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## **CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS IN THE INTERFACE BETWEEN GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article explores the interface between good governance and sustainable development by focusing specifically on the role of governments in the global sustainable development agenda. With this context in mind, the purpose of this article is to highlight the role that governments should play in sustainable development in terms of the notions of ‘good’ governance as a prerequisite for a specific country’s ability and capacity to successfully plan and execute development initiatives, to participate in the global economy and to adhere to the imperatives that emanate from international treaties and conventions regarding sustainable development. The article adopted a qualitative observational approach by comparing, contrasting, critically analysing and synthesising relevant documentary and literature sources in terms of recent data, statistics and knowledge pertaining to a historical and regulatory overview directing good governance and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the variables influencing global and African governments in pursuit of these goals. To eliminate bias and promote conceptual and contextual analysis, the research method also included specific unobtrusive research techniques, such as concept analysis, historical analysis and documentary analysis. The study found that the reforms pushed by the World Bank are not prioritised and that recipient countries, which are forced to implement them, are not given an idea of how long it would take to carry them out. As a result, recipient countries undertake a multitude of governance reforms at the same time, which are differentially supported by a plethora of donors. Often little thought is given to their sequencing, interdependence, or relative contributions to the overall goal of creating more

efficient, effective and responsive governments. This is exacerbated by the fact that many developing countries do not have the required resources to successfully implement the reforms required for good governance.

**Keywords:** good governance, globalisation, development initiatives, global economy sustainable development goals.

**JEL classification:** Z00

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to Auriacombe (2017:56), “To appreciate the role that good governance plays in the global sustainable agenda, it is necessary to understand the world as a complex and interrelated system... This system is characterised by often opposing forces such as pressure for economic growth versus the protection of the environment, globalisation versus the rise of nationalism, human rights versus radicalism, national development imperatives versus geopolitical realities and so forth”. Challenges that face humankind today transcend national borders. No single country has the capacity to address the complexities associated with issues such as climate change, ecological degradation, chronic poverty, radicalism and limited natural resources. This reality forces countries to collaborate and coordinate their efforts. To frame such collaborative efforts, various international treaties, conventions and good governance protocols have been established to act as frameworks or guidelines for countries to respond in an appropriate and coordinated manner.

International development organisations and agencies, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and the African Development Bank (AfDB) continuously make a significant contribution in this regard. With this context in mind, the emphasis is placed on good governance and the global sustainable development agenda. The article firstly aims to provide a conceptual orientation for the notion ‘good governance’. It is important to comprehend the nature, scope, dimensions and interface of the concepts ‘government’, ‘governance’ and ‘good governance’. Secondly, the article aims to build on the above notions to explore the interface between good governance and sustainable development by focusing on the role governments play in the global and African sustainable development agenda. This perspective is significant, since the implementation of international conventions, treaties and protocols, such as the SDGs, depend on the commitment and capacity of individual countries’ governments to implement its programmes and meet its

targets. In this regard, Auriacombe (2016:6) notes that, “the key is to strike a healthy balance between sustainability and development”.

As noted before, the article is based on a qualitative observational analysis. Different documentary and literature sources are synthesised to present the authors’ observations of the current knowledge, views, trends and recent initiatives. The sourced material includes recent data and statistics; approaches to sustainable development governance; a historical and regulatory overview directing good governance and SDGs; and the variables that influence global and African governments in pursuit of these goals. The research approach also included specific unobtrusive research techniques, such as conceptual analysis and historical/comparative analysis to eliminate bias and promote conceptual and contextual analysis. Conceptual analysis can be seen as a “system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories informing the research and is generally regarded as an explanation proposed to reach a better understanding of the social reality/phenomena that is being investigated” (Maxwell 2005:66). Historical/comparative analysis “is a qualitative technique of which the main resources for observation and analysis are historical records... researchers seek to discover common patterns that recur in different times and places...Comparative is included in this method’s name to distinguish it from historians who may attempt to describe a particular set of events” (Auriacombe 2007: 466). Notably, historical/comparative research extends “beyond a mere collection of incidents, facts, dates, or figures... It includes the study of the relationships among issues that have influenced the past, continue to influence that present, and will probably affect the future” (Glass 1989 in Auriacombe, 2016:24).

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

**Development** refers to progress within modern society and also relates to economic progress and prosperity. According to Cloete and Auriacombe (2013:14) development is seen as “an outcome of governmental interventions in society that succeed in empowering people to consider feasible options in their lives and to make informed choices for the future”.

The most widely used definition of **governance** is that of the World Bank (2007), which views the concept as part of its “criteria to gauge the level of goodness of a particular government”. According to the World Bank (2007), “governance refers to a political regime; authority processes; and the policy-making and implementation capacity of a government”. The World Bank (2007) further

considers the “goodness of governance i.e. the extent to which a particular government succeeds in fulfilling its constitutional obligations in society”. The (UN) views **good governance** as a prerequisite to successfully operationalise MDGs and currently, the SDGs (Auriacombe 2017). In this regard, (Pierre (2000) states that, “Good governance is the key instrument to address challenges such as chronic poverty, social inequality, insufficient economic growth and environmental decline”. Against the background of this article, good governance takes place when developmental policy objectives are operationalised successfully to ensure that a given society develops in a sustainable fashion. This takes place when resources in the voluntary, public and private sectors are mobilised, applied and coordinated in the most participatory, inclusive, effective and efficient fashion.

**Sustainable development** “in general is based on the argument that the general well-being and welfare of society should be promoted without causing harm to sensitive ecosystems...Governments around the globe should provide essential services without depleting natural resources and without putting future generations at risk” (Auriacombe 2017:67). The Brundtland Commission’s Report (in Auriacombe and Jarbandhan, 2015) conceptualises “sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs”. For Auriacombe (2017:69), **sustainability** “generally refers to the continued healthy functioning of the planet’s climate, ecosystems and oceans”.

### III. CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The notions of government, governance, and the level of goodness thereof are not without controversy. The success of governments largely depends on the trust that citizens have in them. Yet recent Gallup polls (2014; 2015) indicate that public trust in governmental institutions is very low and is continuing to deteriorate. Furthermore, various driving and restraining forces influence governments’ ability to govern. For example, some may argue that the complexity and scope of societal challenges demand strong or ‘big’ governments that intervene in societal affairs. In contrast, libertarians will probably argue for ‘small’ governments with no or limited intervention (Van der Waldt, 2017). Despite these realities, there is broad consensus that the most important role of a government is to take care of society’s general well-being and to facilitate prosperity (Van der Waldt, 2017).

The good governance agenda is not without its critics. It has largely been condemned for imposing ‘superior’ Western values and traditions on developing countries and pushing a neo-colonial, neo-liberal and capitalistic agenda. Ayittey (1997) argues that, before the colonisation of Africa, communities lived in relative balance with their environment. The political institutions which they established assisted them to cope with challenges emanating from the environment. As a result, Africa experienced two forms of governance: an indigenous, informal and community-based structure and a formal government structure. The latter was an extension of the state and was based on the legacies of colonial rulers. The burden placed on countries to meet certain conditions of good governance has drawn sharp criticism (Abrahamsen, 2000:36). Furthermore, pushing the good governance agenda perpetuates dependencies and dominance and sustains global power dominance and in the process disregards the humanitarian dimensions of economic aid. An additional problem with the good governance agenda is determining what conditions are required for good governance and how they are to be achieved. Part of the issue is that it is assumed that the “characteristics of good governance are coherent and capable of being universalised” (Auriacombe 2017:72). This scenario is complicated by the lack of a general consensus on which aspects of governance are to be valued over others, as well as what constitutes the best political system.

The dilemma is that the reforms pushed by the World Bank are not prioritised. Furthermore, recipient countries that are forced to implement these reforms are not given an idea of the time-frame to carry them out. Auriacombe (2017:72) argues that, as a result, “for any given country, a multitude of governance reforms are being undertaken at the same time, differentially supported by a plethora of donors, often with little thought to their sequencing, their interdependence, or their relative contributions to the overall goal of creating governments that are more efficient, effective and responsive”. The aforementioned scenario is exacerbated by the fact that many developing countries do not have access to resources needed to ensure that the reforms required for good governance are implemented successfully. To this end, Van der Waldt (2017:88) proposes that “good enough governance” conditions that consists of “a condition of minimally acceptable government performance and civil society engagement that does not significantly hinder economic and political development and that permits poverty reduction initiatives to continue” are more suitable.

Leftwich (1996) argues that the World Bank’s perceptions of good governance are “naive” since “it entirely ignores that good governance is not simply available on

order but requires a particular kind of politics both to institute and to sustain it". The World Bank's idea of good governance is "too idealistic, insufficiently historically specific and over-confident in respect of what we do know and can know about the politics of development" (Van der Waldt, 2017:90). Philip (1999) makes an especially valid point concerning the lack of specificity of the reforms, which seem to be applied regardless of historical, cultural, or political context. Philip (in Van der Waldt, 2017:90) argues that the World Bank appears to be pushing for 'perfect governance', rather than something that could be realistically attainable in a developing context. To this end, Auriacombe (2017:76) states that: "The manner in which governments govern, is frequently judged as either good or bad...The level of trust in government institutions, the legitimacy of political leadership, the responsiveness of government to address societal concerns and aspirations, the level of openness, health, security, education and justice, all influence the way governments are perceived".

In terms of governance, the 'third' sector (i.e. voluntary, non-profit, civil society) plays an increasingly important role in aspects of service delivery, such as education, healthcare, caring for the elderly, housing and public safety. On the one hand, this reality has eroded governments' traditional authority over service delivery. On the other hand, it has strengthened the state's role to take care of its citizens. One can refer to this as the 'co-management' of services between the third sector and government. Evers (2005) refers to this 'co-management' as a "hybrid state" that emerges from the new network mode of governance. Undeniably, it has blurred lines between the public, private and the third sector. Milward and Provan (2000:359) further elaborate on this phenomenon by referring to the "hollow state". This implies that networked governance has eroded the conventional roles and responsibilities and more traditional notions of the state. Guttman (2008) also explains that third-sector involvement has led to more public-private partnerships (PPPs) and outsourcing some services to private service providers. Guttman (2008) refers to this phenomenon as "government by contract". Within this paradigm, robust tender procedures, contract management, adhering to services standards and conventions, as well as issues relating to accountability and responsibility for these outsourced services are critical.

A further potential benefit of third-sector involvement in traditional governance activities is the fact that it could lead to the cross-pollination of ideas, technologies and competencies between these sectors. Third-sector agencies are often highly competent and skilled in their specific area of function. Exposing public officials and political representatives to this expertise may improve the way

services are rendered. Innovative service delivery strategies and mechanisms may improve overall governance, since they typically increase productivity and public sector performance. An impartial civil service is also a fundamental prerequisite for good governance in Africa and elsewhere. Public officials should serve the entire community and not only those who belong to a certain political party. Auriacombe (2017:81) argues that “officials should also not be politically directed or expected to act in ways that promote the partisan interests of the ruling party beyond what is required by their job descriptions”. Aucoin (2012:179) further warns that, if officials are not impartial, they will be unable to provide objective, independent technical advice to their political heads.

#### **IV. BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN OF THE GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

With the emergence of the development movement – especially after World War 2 – the global agenda gradually shifted away from a market-driven paradigm towards a development-driven paradigm (Van der Waldt, 2017:100). The seminal works of Adam Smith, among which *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Karl Marx’s *Das Capital* (1867), and John Maynard Keynes’ *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) and *A Treatise on Money* (1930) were highly influential in transforming the global economic system. Unlike the classical economists, Keynes (in Van der Waldt, 2017:100) “saw a key role for government in promoting economic growth”. Rather than letting the market operate alone, Keynes (in Van der Waldt, 2017:100) suggested that “governments should intervene to promote investment either through monetary policies such as changing interest rates, or directly through government expenditure” (Van der Waldt, 2017:100).

In reviewing the history of development thinking, Potter and Desai (2008:67) suggest that it represents three key themes, namely *theories* (including ideologies and normative approaches), *strategies* (e.g. “the practical paths to development which may be pursued by international agencies in both developing and developed worlds, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) in an effort to stimulate change within particular regions”) and *processes* (Potter & Desai (2008:67) (e.g. the particular growth trajectory a country should follow based on its geo-political and environmental realities). To these three dimensions, one may add the *goal* perspective. Notably, this perspective takes cognisance of political, social, economic, cultural, ethnical,

moral and even religious influences and focuses on the specific reason why a country or agency pursues development.

After the free market was subject to several failures, economists began to develop new ideas about socio-economic growth and the state's role in regulating its effects. In the economics sphere, the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference in New Hampshire (US) gave rise to three important international institutions, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Known as the "Bretton Woods" institutions, these three institutions form part of the UN and are mandated to facilitate stable economic growth within capitalist systems (Van der Waldt, 2017:101).

Development circles began to see that the value of sustainable development after the debt crisis in developing countries, especially in Africa and Latin America, placed considerable strain on economic stability. To this end, The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987) was convened to assess this debt crisis. Discussions highlighted that development efforts should be redirected towards the poor. To add credence to talks, the influential Brundtland Report, titled *Our Common Future* was drafted in 1987. (Van der Waldt, 2017:100). According to Van der Waldt (2017:100), "The decision by the UN to replace the MDGs with the SDGs was one of the most important outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development held in July 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil". In its post-conference resolution, *The Future We Want*, the UN Goals Agenda (UNGA) committed to conduct "an intergovernmental process on SDGs that is open to all stakeholders with a view to developing global sustainable development goals" (in Martinez and Mueller 2015:239). A key outcome of Rio+20 was that UN member states resolved to create a set of SDGs that would build on the MDGs and link with the post-2015 development agenda (United Nations General Assembly, 2012).

There was general consensus that the SDGs should be action focused, brief, easy to understand, restricted in number, inspiring, globally focused and generally relevant to all countries (Slack, 2015:5). Furthermore, it was agreed that unique national realities, capacities and development levels should be considered, while national strategies and priorities should be respected (Slack, 2015:5). The establishment of the SDGs was a watershed moment. For the first time, the global sustainable development agenda endeavoured to strike a balance between socio-economic development and protecting the environment. Notably, SDGs pay attention to critical environmental areas or cover targets on how development could influence the environment, both directly and indirectly.



## V. GOVERNANCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

An analysis of the status of sustainable development practices in Africa reveals vast differences in culture, beliefs, language, ethnicity, political regimes, geography and trajectories in terms of economic growth. To this end, it is useful to split Africa into five regions, namely North, West, Central, East and Southern Africa. Notably, each region has unique sustainable development-related traits and priorities. The Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution's report, *Foresight Africa: Top Priorities for the Continent 2016*, highlights the following six key challenges that Africa faces in terms of socio-economic development (<https://providencemag.com/2016/01/six-challenges-facing-africa-2016/>):

- Challenge 1: The present economic growth rate is far too low. Given the 1.4% growth rate, it will take half a century to double the continent's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.
- Challenge 2: Since the 1970s, industrial development has levelled off. Only one in five workers is employed in the wage economy.
- Challenge 3: Most Africans face poverty, malnutrition, poor education, poor health and violence. Poverty levels continue to rise due to rapid population growth. In 1990, 280 million lived in poverty; the number spiked to 330 million in 2012. In terms of countries with the worst food and nutrition security, 19 out of 20 are in Africa. More than two out of five African adults are illiterate. Africa faces the worst health outcomes in the world. On the upside, new-born life expectancy has risen and chronic child malnutrition has declined since the mid-1990s. Africa is twice as tolerant to domestic violence than the rest of the developing world, while violence against civilians are become increasingly prevalent. While sub-Saharan Africa is characterised by widespread suffering, life is specifically tough for people living in some 34% of Africa, where states have collapsed.
- Challenge 4: Every year, more Africans move to urban slums. In 2010, some 400 million Africans resided in cities; 60% lived in slums with no access to basic services. The number is expected to spike to 1.26 billion by 2050. It is estimated that about 50% of all Africans will reside in cities by 2035, with ongoing urbanisation expected thereafter.
- Challenge 5: The government and business sectors are rife with corruption and nepotism.

- Challenge 6: African countries will be disadvantaged by architectural changes to global trade mechanisms. As the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) exclude sub-Saharan African countries, many trade benefits under America's Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) will be lost.

Undeniably, Africans are primarily responsible for addressing these challenges. African citizens need to pressure their respective governments to implement these necessary changes. The mismanagement and misappropriation of Africa's mineral resources presents yet another challenge to sustainable development on the continent. A further commonality as far as sustainable development governance is concerned is that the New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD) acts as the overarching framework to address socio-economic and environmental challenges. NEPAD was adopted in 2001 as a inclusive and joint development plan for the continent. Notably, it highlights that sustainable development on the continent is based on key preconditions such as peace, security, democracy and good economic and corporate governance.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a critical component of the implementation plan. Approved by the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) in March 2003 (UNECA, 2003), each country must take the needed steps to create national focal points to coordinate, monitor and integrate NEPAD programmes into respective national development plans (NEPAD, 2010). A further positive governance-related move was the inception of the African Union (AU) in 2002. This gave rise to the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Informal Regional Network of African Non-Governmental Organisations, Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA) and the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC). Undeniably, these organisations contribute significantly to implementing the sustainable development agenda on the continent. They also help to align continent-specific development priorities with respective UN development programmes. This, in turn, has improved overall governance.

Since the 1990s, African countries have recorded higher economic growth rates. Regular democratic elections are more commonplace and there are improved

governance approaches, structures and systems. However, given the slow progress, most countries (specifically ones in sub-Saharan Africa) are unable to meet development goals, such as the former MDGs and the post-2015 SDGs. Therefore, these efforts should be strengthened and there should be a focus on facilitating better governance outcomes. According to Ayittey (1997), “Africa’s deteriorating economic situation is a paradox...The continent has rich deposits of mineral wealth and has enormous tourist potential...Yet it is “inexorably mired in steaming squalor, misery, deprivation, and chaos”. Africa is the least-developed continent in the world. Despite this, the region is home to 40% of the world’s potential hydro-electric energy and 12% of its natural gas (Ayittey, 1997). Most of the world’s diamonds and chromium; 90% of its cobalt; 50% of its phosphates; 50% of the world’s gold; 40% of its platinum; 8% of its coal; and 8% of global petroleum reserves are found here (Ayittey, 1997), Furthermore it has enormous agricultural potential with millions of acres of latent farmland.

Why is Africa struggling, given the wealth of natural resources at its disposal? The ‘externalist’ and the ‘internalist’ schools of thought are concerned with this question. Externalists attribute Africa’s challenges to factors beyond its control, such as colonialism and imperialism; exploitation by multinational corporations; conspiracy plots; an unjust and unequal global economy; and insufficient flows of foreign aid, trade and investment. Internalists ascribe Africa’s low growth trajectory to poor political and administrative leadership; bad governance and decaying public institutions; systemic corruption; capital flight, economic mismanagement and deteriorating investment; incessant civil war and tribal factionalism; political dictatorship, human rights violations and military destruction. Internalists are of the opinion that internal factors have played a more important role in defining the current state of Africa. For Africa to be placed on a path of sustainable development, internalists argue that power needs to be transferred from the elite to citizens. In this regard, the politics of inclusion need to replace the politics of exclusion.

To facilitate this, governance systems need to be democratised and broad political reform needs to be facilitated. Furthermore, economic transformation is imperative to liberate the market, to attract foreign direct investment and to become more globally competitive. An independent and free media is needed to expose criminal wrong-doing and to disseminate ideas. This free flow of information helps to address the issue of corruption, nepotism and maladministration. Furthermore, the media could also play a meaningful role to promote home-grown solutions to the continent’s problems.

To varying degrees, African countries have made strides in establishing institutions, instruments and appropriate processes to support the sustainable development agenda. To rate the successes and failures of government interventions in sustainable development, it might be useful for social scientists to design a general scorecard for Africa and more specific rating systems for respective countries. Positive developments include better democratic practices where citizens participate in electoral processes; more rights to minority and marginalised groups (e.g. the disabled, the elderly, women and children); more inclusive governance institutions in terms of ethnicity, religion, race and gender a focus on macro-economic stability; reforming financial and monetary institutions and trade; better accountability; facilitating private sector development, such as macro-economic stability and transparency; political stability, peace and security; better mobilisation of resources; and implementing conflict resolution instruments.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS**

The article assessed the status of sustainable development and good governance on the continent. Critical success factors were identified pertaining to good governance practices in terms of sustainable development in the five regions of Africa. It is evident that the status of sustainable development in Africa is quite diverse in nature. The study found that Africa's good governance agenda has largely been condemned for imposing "superior" Western values and traditions on developing countries and pushing of a neo-colonial, neo-liberal and capitalistic agenda.

Colonialism introduced new governance systems and structures that created the illusion of accommodating indigenous systems. In reality, it enforced the privileges and wishes of the colonial conquerors. Traditional leadership was transformed and had to run parallel to new governance structures. The result was that Africa experienced two forms of governance: an indigenous, informal and community-based structure and a formal structure of government. The latter was an extension of the state that was based on the legacies of colonial rulers. Furthermore, pushing the good governance agenda perpetuates dependencies and dominance and sustains global power supremacy. Subsequently, the humanitarian dimensions of economic aid are disregarded.

An additional problem with the good governance agenda is determining what conditions are required for good governance and how they are to be achieved. Complicating this, is the lack of general consensus on which governance aspects are of more value than others, as well as what constitutes the best political system. The notions of government, governance and the level of goodness of developing countries are not without controversy. The good governance agenda has also been reproached because of its emphasis on economic rather than human development. Recent protest movements across the globe claim that governments are no longer able to cope with societal issues and concerns. Governments are increasingly losing their legitimacy to govern. Due to to limited resources, capital (both financial and human) and infrastructure, they struggle to render even basic services to citizens. Some governments in Africa are characterised by power struggles, bureaucracy, patronage and general inefficiency. As such, they are unable to render quality services. As governments' success largely depends on the trust that citizens have in them, this situation needs to be remedied.

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