the misuse of revenues from extractive industries. It will add significantly to our understanding and awareness of these processes.

¹¹ In this regard, see the remarkable video on environmental decay in Nigeria, "Nowhere to Run", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zuRMxaCrvQ>

footballs in global conferences, Africa with its vast land mass, powerful rivers, extensive shore lines, abundant natural gas and copious other minerals, should amplify its voice and achievements in this critical domain.

VI *Guaranteeing Basic Incomes*

There was a time when labor in many societies was tied to satisfying basic needs, whether through hunting, gathering, fishing, and cultivating. We are in a period of rapid transition in this regard as a consequence of globalization and automation. A gap is growing between labor needs and the acquisition of income to meet fundamental needs. Even in my own country, many working families cannot satisfy such needs and spiral into unsustainable debt.

Population growth in many African countries continue to exceed income flows. Out-migration in such circumstances becomes an option despite the appalling risks. Digital payment systems, and digital cash, make it increasingly possible to provide income subsidies directly to families. Along with overcoming operational hurdles that have undermined public services in health, water, lodging, transport, and education, a key intellectual hurdle must steadily be overcome in Africa and elsewhere. It is the recognition that an increasing proportion of national revenues, from a variety of sources, should incrementally flow directly, and with minimal interference, to the citizens of African and other countries.¹² There is increasing awareness, for example, in the important benefits to families and communities in Africa and other regions in remittances from the diaspora. Basic incomes strategies through informal networks are therefore not new. They can constitute a larger part of the global aid system.

VII *Widening Access to Knowledge*

Much of what we learn can be transmitted to others, but how widely? I have sought to transmit much that I have learned over a half-century. My study of Cameroon's anti-colonial struggle, for example, was expertly translated into French and thus made more widely accessible. Although initially

¹² See Larry Diamond and Jack Mosbacher, "Petroleum to the People", *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2013).

banned, my second book on Cameroon has reached a wide readership. My Nigeria book was made available a few years after its publication locally in a paperback edition.

Too much knowledge generated about Africa, however, even by African scholars and writers, is not easily accessible. In view of the explosion of fake news and reports, we have to accelerate making verifiable studies and documentation widely available. I therefore salute the important Open Access repository, Arch Library, created at Northwestern University, Gaps in quality education and instruction can be filled by online learning. For anyone who moves between Africa and the developed, and the fast developing world, it is disconcerting how wide the gaps are between access to books and scholarly articles.

I will conclude by mentioning what, together with my colleagues and students, is being done and the opportunities they represent for partnering with many of you present and with your organizations. Because of time limitations, details will be made available online. The time has come to establish a transnational **Center for the Study of Governance and Development**. It can begin with a **Governance & Development Learning Network**.¹³ While its primary focus will be Africa, it can draw on the experiences of other regions. I am willing to work with my large network in academia, policy making, and philanthropy - and many of the organizations represented here - to help create such a Center. Its agenda can include the seven priority concerns mentioned earlier and others that should emerge during this conference. In coming weeks, I will prepare a draft synopsis of the scope and objectives of the proposed Network and Center.

Thank you.

¹³ A *Governance & Development Study Group* will begin at Northwestern in January 2018. Its deliberations will center on the political configurations of particular African countries, examining how they arrived at their current impasse and what paths forward can be envisaged. The first three countries to be examined will be Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Cameroon. The *Study Group* will build on a "Forum Series on Democracy and Insecurity in Africa" conducted in Evanston and Chicago, Illinois, in spring 2017. An archival project on "Peace and Security Initiatives, 1987-1997", followed in summer 2017. It focused on Carter Center engagements in a half-dozen African countries.