The Plight of African States and Good Governance

The Japan Institute of International Affairs
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1. Prologue

Promoting good governance and improving governance in Africa has drawn increasing attention from the international community as a new approach to solving a variety of problems such as military conflicts, poverty, and sluggish economic development. The question of how to achieve good governance came under the spotlight in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War era. Establishing good governance, along with democratization, has now come to be recognized an issue related to the “conditionality” imposed by donor countries on recipients in exchange for financial assistance.

Structural reform programs crafted by the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s were the first set of policy prescriptions by the world community to address sluggish development in Africa. Under “the Washington Consensus,” the World Bank and the IMF called for the battered economies of Africa, which were plagued with expanding budget and current-account deficits since the late-1970s, to reform their political and economic structures as a condition for creditor countries to start negotiations to reschedule their debt repayments. The IMF and World Bank programs inevitably prompted drastic changes in the political and economic systems established by African states after their independence from European countries. The consensus called on African countries to discard earlier economic policies, which were characterized by economically inefficient management by state-run companies and protectionist trade policies that let these state-run firms stay alive. The reforms aimed to introduce market mechanisms in African nations and help them to escape chronically anemic economic development by placing state-run businesses under private management and promoting deregulation.

But despite many years of effort by the IMF and the World Bank to promote structural adjustment in Africa, economic growth in the region fell short of expectations. The World Bank, evaluating the progress of structural reform measures, conceded the programs did not generate the desired results, saying these measures only laid a foundation for economic recovery[1]. The World Bank thus effectively acknowledged that merely following market-oriented economic principles is not effective in achieving sustainable economic development.

As the international political environment underwent rapid changes following the failure of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment polices, and the collapse of the Cold War structure from the latter half of the 1980s to the early-1990s, good governance began to gather momentum worldwide, along with democratization in Africa, as a potentially indispensable element for development in the region. This was also pushed by the global movement toward democratization. In other words, the Bretton Woods organizations, first and foremost among the international donor community, reflected upon the failure of traditional aid policies, which largely relied on the recipients’ efforts to reform their economic structure. Ultimately they came to recognize political democratization, as both a universal value and a necessary and sufficient condition for achieving economic development and growth.

Good governance, which also has political aspects, thus came to be recognized as a universally valuable tool for resolving a variety of issues in modern Africa in the wake of the collapse of the Cold War structure. Ensuring democratization was now seen as a precondition for realizing economic development.

Before examining issues involving good governance we should ask ourselves what governance means. Dictionaries define the term as the proper management of official duties, but the term encompasses concepts that are extremely complex. Defined in simplest terms, governance has to do with the manner in which a country is governed, the way politics should operate, and how authority is exercised.

Organizations such as the IMF and World Bank define governance as the way in which social resources are controlled in order to exercise political power and promote social and economic development. This definition highlights the role played by governmental authorities in establishing a framework for economic activity and in deciding how the benefits of such activity are distributed. It also reveals the essence of relations between those who govern and those who are governed.

Governance primarily comprises the essence of a political regime, its mechanisms for exercising authority in controlling the social and economic resources of a country, the degree of competence in public authorities' formulation and implementation of policy, and the ability of those authorities to fulfill their duties generally. Strengthening the functions of public authority—legislative, executive and judicial, establishing the rule of law, managing the public sector, cracking down on corruption, and curbing the rise in military expenditures are the key aspects of governance.

This paper seeks to make proposals as to what kind of governance should be established in Africa by examining the social and historical factors related to governance, and the problems African countries are encountering in building their states.

2. Economic failures in African countries

Economic statistics compiled on Africa, in many cases, do not necessarily reflect economic reality. One must therefore consider whether such statistics actually capture the true state of African economies. One cannot blindly trust in the reliability of the data, particularly recent growth rates for African countries published by the Bretton Woods institutions. The reliability of such data is suspect because it is based on statistics presented by African countries themselves. Per capita gross domestic product in African nations has generally been stagnant since independence in the 1960s. Over the past 10 years GDP has contracted significantly in Africa, a phenomenon unseen in other parts of the world. Doubts about the accuracy of economic statistics notwithstanding, the data generally show the severity of the economic plight gripping African countries.

Africa's share of total world trade has fallen by half over the past 20 years while its imports of grain have tripled and its cumulative external debt has jumped twentyfold over the same period. Africa's economic plight is reflected in the depopulation of rural areas, rising urban unemployment, repeated fiscal crises, the collapse of the banking system, and capital flight, which, taken together, can safely be described as a general failure of economic policy.

Many African countries underwent industrialization in two stages. The first stage of industrialization occurred within the political framework of the colonial period. Looking back on the process, the first stage of industrialization efforts was apparently targeted only at sub-regional markets. In a sense, African countries were victims of the bad economic policy of early post-independence governments, which rushed to nationalize businesses without the necessary experience in economic management. Under this industrial policy, many private companies were integrated and nationalized under a sloppy management system. As businesses targeted only domestic markets, the first stage of industrialization efforts inevitably ended in failure.

In the 1970s, international economic cooperation organizations and commercial banks embarked on the second stage of industrialization in Africa. In the late-1970s, industrialization in Africa did not progress as anticipated, except in a few countries where private industries were successfully diversified without international support. With the exception of a small group of industries that have traditionally been shielded from imports due to government protectionism, such as liquor sellers and beer hall operators, many nationalized companies were on the brink of bankruptcy. Many projects that had received huge capital injections stalled or flopped even before they began. In light of the devastation of African industry, international aid organizations reluctantly acknowledged in the early-1980s that their economic cooperation policies and their efforts to industrialize the continent had floundered.

There were at least three factors behind this failure. First, the industrial model used to promote the nationalization of African industries turned out to be useless. Despite predictions of failure, one project after another was lavished with large budgets by corrupt politicians. Such politicians incessantly interfered with the hiring of personnel and other business decisions of state-run companies. In addition to a lack of technology, many promising small businesses in Africa faced unnecessarily strict regulations designed to protect the vested interests of big industries. And many state-sponsored corporations were effectively pushed into bankruptcy because domestic markets were too small to absorb production. Nevertheless, many were spared the pain of bankruptcy through ongoing government subsidies.

Second, industrialized countries contributed to the economic failure in Africa as they sought short-term commercial benefits from their participation in financial assistance to the continent. International aid organizations faced a political dilemma as they were caught between calls from leaders of advanced nations to ensure that financial assistance to Africa bring about commercial benefits for donors, and the demands of African leaders friendly to those donor countries. Increased international liquidity following the outbreak of the oil crisis in 1973 and the political motives of industrialized countries to clinch as many large-scale contracts as possible in Africa worsened the situation. Under these circumstances, banks in industrialized countries stepped up lending to finance economic assistance and development projects in Africa. This lending ended up being funneled into large corporations from advanced countries. Donor countries sold factories built in Africa that had been deemed economically unviable and this left African countries with more external debts.

Third, the economic environment in Africa soon turned unfavorable to private investment. Failure to guarantee the rule of law, incessant intervention by bureaucrats and politicians with huge discretionary influence over the affairs of private business, small markets, rising manufacturing input costs, and socially inadequate legislation all combined to dampen effectiveness of industrial investment by private companies.

The failed management of state-run industries and the resulting economic crisis in Africa caused disruptions in essential public services. In general, public institutions charged with providing these services, regulating social and economic activities, and ensuring livelihoods are responsible for creating an environment that will directly affect the organization and growth of corporations and industries.

In the case of Africa, however, these institutions largely failed in their duties. Hospitals, for example, failed to provide basic healthcare. Construction companies failed to build and real estate firms did not manage properties. Utilities provided electricity but power outages were commonplace. Water was supplied but it was not drinkable. Projects to develop farm villages ended in failure. Almost all financial institutions set up to spur African development were on the brink of bankruptcy. Public corporations in the commercial sector managed to survive, but only with the injection of public funds.

That many public institutions in Africa offer shoddy services is not exactly a new discovery. The problem has been universally acknowledged for at least a decade. This was the impetus behind the “institution-building” projects implemented over the last 10 years to enhance the ability of government institutions and to promote their reformation.

3. Africa’s difficulties in nation-building

Since the beginning of modern history, Africa has been at the mercy of outside powers and events. The continent has been treated as something to be traded among major powers. The fate of Africa has been shaped by the slave trade, colonial domination and partition by European powers, African nations' struggle for independence with borders remaining unchanged as artificially drawn during the colonial era, strategic games by major powers during the Cold War, and the withdrawal of financial assistance afterward. In short, the content has been always affected by the vicissitudes of global politics. Even now, Africa is in the process of decolonization, with states on the continent still seeking to define themselves. We cannot study Africa without studying its historical context; presenting policy proposals for African countries is a far more difficult task.

The 1960 U.N. resolution on Africa and the establishment in 1963 of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) signified international recognition of the independence African states had achieved from European colonial powers. But they were still in the process of decolonization as of the early 1960s. At that stage of decolonization, it did not matter whether a country had the ability to govern itself. Newly independent African countries were simply recognized as sovereign states.

In the modern world, states derive from the concept of "public." They are defined as entities that effectively and rationally fulfill their tasks and govern public affairs. But many sub-Saharan African countries do not have a concept of public as it is understood in Western society. In Africa, states are essentially privately owned and controlled by their leaders, whereas public is defined as that which is subject to the influence of the social groups or communities from which those leaders arise. Political leaders in Africa, abusing their political power and status, thus work to protect the interests of the social groups to which they belong. In so doing, these leaders are able to maintain their status and position.

In the first phase of building of a modern state, conflicts occur between state sovereignty and individual rights[2]. As citizens become involved in the process of building the state, however, sovereignty itself derives from the people. In other words, two conflicting elements, the state and the individual—collectivism and individualism—must overlap and the tension between them must be sublimated before a modern state can be built. In Africa, however, such a conflict has never existed. Instead, uniquely "African" modern states, unprecedented in world history, were created, according to many scholars on international affairs[3].

In Africa, heads of state do not adequately distribute national resources to people. They neither represent their states nor are they sovereign over them. They merely represent certain social groups and serve to protect their interests. Simply stated, they are heads of state who lack the legitimate authority to govern. In countries where leaders are unwilling to fulfill their obligations to the people, public goods and authority are treated as private possessions, while dominant ethnic groups monopolize precious economic resources, a situation that makes economic growth and development in such countries nearly impossible.

Many previous studies of African political systems have been overly focused on the broadest picture of what has been unfolding on the continent, leading scholars to overstate the significance of state integration and social phenomena such as political control. In the past, Africa scholars were expected only to explain the virtue of tradition and its social penetration, modernization, national consensus, and a political system based on compulsion and dependence. Few looked into the dynamics and conflict that comprise the political reality of sub-Saharan African states. Scholars must now examine how the current political system has developed, how it functions, and its interaction with various social subgroups. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa have extremely complex political systems. After achieving independence, they joined the global political and economic community as sovereign states, but their social systems are indistinguishable from the precolonial era. In other words, the social systems observed in colonial days and the continuing dependence of African states on their former suzerains are nothing but a demonstration of inherent characteristics in African society.

Nation-building efforts in African countries after independence and their subsequent dissolution have been studied thoroughly, as scholars see that Africa is still in the process working toward independence and decolonization. Many theories have been posited to explain the ongoing economic, political, and social plight of Africa. Many claim that no other part of the world has been more victimized by misrule, evil government, and malignant states than Africa. I examine this claim below.

The question of whether Africa has suffered more than other parts of the world is controversial among Africa scholars. Many instead point to factors behind a host of problems Africa is facing now, including lax administrative management during the colonial era, problems deriving from the Cold War structure, incoherent U.S. policy toward Africa, irresponsible investment by American businesses, indifference by the United Nations, excessively generous WTO rules, overpopulation, environmental problems, and greedy behavior by African leaders and their subordinates.

When African nations attained independence, their leaders used terms like “African integration” and “respect for national borders” to justify their independence from European powers. But these slogans, as used by African leaders, have made our perceptions of modern Africa chaotic and ambiguous. The foundation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was a significant event in African history as it marked the end of colonialism and imperialism. But seen from overseas, it was merely confirmation that African nations had become free of colonial rule. Later, the OAU degenerated, becoming an Africa’s version of a general meeting of a labor union where its leaders met. For the past few years Africa’s efforts under slogans such as “African integration” and “joint action” have fallen through.

Thanks to the efforts of Libya’s revolutionary leader Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, and Ali Abd as-Salam at-Triki, Libya’s secretary for African unity[4], the OAU, following the 2001 summit in Sirte, Libya, and the 2002 summit in Durban, South Africa, became the African Union, which opened a new chapter in Africa’s history, one of the most remarkable events of recent times on the continent.

Since the beginning of the new century, perceptions of African nations have changed slightly compared with the period immediately following independence. The historical and social uniqueness of African nations is now drawing more attention. And discussions about the continent are based more on statistics and other concrete data than on the stereotypes and preconceptions of the past. An enormous amount of data, methods to analyze the implementation of public services, and economic statistics and standard of living index released by all African countries have become available in recent years, making it possible to evaluate African realities. Ideas of good governance and democracy that had been generally ignored for 40 years by many scholars under the pretext that such concepts were not applicable to Africa, have finally come to be recognized as universal principles and value with the end of the Cold War. Many have started to say they should be applied to Africa as much as to other parts of the world. Changes on the political and social fronts in Africa brought about by efforts to build good governance differ significantly from what we have seen in the United States and Europe. Despite this, all African countries now find it impossible to revert to old political values and tactics. It is self-evident that good governance is irreversible.

4. Social structure in Africa over several centuries

For several centuries the African continent has been a mosaic of more than 800 cultural communities, each tied by families. In each community, the structure of family lineage, particularly its paternal structure, was instrumental in creating a unique political community or society. Cultural anthropologists in the United States and Europe call such a political community or society a “realm,” that is, an area under the political authority of a tribe or “kingdom[5].” A political community effectively controls several hundred to several thousand square kilometers and guarantees military, legal, and religious security for its members, as well as providing and stockpiling food for them.

Outside the framework of traditional agricultural society, people who engaged in animal husbandry moved from one place to another on a seasonal basis to find new settlements. They usually moved from north to south and back according to seasonal changes in the environment and, in the process, built a certain community within the group. The movement of such communities affected the scope of land controlled by farmers. Farmers and herders traded to make up for products in short supply, but their commercial relations sometimes became a source of contention. Disputes were usually between farmers and herders in one local area but they sometimes led to larger conflicts involving more than two regions. In savanna areas, grain, salt, ironware, pottery, and wooden products spread as these products became part of a vast web of commercial networks that stretched across the entire African continent. The flow of trade created centers for the distribution of goods, which eventually became urban centers with commercial privileges and which began to function like the control tower of a network system.

The agricultural and nomadic societies that have existed for several centuries in Africa can be categorized according to various factors, including the scale of networks binding societies together, the degree of hierarchy in the society, and whether the society has a system to manage public services such as defense, legal systems, diplomacy, policing, and finance. Sparsely populated areas such as grasslands and forests tended to have segmented societies with no centralized institutions, while more densely populated areas gave rise to communities with public institutions. In many cases, the community’s supreme leader was not a monarch but a brotherly figure. His power was not absolute, but counterbalanced by other forces in society that exercised power flexibly and served to hold the leader’s power in check. As this system of checks and balances functioned, many “realm” and “kingdoms” were able to survive for many years. Replacement of ruling families never affected traditional customs or practices. The country of Burundi provides an example: it had a rotational system for choosing its leader from among several aristocratic families. The leader’s post switched from one family to another over generations. This system was designed to prevent one ruling family from controlling the country over long periods. In traditional African societies, political structures tended to become aristocratic but no African country other than Ethiopia had a feudalistic political structure[6].

5. European powers’ incomprehension of African society during colonial rule

During the era of colonial rule, European powers tried to “civilize” Africa but they lacked an understanding of the values of traditional African society. Such misperceptions and these powers’ imposition of their structures and concepts on African countries gave rise to incomprehension in many aspects. Thus, although African leaders inherited states from their former colonial rulers at independence, these political and governmental structures were artificial constructs of the suzerain states rather than structures derived from traditional African society. This was so despite the fact that leaders who were supposed to play an important role in issuing instructions to make these new states functional still retained the same values and ideas they held before Westerners began colonizing the continent years before.

After independence African countries’ relations with former suzerain countries in the Western world were reversed in terms of seeking economic benefits. When colonial rule began in Africa, suzerain countries tried to reap economic benefits from their control of colonies. After they had won their independence and sovereignty, Africans expected their governments to try to recoup the losses from their former rulers. People also demanded money and wealth in return for their allegiance. For African leaders, the purpose of governing the country was not to ensure that taxation would be minimal. On the contrary, the goal was to collect as much money as possible by imposing the highest taxes possible on the governed in order to sustain the layer of subordinates working for them. The cozy relationships between leaders and their subordinates led to the corruption of African society and led to a situation where inequality, inequity, and bribery were ubiquitous.

6. The client system, patronage, and patrimony

When African countries achieved freedom from colonial rule by Western powers, their newly-created states were modeled after those of Western countries; African leaders attempted to introduce mechanisms of government from these models. But such attempts soon faltered and their administrations degenerated into institutions in which the governing body favored its clients with money and other commercial favors. Although it is an exaggeration to say governments completely lost their regulatory and distributional function in providing public services, governments were nonetheless selective in fulfilling their duties, representing those segments of society that supported them rather than the citizenry as a whole. In these countries, the allocation of benefits was not based on the concept of surplus or margin of interests as commonly understood in the West, but on capital. Thus, African governments try to collect money from people by tapping into the capital of farmers, craftsmen, merchants, and entrepreneurs who are engaged in key industries or those regarded as producing wealth.

In such societies, the state is private property of those who control it. It is therefore is often called a "patrimonial" or "neo-patrimonial" state. States with patrimonial systems call for national unity and use a variety of norms symbolizing traditional culture in order to give their authority the appearance of legitimacy for the majority. In such a society, it is difficult to imagine the concept of "public goods" emerging.

Newly emerging African states used financial assistance from foreign countries as an instrument to smooth the development process, but foreign aid later became a source of contention among competing interest groups and led to conflict. Economic assistance from foreign countries was often used to make up for shortfalls in government revenue resulting from defective tax systems. Some of the funds from foreign countries intended for development were instead funneled into the pockets of leaders. At the same time, international aid organizations lacked the knowledge of African society and history necessary to make their aid to the continent effective. Due to this lack of knowledge, aid organizations had difficulty communicating the concept of public goods to African leaders and the people in general. Unable to find appropriate means of training African leaders, aid agencies tried to impose strict regulations on Africa's public management. The African states, for their part, ceased to function in their supposed role as a mediator between various units in each country. These states thus eventually degenerated into entities that exercised coercion on civil society and suppressed people. State leaders did not ask their citizens whether their exercise of power was legitimate. Instead, they tried to confirm their legitimacy in the international community, busying themselves with lobbying to former suzerain countries and international aid organizations in hope that the legitimacy of their power would be established in the international community.

From the time of independence to the start of the democratization process in the 1990s, a single political party ruled in many African countries under the slogan of "state unification." During this period, a political party representing the community or region from which the president hailed ruled the country as a national party, and after multiparty systems were adopted, as a dominating party. Within the ruling party, factions fought each other for power. A faction usually represented the interests of particular regions or ethnic groups. Wrangling among factions often led some to splinter off from the ruling party. When an organization holds one particular individual as its leader, differing opinions within the organization and the consequent struggle for power usually lead to factional splits, and this applies to both ruling and opposition parties. In any case, political parties acting on behalf of one individual showed little enthusiasm for representing ordinary citizens in Africa. They were thus a poor vehicle for pursuing the broader public interest.

In other words, African countries, despite having attained independence, were engaged in a pointless "discussion in the desert." This is the impression that observers may get from African countries. Ethical standards regarding public goods and the rule of law were not established in many African countries, and their leaders became fixed on a patrimonial transfer of assets while their governments became cancerous[7]. Despite these difficulties, a segment of the population, aware of global trends, began listening to views and opinions outside their society, thanks to the rapid advance of mass media worldwide and large diasporas in Europe and North America. Authoritarianism was widespread in Africa and the gap between state functions and obligations on the one hand and rights of the people on the other continued to widen. This underscored the fact that the political structures adopted at the time of independence were not adaptable to African society.

7. Measures to improve governance

In any sovereign African country, the bureaucracy is seen as important and it has a higher status than civil society. Public servants seeking to advance democratization ideally should have a proper sense of public duty and take a neutral stance toward private-sector and individual interests. In most cases, however, public servants' sense of duty and solidarity are deeply connected to their paternalistic relationship with those they govern. That is, they have a patron-client relationship with citizens. Illegal public practices that promote bribery and other forms of corruption are often regarded as propriety rights and established customs. They are therefore not something that can be eliminated overnight with a slogan. A group of "New African leaders" including Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, Nicephore Soglo of Benin, and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso tried to crack down on bribery and corrupt public practices but their efforts did not produce significant results.

Under these circumstances, many experts and scholars on Africa have come to regard Africa as hopeless. Some make the unrealistic suggestion that African countries should be cut off from the rest of the world. African states' only chance for reform lies in promoting the reform of African elites, taking practical measures, and preventing the people and economies of heavily indebted countries from going broke. Governance should be improved through more effective allocation of tax revenues among many different social and functional categories, use of national resources to improve infrastructure, and implementation of specific measures such as providing maximum family allowances with minimum social security payments.

It is possible to promote democratization by adequately managing money in state coffers and financially supporting the socially disadvantaged so as to have their activities properly reflected in gross national product figures. Workers in the "informal sector," such as unlicensed craftsmen, who are major contributors to Africa's underground economy, should be given the same sorts of financial protection that employees at state-sponsored companies receive. Another important point to remember in promoting democratization in Africa is to ensure that political leaders and senior officials at big state-run companies are chosen from among young, talented people who have expertise in modern business management. Recruitment of such officials should not be decided by a handful of bureaucrats who play a subordinate role to local leaders.

African nations should focus more of their efforts on human resources development, including training and educating promising young people. Without such efforts, Africa will not be able to escape its "low development" status. Bad habits and illicit practices traditionally seen in Africa tend to emerge during elections. If citizens' political awareness is undeveloped and they have a poor grasp of the issues, they are likely to vote based on traditional allegiance to the leader and their sense of identification with him.

Building a viable education system will of course require an enormous infusion of capital. The international community needs to come to a consensus on the necessity of mid- and long-term efforts to achieve this goal. Many African countries cannot secure sufficient funds to finance costly human resources development programs. To make ends meet, African countries may need to integrate human resources programs being conducted on a sub-regional basis.

It may be necessary to resume the disciplinary functions of public corporations set up to stabilize prices of primary products in order to establish good governance in Africa. Most such public corporations were founded during the colonial era. Their mission was to stockpile primary goods with the highest value and distribute them to producers later. If prices for these goods are higher in international market than they are domestically, producers release them at prices that are lower than those at which the central government promised to buy.

In the first decade after independence this mechanism functioned well, especially in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis when demand for African resources skyrocketed. But the function of the public corporations deteriorated as some government officials who supervised the corporations abused their discretion and charged extraordinarily high fees.

At present, Africa is far from self-sufficiency in food, with demand for grain, particularly the major staple food, wheat, mostly met by imports. But Africa is still a major farm producer, with agricultural foods accounting for 40 percent of gross national product and 50 percent of total exports. It may be safe to say that increasing agricultural production and expanding trade is the key to the recovery of African economy.

8. Epilogue

If the measures I proposed above are implemented simultaneously and in an adequate manner, African countries have a reasonable expectation of reconstruction and rehabilitation. If African countries want to see these changes happen, however, high-ranking officials at all levels of government must first change their behavior. African countries need to rejuvenate their leadership. Only such a rejuvenation policy will accelerate the process of African reconstruction. Compared with earlier generations, the younger generation is less likely to get their hands dirty in the management of public goods. Given the fact that the younger generation is more talented and has a firmer grasp of public goods, management should be gradually shifted to such people.

An important role of presidents and government leaders in Africa is to select administrative officers based on rigorous scrutiny of their ability and, once chosen, throw their full support behind these officers in the carrying out of their duties. State heads generally need to be informed about what is going on inside and outside their countries, but this does not require them to micromanage every issue. If heads of state are forced to handle all matters themselves, they will have little time for their most important mission: ensuring that universal norms and values are maintained in the entire process of policy implementation. It is also necessary to promote the transfer of authority in the order of hierarchy among the central government, regional governments, and municipalities to improve governance overall.

African countries would also benefit from greater cooperation across the continent in coordinating their commercial and trade policies. This is particularly important in light of the increasing economic integration taking place at the sub-regional level in Africa. By promoting sub-regional trade cooperation, countries within the same region can complement each other, raising the economic benefits of such trade. Among the sub-regional African trade groups formed to promote cooperation are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). These sub-regional groups are an indication of Africa’s efforts to create common markets on the continent and are a step in the right direction. In particular, the decision by ECOWAS to simplify visa procedures for businesspeople traveling within the West African states and to waive their charges was an unprecedented step in Africa’s trade history.

If African nations achieve a degree of success in their commercial activity and can derive greater economic benefits for manufactured exports, their need for financial assistance from donor nations will lessen.

If a consensus is reached in Africa that state functions should be reformed on the basis of simplified norms and easy-to-understand rules, there are reasons for optimism about the future of Africa. Corrupt behavior by elite African bureaucrats is amplified mainly due to external factors, including the imposition of strict loan conditions by international aid organizations, intervention in policymaking by lobby groups with neo-colonialist ideas, and violent price fluctuations in international markets. Such behavior makes Africa's leaders lose their ability to govern and regulate their states. African elites should remember the importance of doing their utmost to eradicate corruption in order to establish good governance.

As I mentioned above, international aid organizations such as the World Bank have welcomed recent developments in Africa, including moves to shift to market-based economies, democratization, and the formation of new trade groups. These organizations have praised Africa's efforts to create good governance, pointed out its importance, and offered their assistance in fostering the development of African civil society. But a closer examination of the relationship between African leaders and their citizens reveals that good governance as the World Bank defines it is nowhere to be found in Africa at present. Rather than devoting itself to achieving good governance, Africa appears to be returning to the "heart of darkness," where illegal transactions and corruption are everyday occurrences. Large-scale illegal business deals, plunder economy, and plunder of precious natural resources are rampant, while leaders continue to treat government institutions as their private property. In the process of exercising power, some politicians commit crimes and power struggles between politicians sometimes leads to major conflicts involving mercenaries and private armies. As conflicts escalate, more and more private citizens are hired to fight. At worst, such conflicts escalate into war involving neighboring countries.

Countries in Africa are sometimes called "fragile states." They are fragile because they lack a legitimate foundation for their authority and their level of governance is low. Such a state is not capable of providing security to people or protecting their livelihoods. States in Africa are thus still in the process of transition to nation-states, a situation comparable to the early stage of modernization in Europe. At present, only a few countries in Africa have a single-party dictatorship or a military regime, but this does not mean the rest are free of problems. Nepotism, corruption, and scandals are ubiquitous in Africa. A bureaucratic system has been established, but positions of influence are monopolized by a handful of figures as if they were private assets. The bureaucracies thus fail to function according to the modern European models upon which they are based. Moreover, Africans do not feel their governments treat them fairly and equally or that they enjoy sovereignty and a guarantee of equal rights under the law.

Violence is commonplace in Africa and conflicts and crisis are always potential problems. Crisis prevention is thus critical to peace, stability, and advancement. But Africa's struggle to achieve this goal has just begun and it is likely to take years. Quick fixes may buy time but they will not eradicate the sources of crime. Crises on the continent reflect the deep-rooted evils of domestic and cross-border tension. Such crises often occur as a result of a society's failure to guarantee solidarity and peace between ethnic groups; political discussion degenerates into violence and neighborly relations between states become cross-border conflicts. Genuinely effective crisis prevention-measures must provide a stable environment. It is therefore necessary to build states that respect public freedom, public interest, and public goods. They must pay heed to the wishes of the people while ensuring that interests of ethnic groups in each state are protected. If such states are built, an ideal civil society will emerge and they can enjoy unity and cohesion, along with the economic development that will help them survive political turbulence. Africa needs to build states that respect the rule of law and public order, and must create judicial systems that fulfill their obligations to the people. Countries around the world have experienced and overcome similar difficulties in laying the foundation of the stability they now enjoy. In order to establish good governance, Africa must also undergo the same process.

African countries and their industrialized counterparts formed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to provide solutions to various problems in Africa and place its countries on a sustainable growth path. The NEPAD program places the highest priority on improving governance in Africa. In that sense, NEPAD is a new pledge by Africa for the twenty-first century.

Africa should introduce the concept of governance in reviewing the structures of its authority. Africa should reform the exercise of political power, work to enhance the legitimacy of its authority, and pursue policies aimed at preventing conflicts and promoting development.

The biggest problems facing African nations in their efforts to improve governance are "informal" politics, arbitrary decision-making, and administrative systems that are deliberately left uninstitutionalized. As a first step to solving these problems, African countries should adopt a check-and-balance system for political oversight, administrative organizations, and management to the greatest extent possible. African nations should ensure public accountability and transparency in decision-making, and establish a political and administrative system in which people can feel they are part of the system and that their voices are heard. Only after such systems are established will Africa become a major player in the international community and world history.

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[1] World Bank, *Adjustment in Africa Reforms, Results, and the Road ahead*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 219.

[2] Below I quote part of an article by Yuzo Yabuno of Kyushu University to help examine problems involved in the foundation of modern states in Africa.

According to Yabuno:

Modern civil society created a mechanism based on functional possession, which replaced a mechanism based on physical possession. Sovereignty is a system in which the physical being of the king rules the state. A system which lies above the physical being of the king delegates its authority to him. This mechanism ensures the legitimacy of sovereignty. A "national" system is the organ having sovereignty, which is backed by people. This closed loop indicates that sovereignty and human rights are the different parts of the same thing. Sovereignty and human rights are ideologically balanced under the framework of a "people's state." A state whose constituents are the people rather than a king or an aristocracy is nothing less than a modern state. **Human rights create sovereignty and sovereignty protects human rights. This ideological structure is a sign of the emergence of the modern era. In that sense, the final phase of the system is sovereignty and the ultimate actor in it is human rights. This is how we should begin when examining the political structure of the modern era. It was only after the modern era, when sovereignty at one end of the spectrum and human rights at the other end of the spectrum were seen as mutually harmonious.** But it was also after the beginning of the modern era that problems emerged. Do sovereignty and human rights become mutually dependent in spite of their ideological content? To be sure, they are interdependent but sovereignty tries to suppress human rights while human rights try to destroy sovereignty. The tension between the two thus hampers their function. This is exactly the experience that the modern world has undergone. As the two forces came into conflict, sovereignty was transformed into nationalism while human rights were transformed into individualism. It was indeed during the modern era that these changes occurred.

This leads us to a new question: Can nationalism and individualism coexist? Nationalism was born as an instrument to make national movements possible. There are many examples in which individuals were absorbed into nationalist movements, including the independence movements of the colonial era. When a nation is working to achieve independence from colonial rule its people unite against a common enemy, the suzerain state. People are united under the principle of national independence, but once independence is attained, the ruler who called for unity in the struggle against the suzerain state, now begins suppressing people. This has happened frequently around the world and still goes on today. Upon independence, sovereignty lies not with the people but with the ruler. To the outside world this appears to be liberation but leads to repression by the ruler to the inside. (Yuzo Yabuno: "Conflicts Between Systems and Actors in the Political Arena," Political and Legal Studies, Faculty of Law, Kyushu University, No. 67-1, Aug. 2000, pp. 146–149)

[3] A typical example is Chabal, a French historian residing in London. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal DALOZ, *Africa Works: Disorder as a Political Instrument*, Oxford James Currey; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998, op.cit., pp. 11–16; 26–30.

[4] **Triki, after taking such posts as Libyan ambassador to France, was named secretary for African unity, a post newly created by Revolutionary Leader Col. al-Qaddafi. Triki, the man in whom al-Qaddafi has personal confidence, is said to have played a behind-the-scene role in establishing the African Union.**

[5] Bernard NANTET, *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et Civilisations Africaines*, Paris, 1999, Larousse.

[6] Sous la direction de Philippe LEMARCHAND, *L'Afrique et l'Europe Atlas du XXème siècle*, Paris, 1994, Editions Complexe.

[7] French political scientist Jean-François BAYART described such a state as "plunder state" or a "criminal state." (Jean-François BAYART, Stephen ELLIS et Béatrice HIBOU, De l'Etat kleptocrate à l'Etat malfaiteur? *La criminalisation de l'Etat en Afrique*, Paris, Editions Complexe, Editions Complexen, pp. 17–55)