
Addressing Good Governance In Africa



A Discussion Paper

This document is for discussion only. The ideas contained in this paper were refined through discussions involving fellows of the African Good Governance Network (AGGN) and other concerned stakeholders in the domain of good governance in Africa, at the 1st 2010 AGGN Seminar held on 21st - 27th of March, in Bonn, Germany. The persons mentioned in this document are for contacts only, and are not the authors of this document. This document was prepared by the Research and Publication Committee of the AGGN. It attempts to present in a neutral and objective way some issues pertaining to Good Governance in Africa. It does not represent the opinion of the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) or its agencies and services. Comments should be addressed directly to AGGN Research and Publication Committee through:

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Abbreviations

AAPAM:	African Association for Public Administration and Management
ABI:	Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut
AGA:	African Governance Architecture
AGGN:	African good Governance Network
AU:	African Union
CISDL:	Centre for International Sustainable Development Law
DAAD:	Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst
EPRDF:	The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EU:	European Union
IAS:	International Accounting Standards
LBS:	London Business School
LSEPS:	London School of Economics and Political Science
SAIIA:	South African Institute of International Affairs
UNESCAP:	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNRISD:	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USA:	United States of America

About the AGGN

The mission of the AGGN is to promote sustainable societies in Sub-Saharan Africa by advancing the understanding, development and implementation of good governance in the sub-continent. The group comprises of African scholars who have either studied in Germany or are still studying in Germany. Due to their qualifications they are numbered among the future decision makers dedicated to good governance principles in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its members consider it their duty to actively promote the values of good governance and thus contribute to the economic and political transformation processes in sub-Saharan Africa.

The AGGN was set up in 2007 under the auspices of the former German Federal President, Horst Köhler, by the DAAD. By initiating the Network, the DAAD envisions to make a contribution to the broadening and deepening of the academic collaboration between Africa and Germany and promote future key players in the domain of good governance.

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1. Introduction

This paper is AGGN's attempt at promoting discourse on *good governance* in Africa. It presents some points that need to be considered and debated upon with a view to introducing a more specific proposal. It therefore invites comments in particular on the following issues: definitions and contextual applications of the term, *good governance*, to Africa. AGGN is aware that good governance goes beyond the scope being discussed here; however, respondents are encouraged to evoke discussions beyond what has been presented. The main objective of creating this discourse is to gain broader contributions from relevant stakeholders to facilitate the generation of quality ideas for developing a practicable understanding of *good governance* within African context. The paper is divided in two parts: a background on how the paper was conceived and a more discursive part which raises important issues pertaining to good governance in Africa.

2. Background

The ideas contained in this paper were refined through discussions involving AGGN fellows, and other concerned stakeholders in the domain of good governance in Africa, at the 1st 2010 AGGN Seminar held from the 21st to 27th of March, in Bonn, Germany. Since most African States are either under dictatorial governments or in a period of transition from dictatorship to democracy, we believe that by emphasizing on good governance, these countries will have better chances for the restoration of the rule of law, democracy, peoples' faith in state institutions and hence sustainable development. But with the concept of good governance being a term of controversy, its implementation and practice have become muddled up with difficulties. For instance, it is difficult to explain to most persons on the African streets the true meaning of the term.

The concept of *good governance* "is emerging as a principle of international law" (Chowdhury and Skarstedt, 2005, p. 3) and African countries and their agencies are expected to adhere to it. The concept has not only attracted worldwide interests, but has provided a conceptual platform on which most nations are judged. This is probably why the various prescriptions of good governance (for Africa) coming from academics, researchers; institutional and regional powers outside Africa are prone to have some appeal in the urgent search for solutions to Africa's problems. Ayeni (2000, p. 1) notes that "the air of confidence that covers much of the good governance literature has a messianic tone to it... there are important reasons to be cautious". Judging from the fact that the very serious crises facing most African countries today do contrast sharply with those faced by most part of the world (ibid), this discussion paper calls for explorations on the possibility of reaching a consensus on an *African* meaning of *good governance*. Therefore, the important questions under investigation are: is the concept of good governance alien to Africa? How best can the term be defined to reflect the needs of Africa?

3. Good Governance: A New Paradigm?

Governance is certainly not a new term. According to Bhattarai (2006, p. 2), the concept had been dealt with by Max Weber, who in the early twentieth century, without necessarily using the term, "outlined the functions of a bureaucracy that would facilitate development and called for

strict observance of the rule of law and legal rationality –and also advised against a mixture of private interests with the public responsibilities of the bureaucrat”. Many African scholars, like Ali Mazrui and Claude Ake, have dealt with the concept from an African context. The term evolved from the search by economics and political scientists for an all-embracing concept capable of conveying diverse meanings not covered by the traditional term *government* (Rhodes, 1996). However, the qualification of the term with *good* has given birth to a whole new concept –*good governance*.

It is popularly asserted that the term, *good governance*, was initially articulated in a 1989 World Bank publication which identified it as a structural necessity for market reform. In the introduction to the report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: from Crisis to Sustainable Growth. A long-term perspective study*, Barber Conable¹ (in World Bank, 1989, p. xii) asserted that the major cause of poor economic performance in Africa was “the failure of public institutions” and noted that “private sector initiative and market mechanisms are important, but must go hand-in-hand with good governance...” From different authors we have learnt that the origin of the term can be attributed to this famous 1989 World Bank report. Unfortunately, many of these authors leave out the fact that this report was specifically on Africa and most importantly, it was African scholars in the likes of Claude Ake, Waheed Oshikoya, and Gladson Kayira (see world Bank, 1989, p. x) who coined the term *good governance* in this report. This is probably why Mkandawire² (2007, p. 1) broke the silence of contemporary researchers on the issue by revealing that the “concept of good governance originated among African scholars in relation to state-society relations in Africa, expressing the concern that these be developmental, democratic, and socially inclusive.” The term is believed to have been “taken up by the international development business - in particular the World Bank - and used by them as a new label for aid conditionality, in particular structural adjustment in all its various manifestations” (ibid). Ayeni (2000, p. 5) supports this assertion by authoritatively positing that the concept of *good governance* “is largely a re-packaging of development items that many of us are well familiar with.”

What appears really obvious in the debate surrounding the origin of the term is that the concept of good governance (as is being presented to Africa today) is more of a case of *old wine in new bottles*. As Shakespeare (1600) once questioned, “what’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” What matters is that *something* is and not what it is called. As it seems today, what is termed *good governance* today existed in some African societies in various forms in the past. For instance, it is not disputable that pre-modern African societies had sets of rules, principles and practices that ensured fairness in societies and respect for all members. These principles and practices were aimed towards the overall development of the societies. The question of the goodness, badness, weakness, effectiveness, efficiency of these

¹ The World Bank’s President at that time

² Thandika Mkandawire was UNRISD Director from 1998. A Swedish national, he is an economist with many years’ experience in the promotion of comparative research on development issues

rules depends very much on the spectacle from which they are being viewed. To some, it was good; to others it might not have been –but it was there.

4. Some Perceptions of Good Governance from African Perspective

UNESCAP holds that *governance* means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). On the other hand, it portrays *good governance* as a sort of *governance* that embodies processes that are participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and (which follow) the rule of law. While it may not be necessary to dwell so much on the current definitions of good governance, as many other definitions appear to have been derived from the aforementioned, it may be important to note that the term comes with its own controversies. Aubut (2004, p. 11) refers to it as not just a mere concept, but an “agenda.” Leftwich (2007) exposed it as one of the three main requirements for contemporary western aid – the other two being promotion of open market, friendly and competitive economies; and support for democratisation and improvement of human rights records.

While it is very difficult to speculate on how *good* the conventional paradigm of good governance (as espoused by the world’s major economic and political powers) is for Africa, there is need for African institutions to start addressing its meaning within a localized context. This is very critical to the future state of the continent because apart from the practical difficulties experienced in practicing western-structured norms in Africa, it brings further “ideological baggage” which may even threaten the “entire gains that have been made in re-establishing significance of governance in the development process” of the continent (Ayeni, 2005, p. 5). This calls to question on what constitutes good or bad in governance in Africa.

i) From a Political Perspective

Good governance as often used in universal ways, is biased and has ideological underpinnings in its conception and theorization –because the politics of power and hegemony in the global arena largely influence how the concept is operationalized (Eyasu, 2006). This is probably why it has become *normal* that in contemporary discourse of *good governance*, commentators always begin with apologetic acknowledgements on how the term is a difficult one. In some cases, proffered definitions have been accused of being too *loose* while others have been rebuffed for being too *tight*. Worst of all, when subjected to the whims and vagaries of African realities, researchers appear to have been left too busy with *intellectualizing* the term rather than working towards *materializing* it.

From a political perspective, AGGN is of the opinion that: governance in the context of today’s Africa can be said to be *good* when power relations between those who govern and those who are governed are strongly cemented by the interest to promote sustainable human development. It could further be considered *good* when it effectively facilitates the generation and utilization of public resources in a manner that secures the human development imperatives of a particular

African society. In fact, governance could be deemed *good* if those tasked with the responsibility to manage public resources and affairs exercise capability and willingness to account to the people on whose behalf they govern. At the same time, the governed must have adequate rights to participate in demanding for that accountability. Good governance is the whole set of *criss-crossing* and webs of human-development oriented engagements between the governed and those governing –so far its result is geared towards a benefit of all.

ii) *From an environmental and Natural Resource Perspective*

In a continent where natural resources are in abundance and human (ethnic) diversities appear to have become building-blocks for conflicts, political impasses, social chaos and economic hardship; the conventional construct of good governance tends to become somewhat *disparaging* and *utopian* in its implementation. Considering that the natural resource management cultures vary from place to place in Africa, the enforcement of conventional good governance principles could be viewed in some places with suspicion. For instance, it may take different institutions, strategies or approaches for a system to convince the *karamojong*³ (of Uganda) that not all the cows around them are truly theirs than it will take to convince the *Fulani*⁴ (of Nigeria) that not all green lands around them are permissible for grazing. It is particularly difficult for these people (and many others), with their various *unique* world-views, to have their immediate environments subjected to the conventionality of good governance as practiced in the advanced economies. Special cases like these, call for a mode of involvement of African communities that emphasizes on consensus and participation in a way that is practicable to them. AGGN therefore posits that the perception of good governance could be summed in the context of “processes.” Good governance could be viewed as the processes within which the public, especially where natural resources are situated, participate in ensuring and guaranteeing strategic and sustainable exploitation and benefits from the resources, in a democratic environment devoid of coercion. For this to work in most African states, we are of the view that it must be characterized by:

- Active and democratic participation of local communities
- Transparent processes in decision-making and implementation
- Equitable and sustainable benefit from natural-resource proceeds to local communities
- Environmental integrity
- Absence of foreign intrusions or externalities that negatively affect local communities
- Periodic monitoring and evaluation of resource exploitation and benefit streams
- Existence of legitimate institutions and processes to undertake auditable procedures

This implies that while national development is enhanced from the natural resources, at least, the local communities around the resource must at a minimum enjoy peaceful and direct

³ Nomadic ethnic group in Northwestern Uganda and part of Kenya, mainly cattle keepers. They have a cultural believe that all cattles originated from them

⁴ Nomadic ethnic group in Nigeria, also mainly cattle rearers. They have a cultural practice that all green lands are meant for grazing and always encroach on others' land

improvement of their livelihoods and enjoyment of proceeds, in the long-term. Through this, an economic upsurge that could deepen and widen equitable resource distribution within African countries could evolve. By extension, the frequent emigration of thousands of the continent's brightest and most skilled human resources to industrialized countries every year can be checked.

iii) *From a Corporate Governance Perspective*

Corporate governance is an important consideration for investors around the world. Integrating good governance into corporate governance in Africa, therefore, will produce greater business outputs. Considering that Africa is the forgotten continent for business, with its share of world trade too small and hugely concentrated on natural resources (Nganga et al., 2003), the continent's corporate environment is usually viewed with suspicion. Jensen and Meckling's (1976) identified two possible problems with corporations –from managerial moral hazard, due to lack of full ownership, managers are unable to capture the full benefits of their efforts and at the same time they do not bear the full costs of their actions. In most African countries, there appears to be high mix of business with state politics. Ownerships are in most cases concentrated around top-political elites. Other stakeholders, especially minority shareholders lack adequate legal and institutional protections. Although corporations do adopt International Accounting Standards (codes), they barely put them into practice. Hence, managerial deficiencies, abuse of discretion and self-succession problems are rampant in businesses in the continent. AGGN is of the view that good governance must play a role in aligning the interests of politicians, bureaucrats (principal) and the electorate (agents). Considering the varying corporate cultures, *good corporate governance* in Africa should imply the practice of business codes that embody processes and systems by which provider organizations are directed, controlled and held to account relative to their prevailing business cultures –so far shareholders' values are legally maximized, ethically sustained and fairness is maintained within the system.

5. *Identifying the Responsibilities of Actors in Governance*

AGGN notes that governance in Africa is hinged mainly on governments and politics. In general, *governance* should not just be about these. Apart from other institutions, *government* (the state) and the *governed* (the people) are two actors identified within *governance*. *Government* has the responsibilities for propelling and inspiring the *governed* for sustainable development –in this regard, most African governments have proved to be bad examples. The *governed* (which includes civil societies, the private sector and other citizens) must not seize undue advantage of weaknesses of the *government*, vice versa. No matter how tough it may be, the *governed* should be proactive and have the will to stay on the right course, even if the ship of *government* is wobbling. They must use tools such as citizenship participation, vision (direction) and access to information in order to fulfill their responsibilities within the domain of governance.

6. *Criteria for making Good Governance work in Africa*

Good governance is generally taken to mean “a condition whereby responsibilities are discharged in an effective, transparent, and accountable manner while bad governance is

associated with maladministration in the discharge” of responsibilities (Amoako, 2003, p. 2). If there is one thing that we have learned in the past two decades, it is that there is a big gulf between good governance theories and the realities of politics in all countries –not excluding the advanced democracies. This gulf is most obvious in the African cases. Ake (1993) holds the view that the "absence of enabling conditions for democratic participation at the grassroots is the greatest obstacle to democracy in Africa, just as the transformation of society for the empowerment of ordinary people is the greatest challenge of democratization..." Chabal⁵ (2008) notes that the good *governance agenda*, advocated in NEPAD and the Washington Consensus, have focused on structural and formal institutional arrangements of state and after nearly 30 years of experimentation, has not delivered the expected results. May be there is need for a refinement of the good governance prescriptions? May be other political forces and systems are at work against its practice in Africa? To understand why calls for good governance have not worked, one need to understand how neo-patrimonial power is exercised, how it affects the operation of the state, how it integrates formal and informal political processes and determines the nature of the *social compact* between the government and the governed (ibid). So there is need for governance to be deemed good mainly in terms that makes sense locally. Taking cognizance of the social and political environments of most African countries, should the bar be lowered in terms of the principles needed for good governance in Africa? May be, may be not! Whatever the case, we advocate that donor agencies’ expectations from Africa be streamlined to suit the realities in the parts of the continent where they operate. We therefore call for emphasis on the following criteria in defining good governance for Africa:

- The power and influence of external change agents and outside resources on States and people
- Removal of obnoxious cultural barriers to good governance (e.g. gender, woman and child rights) without demonizing the cultural rubrics of the African societies
- Organic consolidation of existing effective and efficient governance systems towards good governance
- Emphasis on cultural and historical peculiarities of African States and peoples
- Need for more culturally sustainable institutional arrangements

7. African Good Governance versus African Governance Architecture

At the Technical Meeting on the *African Governance Architecture*, 15th to 17th March 2010 (Banjul, the Gambia), Mr. Chrysantus Ayangafac (Political Affairs, AU Commission) through a presentation, introduced the *African Governance Architecture* as the overall political and institutional framework for the promotion of governance in Africa. The meeting specifically introduced the following as the major pillars of African Governance Architecture:

- *Pillar 1: Governance vision: shared values space and normative framework*

⁵ Professor Patrick Chabal, of Kings College London, has been engaged in a long-term project combining the study of culture in comparative politics and an enquiry into the theory of the social sciences.

- *Pillar 2: Institutions and actors:* various institutions with governance mandate. The sum of these actors form the institutional framework of the Architecture
- *Pillar 3: Three-processes and interactions/ the governance platform:* the third axis of the African Governance Architecture as constituting the process and mechanism of interactions (compare programme of the technical meeting on the African governance architecture, 15th - 17th March 2010, Banjul, the Gambia)

The question then is what exactly is African Governance Architecture? In the recommendations that emerged from the Yaoundé Working Session, there was a firm endorsement of the idea of the African Governance Architecture being developed as the framework for “facilitating coordination and complementarity, and information exchange on governance work in Africa.” In addition to placing Regional Economic Communities and AU Organs at the centre of the Governance Architecture, the Yaoundé meeting also concluded that it was “essential that a governance platform or mechanism be established for further and ongoing dialogue on Governance” (Joiner, 2010, p. 2).

While we discuss good governance, it is noteworthy for all not to forget that the main governing body for Africa, the AU, has its own framework on governance which although in line with moving Africa forward, may not necessarily be said to be in line with the framework of good governance as established in the advanced democracies. The reality is that at the moment, the AU appears to be showing their dissatisfaction with the concept of *good governance* by endorsing another term, *African governance Architecture* (AGA), rather than African *good governance* Architecture. To further buttress this point: many of us might not have noticed this, but it is real. Right on the AU’s official website, one is welcomed by the introductory slogan - “*an efficient and effective African Union for a new Africa.*” This being a vision is important for Africa –as we definitely need effectiveness as well as efficiency in our continent. However, according to report from AGGN’s observer at the last AU-meeting held on this subject, it became clear that the concept of *good governance* is not gracefully embraced by AU. Instead, what appeared to be more appreciated was the notion of *effective governance* –a notion AU believes catches more realistically the imperatives of nation-building, stability and peace-building in Africa. The inference from this is clear –even though the economically advanced countries are working hard at preaching *good governance* to African countries, indeed there is still a genuine question about what the *good* in good governance entails to Africa.

8. Defining Good Governance for Africa

Different agencies and institutions have made several attempts at defining good governance. These agencies in most cases define the term from the lens of their different institutional goals. For instance, the World Bank’s emphasis on the term has been on “the economic dimensions and the state’s capacity to effectively use their development assistance” (Nanda, 2006, p. 273). The EU tends to trim its definition of the term towards democracy. Most other acclaimed agents of

good governance for Africa, like the USA government, tend to subject their prescription of the term to international politics.

If Africa must attain sustainable development, *good governance* must be viewed from a more comprehensive lens rather than the narrow political and economic views which have overshadowed other important aspects of the lives of the African. Given our unique stands on promoting feasible and viable governance that benefits all within and outside the African continent, AGGN seeks to define good governance in such a way as to provide protection for all Africans⁶ while not limiting its adherence to African governments, but to indulge the African person to adopt genuine expression of opinion, affection and passion on matters relating to Africa. The implication is that, from an African background, good governance must extend to family, clan, ethnic and general cultural values. At this stage, AGGN is not rendering a specific definition of good governance in this discussion paper because, understanding the significance of doing so, we would like to gain inputs from the general African public (and stakeholders in African governance) in order to finally come up with a position on the term. However, what the discussion paper has achieved at this point is to identify certain areas where such definitions could lay emphasis on.

9. Conclusion

There is widespread concern about the meaning of *good governance* and its practice in African countries. With the exception of few countries, there seems to be an aura of pessimism surrounding the topic of *good governance* within Africa. This paper, written in an effort to promote discourse on the subject, has raised these concerns. It has shown the ambiguity surrounding *good governance* by probing into its origin, its usage and some definitions by different actors and institutions. These actors, institutions and experts who are promoters of good governance do have some motives which affect the way they define the term. The question is, are these motives in the best interest of Africa? It is hoped that the discourse emanating from this paper would help in throwing more light on this.

The paper is based on the widely acknowledged premise that African states need to embrace *good governance* in order to *develop*: increase economic growth and peoples' welfare. This is why the AGGN feels it is imperative that *good governance* in Africa should recognize African realities. This is important in order to make the concept easily understandable to many and more practicable in African countries. We therefore hope that this paper will spur a responsible discourse which may finally give birth to clearer definitions and perceptions on the concept.

⁶ This includes persons, institutions, the environment, cultures, etc.

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