

2006

Challenges of Good Governance in Post-Conflict Liberia

Kebba Darboe

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/greatplainssociologist>



Part of the [Regional Sociology Commons](#), and the [Rural Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Darboe, Kebba (2006) "Challenges of Good Governance in Post-Conflict Liberia," *Great Plains Sociologist*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/greatplainssociologist/vol18/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Sociologist by an authorized editor of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.

Challenges of Good Governance in Post-Conflict Liberia



Kebba Darboe*

Abstract Drawing on Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, this paper employs a conceptual framework to examine the challenges of good governance in post-conflict Liberia. Good governance is the sound exercise of administrative authority to manage a country's resources for development (Astillero and Mangahas, 2002). Government, a pre-condition to governance, is the dominant decision-making arm of a given state. From 1989 to 1996, and 1999 to 2003, Liberia, a West African country, was involved in two civil wars which destroyed most of its' social institutions. Study reveals that the challenges to good governance are political, administrative, and economic.

INTRODUCTION

The international community's heightened concern about the challenges of good governance in post-conflict Liberia is the impetus of this study. Drawing on the political history accounts and Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, this paper employs a conceptual framework in figure 1 (Astillero and Mangahas 2002) to examine the rebuilding challenges. Good governance can be broadly defined as the sound exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a country's resources for development (Astillero and Mangahas 2002). Government, a pre-condition to governance, is the dominant decision-making arm of a given state. From 1989 to 1996, and 1999 to 2003, Liberia, a small West African country, was involved in two civil wars lasting for 14 years, which destroyed most of the social, economic, and political institutions. Consequently, the two civil wars have left many social reconstruction challenges such as political, administrative, and economic governances.

* Kebba Darboe, Ph.D., Minnesota State University Mankato, Department of Ethnic Studies, Mankato, MN 56001; e-mail: kebbadarboe@mnsu.edu

In general democratic elections held on October 11, 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as first female president of Liberia. The aforementioned challenges were reiterated in the text of inaugural address on January 17, 2006, of President Johnson Sirleaf on the question of governance:

The workforce in our ministries and agencies is seriously bloated. Our administration will therefore embark on a process of rationalizing our agencies of government to make them lean, efficient, and responsive to public service delivery. This will require the creation of a meritocracy that places premium on qualification, professionalism, and performance (P. 5).

In this connection, the public policy making and service delivery systems must be accountable, participative, client-focused, demand-driven, responsive, and results-oriented. The preceding statement encapsulates Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, which is built on rational-legal authority. It is in this context that the following pages will explore aforementioned challenges in Liberia.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the review of literature, governance has three legs: political, economic and administrative (Hyden, Court, and Mease 2004). Political governance involves the formulation of policy, economic governance involves the decision-making process on how to allocate scarce resources such as education and health care, and administrative governance involves policy implementation. The primary function of government is to govern, while public administration is the management of the state apparatus for achieving the aims of governance. Arguably, the aforementioned three legs are the main challenges of Liberia. In this connection, there are two perspectives, namely a state-centric one and a society-centric one. The state-centric perspective focuses on how the state can promote economic growth, political stability, and security for all its citizens. On the other hand, the society-centric perspective emphasizes a democratic synergy between government and society, thereby giving more priority to societal needs such as citizen participation and accountability. This perspective is consistent with the

calls for the subordination of bureaucracy to society's cultural and political institutions (Mukandala, editor 2000). To strengthen the democratic state, civil society can assist individual citizens, private sector, and government. Examples are non- governmental organizations, charitable institutions, and religious and cultural groups. These are host associations around which voluntary society organizes to provide social services and advocate for social, economic, and political changes. In this connection, civil society can act as a pressure group by demanding accountability and transparency from both private sector and government.

Further, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) designed to fight poverty levels and development, pointed out that governance is one of the five most important challenges facing Africa (Kajee 2003/2004). Governance for Africa especially Liberia, is about the regulation of the peoples' relationship with each other and with their government. This regulation affects decision-making on how to allocate scarce resources such as distribution of income, access to health care, basic education, and the effective management of cultural and ethnic diversity. Hence, the governance model chosen by each country must be one that is relevant to the values of the people to be governed and allows them to maximize those values. Such a governance system can only be secured through democratic that is participatory, bottom-up, inclusive, and people-driven constitution making.

Since independence in 1847, the Republic of Liberia was ruled by the Americo-Liberians, who established the True Whig Party in 1869. The best-known Liberian president was William Tubman from 1944 to 1971. After his death in 1971, he was succeeded by William Tolbert. On April 12, 1980, an indigenous Liberian from the Krahn ethnic group, Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, seized power in a coup d'etat and executed President William R. Tolbert, thereby ending 133 years of Americo-Liberian political domination. However, in 1989 due to the repressive nature of Doe and his government, rebels under Charles Taylor invaded Liberia from the Ivory

Coast. Taylor and his National Patriotic Front rebels rapidly gained the support of Liberians. As a result, another rebel group captured and killed Doe in 1990. An Interim Government of National Unity was formed in 1990 and Amos C. Sawyer became President. Taylor refused to work with the interim government and continued fighting.

The rebel groups Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and Movement for Democracy in Liberia fought the Taylor regime. "Later in 2003, under intense United States and international pressure, Taylor resigned and departed into exile in Nigeria. Subsequently, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed on August 18 in Accra, Ghana, laying the framework for constructing a 2-year National Transitional Government. Gyude Bryant was elected chair of the National Transitional Government of Liberia consisting of a 76-Member Legislative Assembly" (Electionworld.org 2007). The Transitional Government served until January 2006, when the winners of the 2005 presidential and congressional elections took office. On October 11, 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as the first female president of Liberia and Africa.

Throughout the country's history, Liberian governments have been notorious for using the structures of government to serve the needs and wishes of the elites such as the Americo-Liberians and their foreign benefactors. Little effort has been made to reach out to the masses of people, especially the indigenous groups that make up the greater part of the country. Consequently, an ethnic security dilemma persisted that is members of other ethnic groups fighting for the control of the country (Kew 2005). The indigenous Africans include sixteen ethnic groups, and dominant ones include Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, and Mandingo (The World Factbook 2006). In fact, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Liberia claimed to be the only 'real democracy' in Africa and thus, the only one, which actually had a government that was serving the people. Yet, as the evidence has shown, those governments served as

instruments for the capital accumulation activities of the Americo-Liberian elites, while relegating the majority of the people to the periphery of both the economy and the political system. Additionally, the inability of Liberia to effectively manage cultural and ethnic diversity has been a core problem in the country since independence. In fact, one can argue that this failure has been the primary cause of the country's social chaos, including the civil war that lasted more than 14 years.

Liberia, given its top-down, elite-driven and non-participatory constitutional history, constitution making has been dominated and controlled by the Americo-Liberian elite. As a result, most of the indigenous peoples were excluded from participating fully and effectively in constitutional discourse. Against this historical background, it is critical that the whole country engage in the reconstruction and reconstitution of the state through democratic constitution making in order to produce institutional arrangements that are relevant to the majority of the country's stakeholders.

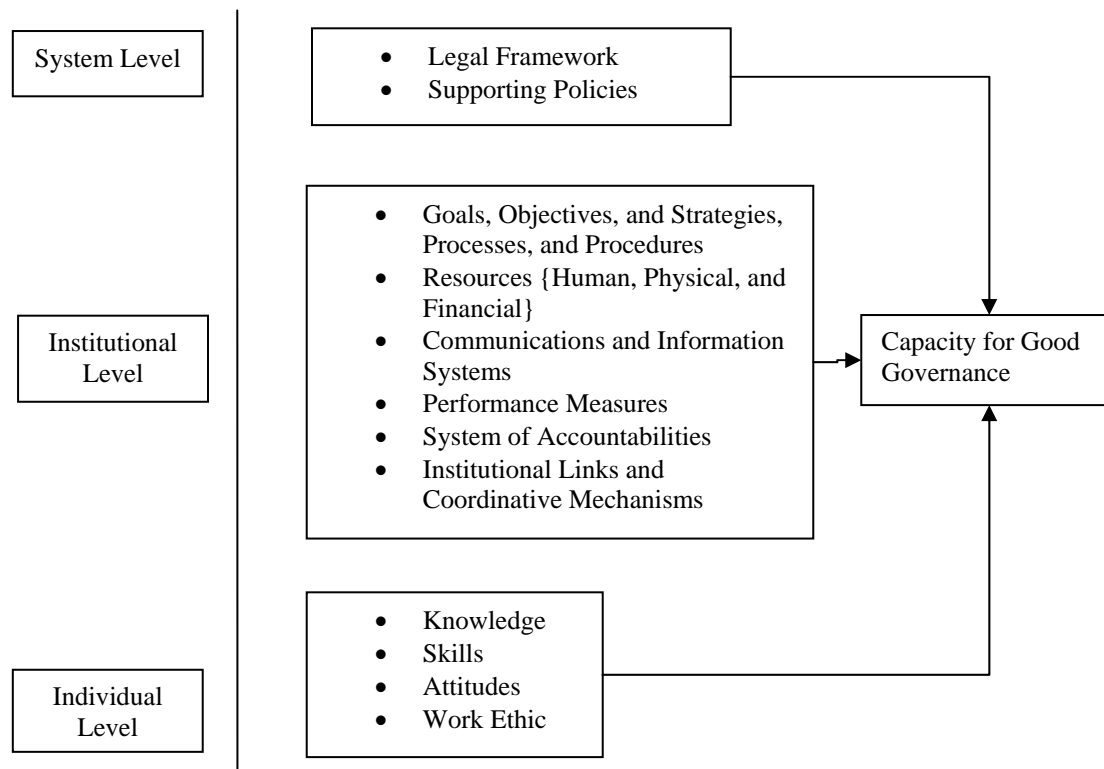
CHALLENGES

Over the past two decades many African countries including Liberia have made a transition to democratic forms of governance. This social change has led to the promotion of First Generation of Rights such as free speech and individual freedom, and Second Generation of Rights such as respect for international conventions as mandated by the United Nations. However, what still remains a challenge is the inability of African countries like Liberia to attain Third Generation of Rights which involves consolidation of substantive democracy and sustainable human development (Adamolekun 1999).

For instance, the big question is: How can Liberians reconstitute and reconstruct the state to provide institutional arrangements that (1) enhance peaceful coexistence of the country's various population groups; (2) promote entrepreneurship and wealth creation; (3)

eliminate historical inequalities like discrimination against indigenous peoples; (3) constrain state custodians; (4) promote the equitable distribution or allocation of public goods and services; and (5) generally advance political, economic, and social development? The analyses on political, administrative, and economic governance will attempt to answer the big question.

According to Weber, an effective democracy cannot exist without an effective bureaucracy. Therefore, public servants working in a bureaucracy must be engaged in formulating, delivering services and as well as implementing policy. Weber approached organizations through a study of power and authority, and he identified three ways for power to become authority: (1) charismatic, which rests on appeal of leaders, (2) traditional, which is based on customs and conventions, and (3) rational-legal authority, which is anchored in impersonal rules that have been legally established. This type of authority characterizes social relations in modern society (Ritzer 2004). Further, Weber pointed out that the exercise of authority varies from one state to another. For instance, in the African context, it is difficult to distinguish the state from political regime, individual personalities and government (Agbese and Kieh 2007). Drawing on Weber's rational-legal authority that is bureaucracy and a conceptual framework in figure 1 below (Astillero and Mangahas 2002) the following rebuilding governance challenges are examined at the system, institutional, and individual levels: political, administrative, and economic. Additionally, the rebuilding of better relationships between people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is necessary. Otherwise, these differences could be used as outlets for oppression and violence. These aforementioned challenges are also highlighted in President Johnson-Sirleaf's inaugural speech as important variables for developing capacities of good governance in Liberia. It is difficult to measure governance, however, development in social indicators such as political, administrative and economic growth will provide evidence of progress.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework: Developing capacities for good governance**Source** Astillero and Mangahas 2002

As shown in figure 1 above, first, the system level focuses on bureaucracy, a good example of legal authority, which uses explicit rules and hierarchical ranking to achieve efficiency. That is, the rights and duties of officials are put into written rules and regulations. Second, at the institutional level the focus is on the management of relationships between and among different organizations and sectors. Often this requires a division of labor which stresses functional specialization for doing specific tasks. Third, the individual level gives support and training of personnel because in a bureaucratic administration decision-making is carried out with reliance on technical knowledge and expertise. Therefore, civil servants and stakeholders should have the work ethic, knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to perform

their daily tasks. The preceding observations of capacity building for good governance are consistent with Weber's five characteristics of bureaucracy which include division of labor, hierarchical authority, written rules, and regulations, impersonality, and employment based on technical qualifications (Ritzer 2004).

POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

Since the colonial and post-colonial era in Africa, governance and public administration approaches have been dominated by the Weberian ideal type bureaucracy. However, in the 1980s, the Weberian approach has been challenged by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Program (SAPs). This new program is designed to make countries in Africa qualify for loans from the world financial institutions and also to ensure debt repayment. Additional conditions include combating poor macroeconomic policies in many African countries, which lead to persistent fiscal deficits, price inflation, and unemployment. As a consequence, the Structural Adjustment Program has created a New Public Management approach, which has two forms: one that is informed by neoclassical theories of rationality and focuses on civil service restructuring by recommending privatization, building partnerships and efficiency in the delivery of goods and services; and the second form is normative, which emphasizes the promotion of sustainable human development, good governance and democracy. The main goal of this new management approach is to investigate the past failures and successes in African governance, and recommend an indigenization of the discourse on governance and public administration. Despite the Structural Adjustment Program's main goal of poverty reduction, many critics contend that it has resulted in reduced spending on social programs like public health, education, and economic development, while making as priority debt repayment and other economic policies, thereby affecting general public administration. The most important reason for SAPs failure is the fact that they were externally designed and

imposed on the African economies, with virtually no participation from each country's relevant stakeholders. In fact, in the design of the SAPs, little effort was made to take into consideration the specificities of each African country. Instead, a "one-size-fits-all" approach was used by the economists at the Bretton Woods institutions who designed them. Consequently, the Structural Adjustment Program's implementation and design were capricious for it imposed virtually all the costs on the poor and vulnerable groups like women, rural inhabitants, urban poor, and various minority groups, while allowing the benefits to accrue to the elites (Agbese et al. 2007).

ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE

The promotion of democracy in post-conflict Liberia cannot succeed without the rebuilding of order such as police and army. So the big questions are: (1) how can Liberia prepare itself for the eventual exit of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)? (2) How can Liberia provide itself with a well-constrained police force like one that is well-constrained by the law and functions effectively to maintain law and order, including the protection of property rights? Answers to the preceding questions require the following reforms: first, decentralize regional governments so that at the county level departments and services can be restructured. This framework can devolve power away from the federal level to local authorities thereby empowering every local community. Second, reform the civil service through the implementation of efficient and effective training methods. This will enable civil servants to acquire technical and managerial skills. Also reform the incentive structures that are hiring, promotion, and pay. Third, create a new national police force. To this end, the United Nations Mission in Liberia is training the new national police force under United Nation's supervision. The former Chairman Bryant encouraged more women to join the police force. Additionally, create a New National Army, which should have a fair ethnic group and geographical

representations. The minimum qualifications for all recruits are 18 years of age, physical fitness, minimum high school education, and no record of human rights abuses. Former fighters from disbanded armed factions who meet the qualifications will also be recruited. Their mission shall be to serve all citizens and not be taken by national leaders to oppress people. Fourth, reform the Criminal Justice System in order to change the perception that justice can be bought. This can be accomplished by replacing the dysfunctional judiciary with an independent and professional one. The main goals shall be to promote the rule of law by punishing criminal offenders; bring to justice those who have committed human rights abuses; and reintegrate former combatants. Fifth, to fight routinized corruption that is “Get, Grab and Go” by ending the culture of impunity. Corruption has led to ethnic conflicts and civil wars. To fight corruption, the United States is helping Liberia by putting experts in key financial institutions with cooperation from the United Nations, World Bank and the Government of Liberia.

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

Lack of economic growth threatens national security because a large number of the youth are unemployed. The solution is to attract needed investments especially in new technologies that will create new employment opportunities for all citizens. The new administration can create jobs by rebuilding the physical infrastructure such as roads, schools, housing, and telecommunication systems. Jobs can also be created by increasing production and export of primary commodities like rubber, iron ore, and cocoa to enhance Liberia's entry into the global economy. This entry can sustain an economic growth that yields employment opportunities for people, and restore Liberia's standing in the international organizations like World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and United Nations.

Education

In any post-conflict society, social reconstruction that is the rebuilding of social services such as education, which is a social equalizer, poses a real challenge. Schools play an important role in shaping the values and attitudes of citizens necessary for the functioning of any democratic society. Therefore, the key activities for rebuilding and stabilization must include primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education. Lack of education is a major cause of poverty, at individual, family, and societal levels. Poverty is likewise a major reason why children fail to enroll in school. Often, poor families give priority to boys' education, as possibly increasing future family income, but many boys from poor families have to drop out of school to earn income. To mitigate these conditions, the new administration should provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens, especially child soldiers who must be reintegrated into society. Implementing a good educational policy will channel youth energy and creativity towards a constructive agenda and reduce high illiteracy. Further, to ensure the strategic vision for educational reconstruction, the new administration must ask for assistance from the international bodies, civil society, and United Nations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing free primary education to all war affected children and helping on their rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Additionally, the United States is providing financial and technical assistance in teacher training and school rebuilding efforts. All these efforts will increase capacity building and lead to a more sustainable human development.

Public Health

Another social reconstruction challenge is the availability and delivery of public health services. There is an acute need for medical doctors, nurses, pharmaceutical drugs, and facilities such as hospitals and clinics in order to fight diseases such as Malaria, Tuberculosis,

childhood malnutrition, maternal illnesses, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). This challenge can be met by pursuing multiple strategies: (1) develop training programs for healthcare and social service professionals at all levels; (2) integrate mental health into the national health care system in order to address social problems related to victims of war trauma and substance abuse; (3) shift the orientation from curative to a more preventive system of care; and (4) design a payment system similar to Medicare and Medicaid in the United States. Medicare is designed to provide prepaid hospital insurance for elderly people, while Medicaid can be means-tested to determine eligibility, thereby, help the poor, women, children and disabled members of society. Additionally, more health care services should be provided in the rural communities. All these efforts will require financial resources and assistance from the World Health Organization.

CONCLUSION

Good governance in Liberia requires proactive policies which can be carried out in collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and community agencies. These efforts will make the government become more legitimate and relevant to all citizens. In summary, good governance therefore implies the ability of the government to provide an institutional environment within which all citizens can live together peacefully. That is individuals and groups can engage in productive activities to create the wealth and income that they need without unnecessary molestation from state custodians like civil servants and politicians; and public goods and services are distributed in an efficient and equitable manner. These efforts will strengthen democracy, human rights and promote economic prosperity and social cohesion.

REFERENCES

- Adamolekun, Ladipo. 1999. *Public Administration in Africa: Main Issues and Selected Country Studies*. Oxford, England: Westview Press.
- Agbese, Pita Ogaba, and George Klay Kieh, Jr. 2007. *Reconstituting the state in Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Astillero, Noel, and Joel Mangahas. 2002. *Assessment of Capacity Building Needs of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Board in the Philippines*. Manila: Department of Environment and Natural Resources and United Nations Development Program.
- Boley, G.E. Saigbe. 1983. *Liberia: The Rise and Fall of the First Republic*. New York: MacMillan Publishers.
- Briggs, Jimmie. 2005. *Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers Go to War*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cassell, C. Abayomi. 1970. *Liberia: The History of the First African Republic*. New York: Fountainhead Publishers', Inc.
- Commonwealth Foundation. 1999. *Citizens and Governance, Civil Society in the New Millennium*. London, England: The Commonwealth Foundation.
- Electionworld.org. 2007. "A Short History of Liberia." Retrieved August 16, 2007 (<http://www.electionworld.org/history/Liberia.htm>)
- Hyden, Goran, Julius Court, and Kenneth Mease. 2004. "Making Sense of Governance: Empirical Evidence from Sixteen Developing Countries." Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Kajee, Ayesha. 2003/2004. "Nepad's APRM: A Progress Report, Practical Limitations and Challenges." *SA Yearbook of International Affairs* 2003/04: 243 – 258.
- Kew, Darren. 2005. "Building Democracy in 21st Century Africa: Two Africas, One Solution." *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* Winter/Spring: 149 – 161.

- Liebenow, J. Gus. 1987. *Liberia: the Quest for Democracy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Moran, Mary H. 2005. *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mukandala, Rwekaza Sympho, ed. 2000. *African Public Administration: A Reader*. Harare, Zimbabwe: AAPS Books.
- Nelson, Harold D. 1985. *Liberia: A Country Study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- "The Peace Agreement Signed in Ghana." *The Perspective*. Atlanta, Georgia. August 19, 2003. Retrieved October 29, 2007 (<http://www.theperspective.org/theghanaagreement.html>).
- Ritzer, George. 2004. *Sociological Theory, 6th Ed*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sirleaf, President Ellen Johnson. 2006. *Text of January 17 Inaugural Address*. Retrieved March 22, 2007 (<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200601170106.html>).
- Staudenraus, P.J. [1961] 1980. *The African Colonization Movement, 1816 - 1865*. New York: Columbia University Press. Reprint, New York: Octagon Books.
- The World Factbook. 2006. "Liberia." Retrieved March 29, 2006 (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publication/factbook/geos/li.html>).