Democracy for development or it is development for democracy in Africa? Towards sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

For African states’ democratic governance is fundamental for developmental and political discourse while sustainable development is also critical for the continent. Owing to the uneven developmental and historical backgrounds of the African states and democratic deficits it is unclear if sustainable development is achievable ahead of democracy. This study is informed by the constructivist/interpretivist concern as a research philosophy grounded on text and content analysis to identify the nexus between development and democracy on the trail of Africa’s development agenda. While some scholars believe the two are interdependent others claim that the two are independent hence one can be achieved in the absence of the other. Africa should strive to strike a balance between the two as they are not mutually exclusive although it is democracy that should take centre stage. There is a challenge of achieving twin goals in the absence of a blueprint through being robustly innovative.

Introduction

Attempts for democratic governance in Africa can be traced back to 1963 when the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was formed. It is the time when campaigns for the independence of Africa were birthed. While the primary objective of the OAU was founded on supporting cooperation internationally giving due regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations, the idea was to speedily have Africa decolonized and promote continental unity through the integrity of states (Chigudu, 2018). The freedom obligation was somewhat silent on prerequisites for promoting governance that would be democratic. This approach paved way for unitary states in the mould of one-party regimes under despotic rulers where corruption was bred and human rights violated. Nyong’o (2009) notes that the OAU’s inability to deal decisively with regimes that did not uphold human rights was conspicuous citing typical instances of; Kenya’s Daniel Arap Moi, Ghana’s Jerry Rawlings (1982-1992), Kamuzu Banda in Malawi, Zambia’s Frederick Chiluba and Equatorial Guinea’s Macias Nguema. Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe adds to the list (1980-2017). They effectively closed democratic space for opposition parties, suppressed press freedoms, and imprisoned opposition members, yet these countries had nothing to show in terms of development, let alone sustainable development. Also, incorrigibly corrupt rulers such as Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast, Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Seko, and Mali, Moussa Traore, amassed personal riches more than what could have been required for offsetting their countries’ external debts.

Democratic governance has to be revamped in Africa as it should be a strategic focus so that the content makes the best out of it (Chigudu, 2018). The continent has to be economically prosperous through all the facets of human development. Reality indicates that there is no steady growth and it is bad governance bearing most of the blame (Chagunda, 2021; Fosu, 2020). In 2009 Barack Obama the former President of the United States attributed the malady in Africa to undemocratic governance while delivering a speech in Ghana. The European Union and World Bank among other supranational bodies have relentlessly lamented the absence of...
Many evaluations and assessment reports have been made on the let-down by Africa’s governance and democracy while across the world and particularly in Eastern Europe the results have been impressive (Afro barometer, 2009; Nzungola, 1984; Olasunkanni, 2014; WB, 2008). Efforts of exporting some neoliberal values further than the Western community frontiers have posted positive results (Agrast, 2013). As a result, this has brought increased legitimacy and global consensus over values which are Western-like human rights, free markets, liberty, the rule of law, equality, and most of all liberal democracy. This has portrayed global democracy to be identified with the West as the champion generating some pressure on totalitarian governments in Africa, climaxing in various democratic systems (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). Such systems have been expressed explicitly as individual freedoms, electoral competition, and civil liberties among others. Development international agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank including multilateral and bilateral donors have provided facilities to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments ensuring good governance and democracy for development (ECA, 2009). However, the original expectation and euphoria about the conceivable global democratic success never lasted (FHR 2013). Despite a noticeable increase of worldwide elected governments, the West has categorized Africa’s most new democracies as either incomplete democratic transitions or illiberal democracies (IDEA & SIDA, 2007). The democratization result has not been exciting regardless of new constitutions that have been introduced, electoral systems, and legislatures (Fombad, 2014).

In light of the above, in recent years, the nexus between development and democracy in Africa has been among the issues that have been mostly contested (Adejumobi, 2000; Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, 2005; Przeworski, 2000; Menocal, 2007; Sikuka, 2017a). Those supporting the nexus contend that development and democracy are mutually inclusive while those opposed to that view have claimed that one of them can be achieved easily in the absence of the other. Informed by those insights, this study examines critically if a link exists in Africa between democracy and sustainable development and proposes the harmonization of the two concepts. The paper takes a middle-of-the-road approach so that Africa strives to strike a balance and become innovative in an attempt to promote both democracy and sustainable development since there is no prescription for achieving the two. However, striking a balance will not be easy given that democracy in Africa is not advanced and yet development is urgently needed and should be sustainable (Fosu, 2020). The study is predicated on the following research questions:

i. In Africa what should take precedence over the other, is it democracy for development, or is development for democracy?

ii. Is the current socio-economic status of Africa due to a lack of democracy for development?

Although it may not be easy to come up with clear-cut answers in this study like in any qualitative research, attempting to answer these fundamental questions will guide policymakers in African countries to formulate policies from a more informed position.

**Literature review**

The literature review highlights; the conceptualization of democracy and development, the concept of sustainable development, and the threat to democracy and sustainable development by the military.

**The conceptualization of democracy and development**

The need for enhanced governance in Africa and the world at large gave rise to democracy making it to be seen as the best and most legal kind of government (Fayeni, 1999; Leon, 2010; Mathonsi & Sithole, 2018). Is it feasible for the entire world or just the whole of Africa to be democratic? There is no straight answer except that "yes, it is possible and no" according to Diamond (2003) in Mathonsi and Sithole (2018:624). Others argue that democracy is scarce (Gitonga, 1995; Masolo, 1995). Hence, the implementation of real democracy in Africa may not be easy and could take longer for several African countries to implement a democracy that is genuine (Mathonsi & Sithole, 2018). This calls for efforts of fighting for the substitution of the elite corrupt leadership who took over from a post-colonial system. It is a fact that substituting the corrupt African leadership will be resisted strongly at all costs (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). Masolo (1995) argues that ‘perhaps a new form of the liberation struggle is needed so that democracy becomes rooted in Africa.

Although democracy has been in existence for many years as a system of governance, there is no agreed definition that is commonly used commanding universality for approval. This is due in part to the paucity of a conventional democratic practice because various countries apply democracy in ways that are not necessarily uniform based on their constitutions. Therefore, there is no single country that can claim to serve as the best model of democracy when various countries have their own accounts (Offor, 2006; Mcinerney, 1992). This explains the narratives of Western democracy and African democracy. Those who argue against democracy
The biggest problem of defining democracy begins with choosing electoral methods for individuals into a position of rulership (Diamond, Linz & Lipset, 1988). Presidential and parliamentary elections the world over have been marred with irregularities. The irregularities have in most cases been due to methods of choosing the techniques used. This dilemma exposes democracy making its implementation varied in some parts especially in Africa given that democracy originated from the West, specifically in Athens of ancient Greece (Mathonsi & Sithole, 2018).

Development in simple terms is described as moving towards a situation or condition which is comparatively better than the one which existed previously (Chambers, 1997). In real life, this implies any change which is positive. For instance, if someone has been owning and riding a bicycle from point A to B then changes and owns a car then drives it from point A to point B, such a change can be described as development. The time taken becomes shorter and living standards improved (Sisuka, 2017a). The same applies to a person who buys and rides a bicycle that he/she did not previously own. This means the concept of development is relative and varies from one country to another (Sisuka, 2017a). Chambers (2004) defines development as meaning all attempts to provide, aid, programs of welfare and resources meant for poverty alleviation, transformation of rural areas, and basic needs provision of the poor to guarantee continuity of their survival. The word sustainability implies, “a capacity to maintain some entity, outcome, or process over time” (Jenkins, 2009:380) as well as conducting activities without exhausting the resources on which that capacity relies. While this is a universal definition of sustainability, its meaning can similarly be located in all processes of business and human activities.

Therefore, in terms of this generalized definition, every single activity is carried out in such a way that its volume or quantity is not completely used up, but allows for renewal and continued use. Shiva (2010) suggests that it is dangerous to have a generalized interpretation of sustainability as this does not appeal to environmental issues so that human activities adapt to the sustainability of nature and its environment. Systems of nature enable human activities and support all forms of life hence sustainability cannot be considered in the absence of ecological aspects (Jenkins, 2009; Sachs, 2010; Shiva, 2010). For that reason, sustainability of the environment becomes fundamental and a subject for socio-economic sustainable development (Klarin, 2018). Two elements of sustainable development emerge namely sustainability and development, though preceding the construction of the concept of sustainable development itself. For Sharpley (2000) sustainability and development could as well be juxtaposed, where the two could have effects that are counter-productive. But neoclassical economists give emphasis that nothing is contradictory when development and sustainability are put together (Lele, 1991). Also, Sachs (2010) submits that it is not possible to have sustainability without development and vice versa.

The concept of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development was popularized after the World Commission on Environment and Development Report of 1987, widely known as the Brundtland Commission and the Brundtland Report respectively. This report was basically a reaction to the increasing ecological and international environmental lobby defining sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987: 43). From inception up to date, sustainable development as a concept has met with criticisms and interpretations that are different. The Brundtland report clearly indicated how the meanings of sustainable development differed and made reference to an all-inclusive planning and strategies adoption, heritage protection, biodiversity, ecology, and sustainable development which is not short-lived (WCED, 1987). A couple of years following the Brundtland report, 300 interpretations, and definitions of sustainable development were identified by Dobson (1996). These definitions to a large extent are informed by the key idea provided in the WCED core definition (Klarin, 2018). Sustainable development in these definitions is predominantly seen as a social and economic system enabling the needs of human beings, with lasting progress towards improvement and well-being of general quality of life consistent with environmental limitations. Given that sustainable development is linked closely to ecological concerns and that it is nature that provides important opportunities and limitations to development, in theory, the conception of sustainable development is related ordinarily to ecological sustainability (Klarin, 2018).

It is a development providing the environmental requirements that are necessary to enable life for future and present generations on a specific level of comfort (Lele, 1991). Also, this is an all-inclusive approach to sustainability that observes sustainable development together with the protection of the environment positioned in a global socio-economic, political and ecological context (Sharpley, 2000; Ulhøi & Madsen, 1999). However, some social conditions must also be realized because of their effect on ecological unsustainability or sustainability in order to meet the required ecological conditions. With respect to social sustainability which is the main thrust of this study, sustainable development signifies prospects for realizing certain needs of people drawn from economic values (Ulhøi & Madsen, 1999), and also certain social needs derived from cultural, traditional, and social values. The sustainable development mainstream theory that is accepted generally embraces the two stated sustainability aspects. Thus, fundamentally sustainable development subsumes understanding the social changes which meet development traditional goals in keeping with the ecological limits of sustainability (Lele, 1991).

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 which has 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The agenda builds on the principle of not leaving anyone behind emphasizing a broad
approach for all to achieve the goals. The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) for transforming Africa and the world will ensure; justice, peace and strong institutions, good health and well-being, no poverty, zero hunger, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, life below water, economic growth and decent, innovation, production and responsible consumption, industry and Infrastructure, climate action, reduced inequality, communities and sustainable cities, quality education, life on land and partnerships to achieve the goal.

Several gaps have appeared in Africa’s new democracies following many empirical studies and surveys on how democracy is performing (Agrast, 2013; ECA, 2009; Lowenstein, 2014). This has been demonstrated by the hardly appropriate different pointers used for Africa’s surveys on issues that are political in the latest democracies. It is not clear what is being evaluated; processes or outcomes? Besides aspects that are conceptually relevant, in surveying political issues there are usually technical problems to ascertain the extent of Africa’s democratic consolidation (Agrast, 2013). For example, measurements are based on quantitative studies that are mostly less developed in several African countries (UN, 2016). Given that the quality of democratic governance is not easy to directly measure, surrogate measures for difficult democratic governance experiences like the stability of property rights and rule of law have been used (WB, 2008). Sets of data like the World Wide Governance Indicators (WGI) have been generated by the World Bank (WB 2018). Informed by these measures, several countries in Africa badly perform in almost all key democratic areas. The WGI indicators rank most countries in Africa below the 50 percentiles of the six governance dimensions. As provided by the World Bank (WB, 2008), it reflects that the performance of Africa is not good compared to other regions, apart from the former Soviet Union. Based on the Transparency International (TI) results shown in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) it is revealed that 30/47 had widespread corruption with only three scoring above the world corruption average being Mauritius Botswana and Cape Verde (TI, 2008).

Tanzania has been frequently labelled as an example of successful good governance in Africa (Utz, 2007). This was depicted following 20 years of political and socio-economic reforms (Ottaway, 1997), the beginning of multiparty plebiscites, and the liberalization of markets. Prior to the process of reforms, the country was characterized by bad governance in all activities by the state (WB, 2001). Even though Tanzania has relatively done well in terms of democratic governance, Connolly and Finlayson (2010) contend that certain crucial areas are still falling out of democratic governance completely.

In 2008, the survey opinion data released by Afro barometers for 19 African states conclude that the attitude of the public towards democracy increased (Afro barometer, 2009:2). The study measured the degree of the continent’s democratic development and assessed if governments are consolidating democracy. It is further meant to determine if different states are heading towards an equilibrium that is stable between the supply and demand areas of democratization. One of the findings was that several African systems are not consolidated hybrids, some are consolidating, though not necessary as democracies even though demonstrate some semblance of democracy. The findings agree with Diamond (1999) who contends that it is now recognized in general that a move to democracy is not essentially a move to a steady, consolidated democracy.

While Africa rejoices in having a period of multiparty elections being a good direction toward democracy what has emerged are some inconsistencies. For example, in South Africa and Zimbabwe, the multiparty elections have not extensively ensured the inclusion of many social groups in the space of democracy. In Nigeria, the tension regarding the dividends of democracy remains countrywide (Lewis & Alemika, 2005:vi). Election disputes in Zimbabwe (2008 and 2018) and Kenya have left people more divided than before due to violence and electoral flaws. The occurrences put to test Africa’s commitment to democratic elections and the rule of law which are all sustainable development pillars. Maybe, Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania, and Mauritius, seem to pursue political developments and genuinely democratic elections. Otherwise, in many cases, Africa’s electoral democracy has served more as a ground for breeding kleptocracy (Chigudu, 2019). Corruption and state capture continue to be a big threat to both development and democracy. Those countries rated very high with respect to democratic quality, notably Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa are not spared. Therefore, the version of democracy in Africa can best be seen through the lens of holding multiparty elections that often fail to pass the credibility test. The result is the survival of those dominating the political theatre yet negatively impacting democracy and development (Chigudu, 2019). Bratton and Van de Walle (1997:13) note that democracy is not just, “A form of political regime in which citizens choose, in competitive elections, the occupants of the political offices of the state.” In this case, a move to democracy is believed to occur when a government that is chosen on the strength of a competitive election is installed, so long the competitors agree with the outcome “within a matrix of civil liberties” (Bratton & van de Walle 1997:12).

Africa and democratization for sustainable development

Africa’s journey to democracy has frequently been challenged and hindered by several factors (Craig, 2018). The democratization process is therefore not complete and it is at a standstill in other countries and has retrogressed in other cases. Houngnikpo (2016, 10) has described the process in most parts of Africa as “treacherous.” This description provides a completely unusual position of Africa’s democratization process in comparison to the metaphor of a ‘wave’ coined by Huntington (1991) and “steps” referred to by Doorenspleet (2000:400). Falana believes that;

“To move Africa forward, emerging democratic governments would have to confront a legacy of poverty, illiteracy, militarisation, and underdevelopment produced by incompetent and corrupt governments” (Falana, 2008).
Afro-barometer reveals that the support for Africa’s democracy is strong and growing whereby seven out of ten Africans are in preference democracy over some other political systems (Afro barometer, 2014). Freedom House in 2015 itemized five challenges of governance in Africa, all negatively implicating democracy (FH, 2015). These comprise; the increase in restrictive laws, repression of press freedom, abuse of term limits and entrenchment of leadership, regional weak human rights systems, and a dearth of competitiveness economically. While there is a variation of democratic inhibiting factors, they always highlight poor leadership, especially with respect to Africa’s military and political elite. In view of the minimalist concept of democracy, supposing that development precedes democracy, given that several countries have had democratization in the period the 1980s to 1990s, and are still in dissimilar development stages, it becomes questionable if sustainable development is a pre-condition for democracy in Africa (Chagunda, 2021).

Threat to democracy and sustainable development by the military

The observation by Huntington (1991) with respect to the deficits of democracy is pertinent to the civil-military relationship in Africa (Craig, 2018). The relationship involves interfaces of certain elites in the military ranks, that is, those in charge of the government and those responsible for the public in general. The involvement of the military in running the state has no provision in a true democracy and development except to provide security. Their involvement outside security concerns threatens a reversal of the democratization process and development. For instance, when;

“[t]he overwhelming transitions from democracy… took the form either of military coups that ousted democratically elected leaders, or executive coups in which democratically chosen chief executives effectively ended democracy by concentrating power in their own hands.” (Huntington, 1991:18).

The ouster of elected leaders could have not been possible without military support. If the development in Africa and challenges faced by democracy are attributable largely to issues of leadership, as argued by Ngambi (2011), then the military’s role is not easily discounted in analyzing democracy and development in Africa. From the perspective of democracy, a more conspicuous political intrusion by the military is a coup d’état when the army executes a “sudden and unconstitutional change of government or regime” (Ngoma, 2004:86). In Africa, the African Development Bank (AfDB) documented an excess of 200 coups in the post-colonial period of the 1960s (Bara & Ncube, 2012). Where democracy is practiced, intrusion into politics by the military impedes democratization because it implies transcending democratically and constitutionally authorized roles. Military intrusion into the political domain of a democracy encroaches on the people’s sovereignty and severely affects development. A coup in a democracy is a pointer to the failure of development and democratization (Craig, 2018). However, the idea of a political-military intrusion is not a detraction of the fact that the military as an institution is an extension and an apparatus of a political game (Craig, 2018). Although a study by Afro barometer shows that people in Africa support democracy in general, the military and political leaders do not subscribe to it as such (Bratton & Houessou, 2014). Under these circumstances, any claim that coups are no longer fashionable is at best premature, and this has implications for sustainable development.

Method, Analysis and Implications

Consistent with an observation by Raadschelders (2011), research is built on certain central philosophical underpinnings of what represents an authenticated study. These philosophical traditions affect the choice of a particular method which generates the needed knowledge to address the particular research problem. For that reason, the research philosophy is interrelated to the source and knowledge development so as to understand the phenomenon. It directs the study in the formulation of the strategy for research, collection, and data analysis (Holden & Lynch, 2004). To understand the relationship of the major elements for the topic, an interpretive/constructivist approach was taken. The problem involves embracing the objective import and versions of democracy and development in the context of Africa. The essence of interpretivism entails that the investigator interprets subjectively the meaning of social action (Bryman & Bell 2011). This is opposed to an objective interpretation in a positivist approach, where the thrust is placed on scientific methods focusing on quantifiable facts when studying social reality (Bryman & Bell 2011). This particular study was based on secondary data from books, journal articles, scholarly reports, and policy research publications.

Discussion of findings

The discussion of findings is subdivided into the following themes; democracy in Africa, the global nexus between development and democracy, and the development and democracy nexus in Africa.

Democracy in Africa

The Economist Intelligence Unit reveals that Mauritius is the most democratic African country according to the 2016 Democracy Index (EIUL, 2017). On the world rankings, it came 18th with Norway taking the lead. In Africa, Chad is the weakest in terms of democracy, ranking 165th on the world rankings only two steps above North Korea which ranked lowest. As of 2016 the top and lowest 10 democracies in Africa are shown in Table 1. The Democracy Index is constructed from questions interrogating civil liberties, pluralism, electoral process, government functions, political culture, and participation per country. The index has been computed for 167 countries from 2006 comprising the world’s entire population.
As revealed in Table 1 above, Chad is the weakest African democratic state. It is, however, important to note that the process of development is not an event because it is regarded as progress from what previously existed. Therefore, development always happens and is sustained ensuring that there is a change in people’s lives which is positive. That change could be higher income, better health access, improved personal freedoms, increased opportunities, better housing and education, and enhanced quality of life. As shown in Table 2 below, in Africa the country which is most developed is Seychelles based on the 2016 Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2016). The HDI is a measure of a country’s standard way of well-being conducted and compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In general, it measures per capita income, education, and life expectancy of a country. According to the 2016 HDI rankings, Seychelles sits at the 63rd position while Norway sits at the 1st position. For Africa and the world, the Central African Republic (CAR) is ranked as the least developed. As a matter of fact, according to the 2016 HDI Africa has the world’s least 19 developed countries. Table 2 shows the top 10 developed and the 10 least-developed countries in Africa. The emphasis of the HDI is mainly that the ultimate criterion for an assessment of a country’s development is its people and their abilities, and not merely the economic growth (UNDP, 2016).

Table 1: Best 10 and weakest 10 African democracies

| Top 10 | Mauritius | Cape Verde | Botswana | South Africa | Ghana | Lesotho | Tunisia | Namibia | Zambia | Tanzania |
|--------|-----------|------------|----------|--------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|--------|----------|
| Ranking | 1         | 2          | 3        | 4             | 5     | 6       | 7       | 8       | 9      | 10       |
| Weakest 10 | Djibouti   | Burundi    | Sudan    | Eritrea      | Libya | Guinea-Bissau | DRC | Equatorial Guinea | CAR | Chad |
| Ranking | 10        | 9          | 8        | 7             | 6     | 5       | 4       | 3       | 2     | 1        |

Source: As adapted from the EIUL (2017: online) 2016 Democracy Index

The global nexus between development and democracy

Several assumptions have been made explaining the nexus between development and democracy. One simple explanation portrays citizens as seeking more accountability from governments the moment they begin to experience higher social maturity and economic development levels; hence they achieve better democracy. This means, that a growing and educated society is more inclined to the top 10 developed and the 10 least opportunities, better housing and education, and enhanced quality of life. As shown in Table 2 below, in Africa the country which is most developed is Seychelles based on the 2016 Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2016). The HDI is a measure of a country’s standard way of well-being conducted and compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In general, it measures per capita income, education, and life expectancy of a country. According to the 2016 HDI rankings, Seychelles sits at the 63rd position while Norway sits at the 1st position. For Africa and the world, the Central African Republic (CAR) is ranked as the least developed. As a matter of fact, according to the 2016 HDI Africa has the world’s least 19 developed countries. Table 2 shows the top 10 developed and the 10 least-developed countries in Africa. The emphasis of the HDI is mainly that the ultimate criterion for an assessment of a country’s development is its people and their abilities, and not merely the economic growth (UNDP, 2016).

Table 2: Best 10 and 10 lowest developed African countries

| Top 10 | Seychelles | Mauritius | Algeria | Tunisia | Libya | Botswana | Gabon | Egypt | South Africa | Cape Verde |
|--------|------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|----------|-------|-------|-------------|------------|
| Ranking | 1          | 2         | 3       | 4       | 5     | 6        | 7     | 8     | 9           | 10         |
| Lowest 10 | Eritrea   | Sierra Leone | Mozambique | South Sudan | Guinea | Burundi | Burkina Faso | Chad | Niger | CAR |
| Ranking | 10         | 9         | 8       | 7       | 6     | 5        | 4     | 3     | 2           | 1          |

Source: Adapted from (UNDP 2017: online) 2016 Human Development Index

In view of the above, attempts have been deliberately made by many countries in Africa to pursue a similar route of achieving development through the application of democracy to their systems of politics. In one way, development and democracy are not reliant necessarily on one another. A typical example in support of this argument is that of China. Regardless of whether China is regarded as one of the world’s least democratic countries, this Asian country has experienced economic development which is impressive a couple of decades ago, at a rate that is much faster compared to other world’s most democratic states (Sisuka, 2017a). There is also an important indicator revealing that the development and democracy correlation is not strong, owing to the increase of authoritarian governments reaping the economic development benefits, yet they evade any efforts to ease their grip on political power.
(Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, 2005). In this category countries in East Asia like India, Singapore and China are identified. These countries have been able to significantly perform much better than some of the Western democracies of this world. Over and above, in most countries, the process of democracy has not quite been linked with economic development. Such an assessment holds especially in most countries that are in Africa. They have extensively made attempts to make their political system a democracy, but economic development remains insignificant. A classic case could be that of Malawi whose democratization efforts are yet to produce desired results (Chagunda, 2021). Despite having introduced multipartyism in 1994, the country still stands among Africa’s poorest countries (Lars, 2011).

Development and democracy nexus in Africa

A critical analysis of Tables 1 and 2 provides some conclusions which are very intriguing concerning development and democracy in Africa. For instance, logically one would have expected Mauritius to be Africa’s most developed country by virtue of being ranked as a country that is highly democratic on the continent. Although in the world China is one of the world’s least democratic countries, it has a notable rate of economic development (Sisuka, 2017a). However, the analysis reveals that Seychelles which is even out of the top 10 range of Africa’s democracies stands as the most developed. To that effect and extent, linking democracy to development, or vice versa is difficult to make sense of it. Further to this finding, Libya a country ranked in the range of Africa’s worst 10 democracies has been placed under Africa’s most developed countries. Libya holds oil reserves that are in abundance for promoting development. Zambia, Namibia, and Tanzania appearing on the list of the most democratized states, are not anywhere near for consideration as Africa’s most developed. This observation renders weak the notion that democracy promotes development. In explaining this lack of correspondence, it can be argued that it is the availability of natural resources that propels a country’s development provided that such resources are put to good use.

This argument appears to be sensible when reference is made to Libya, a country labelled as one of Africa’s democracies that are very weak, yet one of the leaders in development at the continent level. It is noted that some of the largest reserves of oil in the world are found in Libya as indicated before (Sisuka, 2017a). Tables 1 and 2 show that in Africa, in all cases it is those countries that are the smallest with respect to population sizes like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Cape Verde which are leading in the top 10 for both development and democracy rankings. For democratic governance, it may be natural to consider it much easier to govern a few people than big populations like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and South Africa (SADC, 2015).

Research has shown as well that economic growth and development are easier and faster to achieve in countries that are small than in ones that are big (Ryan & Thomas 2012). The study by Ryan and Thomas is helpful to justify why small economies like Seychelles and Mauritius have ranked as the most developed on the continent. Social services like education and health are easily provided to communities that are small making it easier to attain a status of development that is much better.

The nexus between development and democracy is also evidently clear in Africa as revealed in Tables 1 and 2. Several countries featuring in the top 10 of democracy are also appearing in the list of the top 10 developed countries. Five of them namely; Cape Verde, Tunisia, Mauritius, South Africa, and Botswana appear in the most developed rankings as well as in the most African advanced democracies. Four of them namely; Burundi, CAR, Chad, and Eritrea and appear in the list of countries that are least developed and appear as well on the weakest list of democracies. From this analysis in Africa, a positive correlation exists between development and democracy. It can also be argued that most countries in Africa have since attained political independence, use elections to change leadership, and currently working towards economic development though to varying degrees. From that perspective, they exercise a certain level of democracy necessary for development. Many countries in Africa allow citizens to participate actively in civic life including human rights protection and politics. This move towards democracy provides a flicker of hope that when democracy in Africa is ultimately improved the continent will be improved economically, in the manner in which development was enhanced by democracy in the United States and Europe.

Countries in Africa need to strike a balance between democracy and development in the absence of a template to achieve one of them or both at one go. This calls for a middle-of-the-road approach until a socio-economic equilibrium is reached across the continent. Therefore, the democracy-development nexus has to be cautiously implemented in order to promote sustainable development in Africa. It remains indisputable that democracy and development are major sustainable development ingredients. While development is an obvious ingredient Adejumobi (2000) asserts that democracy is pointless to the majority of people except if benefits and socio-economic goods are delivered to them. This is possible only if countries in Africa strengthen institutions tasked with the implementation of sustainable development. The African Union and regional economic communities could intensify their oversight roles to member states in this regard, otherwise, the target for Agenda 2030 could be missed by African states. Sustainable development is more necessary for the continent now than before, especially since, estimates are that Africa has been prejudiced in excess of US$1.8 trillion due to the illicit financial flows (IFFs) in the period 1970-2008, (AU, 2015). The African Union further reports that Africa continues to be losing resources worth US$150 billion annually. These problems of IFFs are a result of various factors that relate to democracy such as weak institutions, political instability, corruption; governance challenges; and enduring conflicts.
Conclusion

Sustainable development in Africa is envisaged to help meet basic human needs, promote environmental protection, achieve equality and ensure socio-economic development among others. If one imagines losses due to the IFFs Africa could have been one of the world’s well-developed continents, with good infrastructure, employment opportunities, and a stable and peaceful environment. The continent has a precarious democracy that exists due to various reasons including the relationship obtaining between development and democracy, and the role played by international and domestic social forces in the inhibition or promotion of democracy. This study shows that it is some of these considerations are missing in several frameworks and models that exist and being used for promoting sustainable development in Africa. Democracy and development should be balanced if sustainable development is to be successful because isolating one concept and pursuing another may not yield the desired results. Many African countries are still far from sustainable development because the gap between democracy and development remains very wide and deep.

Yet, constraints that are fundamental for the execution of sustainable development are located in the extent to which socio-economic development and democracy are intertwined. Many countries still have to achieve a certain degree of democracy and development and then marry the two to achieve sustainable development goals. Development and growth in Africa are distressed by undemocratic practices that create uncertainty. The African Union and its appendages are called upon to reign in democracy and development frameworks that are enforceable to each country and promote sustainable development goals in a holistic way. Further research could be carried out to exploit the debate on the link between democracy and development in the quest for Africa’s sustainable development. Further studies could also help to explore the challenges of how the ideological and epistemological tensions between democracy and sustainable development may be tackled in Africa.

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