Media, Governance, and Africa's Agenda for Development

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Introduction:

In September 2008, William Taft, the 93-year-old alumnus of the first journalism school in the United States — Missouri University School of Journalism —told his guests who gathered for the school's centenary celebration how indispensable communication is to human beings (University of Missouri, 2008). In a metaphorical sense, Taft speculated that in Heaven, no one will need doctors and lawyers, because no one will be sick and there will be no dispute; no military or police because there will be order and no war; no need for architects or civil engineers because everyone will be accommodated in God's mansion; indeed no other profession is needed. But journalists, he said, will be in high demand, because the people on the east and the north sides of Heaven will want to know what the people on the west and the south sides are doing (University of Missouri, 2008; para.4).

As naïve as Taft's view may be, it nevertheless underscores the importance of journalists in every society. It also demonstrates that information flow is the heart beat of every society. Through information, the people of diverse backgrounds are connected to one another.

Clearly we live in a networked or connected age. The 21st century is described as interconnected in a variety of ways mostly by what CEO of Google Eric Schmidt called connection technologies. In her2011 essay Anne-Marie Slaughter of the US Department of State specifically argued that in the 21 century war, diplomacy, business, media, society, and even religion are networked. Power, she pointed out, is measured by the level of connectedness.

No doubt, we live in a networked world, a world that Thomas Freedman, the New York Times Columnist described as flat— where boundaries are more artificial than ever. In the world of the mass media, the convergence of different media platforms including the new and old media, the social media, mobile phones, and digitization of information have changed not only the media landscape but also governance patterns with profound implications for emerging and advanced democracies around the world.

In this paper I will examine what these changes mean to Africa especially in the context of the influence of Diaspora media on governance in Africa. I will also explore possibilities and opportunities for Africa's growth and development in a networked world with immense challenges as well as recommend a development agenda for Africa anchored on international norms of good governance, transparency, and openness.

Media and Governance

To better understand the inseparable ties between media and governance, it is important to review existing literature on governance. That way, we can establish that the mass media are essential vehicles to achieve governance within Africa and among Diaspora Africans.

The concept of governance has attracted widespread interpretations covering social, political, and economic aspects of a country. Chime (2010) distinguished governance and good governance. To him, governance describes the steps involved in decision-making and established procedures for implementing or not implementing those decisions while good governance refers to the accomplishment of this task in a manner essentially free of abuse of due process, free of corruption, and with due regard for the

rule of law. The World Bank conceptualizes governance as a process that empowers rulers to set rules, enforce, and modify them (World Bank, para. 1). Understanding governance, according to the World Bank, requires a proper identification of the ruler and processes in which he or she emerged from the rest of the society.

Apart from rule making, governance also involves policy making and execution, consensus and consultation, equity and inclusiveness. The absence of these governance practices inevitably results in disagreements or outright conflict.

Governance also involves rule making, capacity building, legitimization, transparency, accountability, policy making and execution, consensus and consultation, equity and inclusiveness, prompt response to citizen desires and more effective service delivery (Akindele, Olaopa, & Salaam, 2009; Blair, 2000; Chime,2010; Pierre, 2009). The gradual shift from government to governance underscores a trend towards collaboration, partnership, and building networks to solve social problems (Kapucu, Arslan & Collins, 2010; Pierre, 2009). Lenihan (2002) used the term 'governance triangle' to provide insight into the meaning of governance. According to him governance triangle which is similar to the social contract begins with the citizens who empower a representative with a mandate to speak and act on their behalf and at the same time remain accountable to them. The first stage is the democratic mandate, second is the agenda setting, and the third stage is the public service that executes the demands of elected officials. In the view of Lenihan, the governance triangle remains the basis under which various professionals including journalists determine their roles and responsibilities in a democracy. The news media is an important institution that can help in the full realization of Lenihan's governance triangle in at least two ways: citizens

make responsible and informed choices as well as monitor elected officials and make sure that they uphold their oaths of office and abide by the wishes of those who put them in power.

The African Union recognizes the need for good governance and made it a cornerstone of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). African Union's *Declaration on Democratic, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance* adopted in its July 2002 Summit in South Africa, clearly mandated countries that acceded to the peer review mechanism to ensure adherence to uniform policies and practices in conformity with the agreed political, economic, and corporate governance codes and standards(NEPAD Secretariat 2002).

Zack-Williams (2001) argued that good governance is a desideratum for development in Africa and coined the phrase "no democracy, no development" to emphasize the centrality of governance to Africa's growth and development. In a similar analysis, Africa's illustrious son and former UN Secretary-general, Kofi Annan maintained that the eradication of poverty and promotion of democracy in the continent were linked to good governance.

Juma (2004) concluded that the APRM has the potential to change the trajectory of governance in a way that could guarantee sustainable development in the continent whereas Hope's (2005) analysis illuminates APRM as complementing the role of the media in fostering governance, political participation, and decision making processes. As clearly stated by Hope, the peer review relies on the power of example and influence of peer pressure. In his words:

"The effectiveness of peer review relies on the influence of peer pressure, that is, the persuasion exercised by the peers. The peer review process can give rise to peer pressure through, for example, a mix of formal recommendations and informal consultations by peer countries; public scrutiny, comparisons, and ranking among countries; and the impact of the foregoing on public opinion, policy makers, and other stakeholders. The lessons of peer reviews conducted in the developed countries suggest that the greatest impact is derived when the outcomes of peer reviews are put in the public domain. It is that public scrutiny that is most likely to influence change and brings about corrective actions". (P. 5)

It is in this connection that we can situate the role of the media in presenting a platform for public scrutiny that keeps public officials on their toes and enables them to deliver on their promises. Indeed, the media and in the context of this summit, the Diaspora media or transnational journalism, has the potential to mobilize local and international pressure on home governments towards good governance (Ekwo, 2011). In New York and other major cities in the US for instance, a number of publications including online publications that focus exclusively on African countries exist to provide information to both African diaspora communities otherwise called immigrants and Africans at home on accurate reporting of events and issues. They circumvent the usual secrecy and lack of media freedom in most African countries to tell their stories in unambiguous ways to their audience. Such newspapers, online publications, radio, and TV shows have become veritable platforms for dialogue, debates, and diatribe on wide ranging issues of public accountability, transparency, and basic freedoms in Africa. With all the accolades on the

African Peer Review Mechanism especially its complementary role with the media in enthroning accountability, reduction of corruption and arbitrariness, and political participation of citizens, the review mechanism falls short on guaranteeing free and independent news media system in Africa.

So far, less than a dozen countries in Africa have freedom of information legislations. Consequently, the environment is hostile to freedom of expression of citizens and their active participation in decision making processes. The Pan African Parliament envisages involving diaspora Africans in policy formulation on issues that matter to the continent, but this goal will hardly be achieved in sociopolitical environments that citizens cannot express themselves freely or ask questions and get answers about how elected officials are performing their functions. The principles of open government suggest that citizens are entitled to information about how public officials they hired through the ballot box are conducting the affairs of the state. For example, every Nigerian who cares to know about daily receipts from oil revenue should have access to such information from Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. Similarly, every Ugandan citizen who is excited about the prospect of the country's newly found oil should have access to government records that resulted in the award of contracts to X oil prospecting company from X country.

This brings us to the activities of multinational corporations in Africa and how they undermine governance in the continent. Unknown to many perhaps is the fact that multinational corporations are the new "enemies" of African people. Their predatory inclinations are probably more than some African governments. The companies exploit the lack of due process in most African countries to perpetrate corruption, secrecy, and

arbitrariness. So when we talk about freedom of information and access to information to both citizens and the mass media, it is important that the activities of multinationals that have direct impact on the continent should be made public for scrutiny and debates. Effective democratic governance should pervade all facets of public administration where transparency reigns, where powerful government and corporate chief executives are prevented from discharging discretionary powers that impact the entire society. Kopits and Craig (1998) identified three components of transparency – behavioral aspects such as unambiguous conflict of interest rules for public functionaries, open government data, and unfettered access to information and argued that all three will determine the level of transparency in government operations.

Former Justice Brandeis immortal words that "sunshine is the best disinfectant" should be instructive in any consideration of governance enabled by transparency and the media.

Diaspora, Democracy, and Disciplined Media Campaign for Africa

In an address to Ghana's parliament early in his presidency, US President Barack Obama and fellow African in diaspora said: "Africa needs strong institutions and not strong men". He was of course referring to lack of vital democratic ideals in the continent such as rule of law, media freedom, and respect for human rights. Africa's history is replete with many strong men (euphemism for dictators), and in an era of consensus, collaboration, and compromise, it is no more fashionable or acceptable for dictators to decide for citizens. Governance has shifted from dictators to the people. As recent events in North Africa (otherwise called Arab Spring) have shown, dictators who resist involving citizens in decision making have fallen. Surely, dictators may have fallen

in parts of Africa but dictatorship still thrives around the continent. The Pan African Parliament is positioned to change governance strategies in the continent. The body which is yet to assume full legislative powers is emblematic of the sea change that has occurred in governance in Africa where there is a growing understanding that government is a partnership between elected officials and citizens.

Africa is changing but the wind of change taking place in Africa is grossly misrepresented, ignored, and sometimes tepidly mentioned in the international media thereby fostering negative images of the continent in the eyes of the world. Many scholars and commentators have addressed the negative portrayal of Africa in the media (Onyedike, 1996; Nwosu, 1996; Opubor, 1986; Nwuneli, 1986). According to these analysts, news about Africa is often scanty, crises-oriented, and stereotypical. The negative coverage of Africa in the US and Europe is not new. In the early 80's UNESCO under the leadership of Ahmadou Mbou, a Senegalese national championed the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in which the body sought to redress the imbalance in information flow between the North and South. That effort was sabotaged by the US which withdrew from UNESCO with its huge financial contribution.

Today, Africa cannot continue to complain about distortion or under-reporting of events and issues about the continent. As Onyedike (1996) argued the continent needs a vibrant constituency to advocate Africa's interests and reflect the continent's positive and steady progress in the international media. There is no better constituency to promote Africa in the US, Europe, and other parts of the world than the growing

diaspora Africans all over the world. It therefore follows that all immigrants of African heritage are unofficial ambassadors of the continent through their actions and conduct.

But to achieve this, there must be a committed effort towards diaspora engagement. Russel (2011) provided a litany of ways to sustain diaspora engagement notably through conferring voting rights to citizens who reside outside the shores of their home countries. The guarantee of political voice to diaspora Africans will strengthen their bond to their home countries. It is my understanding that PAP is committed to policies that will grant Africans in diaspora a voice in the affairs of the continent. Few countries in Africa including South Africa, Ghana, and Mali have limited forms of political representation extended to their citizens in the diaspora. The Pan African Parliament should work towards encouraging other African countries to involve their citizens in diaspora in governance activities.

Africa must recognize that diaspora members do not have to return home to play significant roles in the socioeconomic development of the continent. As Russell (2011) noted, brain drain can lead to brain gain and brain networking between diaspora Africans and those at home. The diaspora dilemma whereby they are neither accepted fully in both host and home countries cannot be allowed to continue. I am aware that in some African countries, citizens in diaspora are treated as aliens in their countries especially in the offer of employment. With unemployment rising through the roofs, diaspora Africans are sometimes seen to pose a threat to their fellow citizens who compete for few positions within the elite class. All these are genuine concerns that need public attention and discussion.

No matter how the issue is discussed, the engagement of diaspora Africans is critical to revamping the image of Africa outside the shores of the continent. The mass media is a veritable platform to sustain diaspora engagement. The media has the potential to shape Africa's image for the better depending on a number of factors. It is widely acknowledged that image is everything and many scholars have demonstrated direct relationship between the level of social development, modernizing influences, and ownership of the mass media facilities (Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1969; Lerner, 1967, and Nwuneli, 1986). The implication of these studies is that for Africans to get its story out there in the international arena, it has to be told by Africans that have access to modern mass media channels including old and new media. Africans concerned about the poor image of Africa and who can afford it should think of investing in the media sector. Recent examples in Al Jazeera and al-Arabiya show how international networks can orchestrate information sharing in a way that achieves continental or regional objectives. Al jazeera and al Arabiya espouse the Arab voice in the world and Africa should have similar networks to advocate on behalf of Africa. The mass media has the ability to broaden the base of information sharing and democratize public consciousness that will gradually influence public opinion about Africa.

Africa's Agenda for Development

What is Development?

Development theorists have conceptualized the term development in many and different ways. For Walter Rodney in his provocative book: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it

implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self disciple, responsibility, and material well being.

U Thant — a Burmese diplomat and the third Secretary-General of the United Nations, from 1961 to 1971 phrased development in somewhat mathematical formula. Simply, U-Thant's phrase: development = economic growth+ social change captures the essence of development from all sectors.

Dudley Sears the British Economist says development is the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potential. What's happening to poverty? What's happening to unemployment? What's happening to inequality? If all three have declined from high to low, then the country can be said to enjoy a period of development.

Given the above postulations, can we say that Africa is developing? The answer of course may vary but the simple truth is that the continent has a long way to go. That journey towards development represents the agenda for development now and in the future.

As law makers from different countries in Africa, you could assist to open your various governments to the scrutiny of the people you represent. The formulation of policies and implementation of policies should be people centered and focused.

The future of the world is in Africa. And the continent is blessed with dynamic human resources as well as natural resources. The challenge is to utilize these resources more effectively through increased participation of citizens.

Conclusion:

I have argued in this paper that effective democratic governance is the antidote to development and change in Africa. Democracy based on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, open government, transparency, accountability, and genuine commitment to change will guarantee Africa's growth and development.

I also emphasized the significance of access to information and free flow of information among citizens of a democracy. Indeed, I recognize that information is the lifeblood of democracy and journalists are the midwives of democracy. Diaspora media has the potential to midwife a strong and virile Africa. The media will remain a partner in the development process and enable strong participatory process in the democratization of the continent.

Finally, Africa should tell her story instead of others telling Africa's stories with the risk of distortions. This is why I also called for greater investment in the media by Africans for Africans to help in presenting better narratives about the continent.

Mr. President, distinguished parliamentarians, and other guests, I thank you for listening.

Thank you.

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