Sustaining Africa's Development Initiative: Challenges and Hopes for Future Prosperity.

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ABSTRACT: The African union is a regional economic and political integration framework already put in place to foster economic growth, democracy and technological advancement through the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The challenge is thus for all African leaders to promote good governance, ensure zero-corruption and encourage greater public – private partnership in the development enterprise to boost economic prosperity for posterity.

INTRODUCTION

Sub – Saharan Africa is among the poorest region and contains the least developed countries in the world, with a population of 800 million and current annual growth rate of 2.3% (U.N.2007).

Todaro (1989), referred development as a "multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty. He identified some core values of development which includes the ability to provide as many people as possible with their basic needs namely; food, shelter, health – care and protection.

Sen (1990) viewed development as being synonymous with freedom and thus requires adequate empowerment of the state and society such that they can dispense their complimentary responsibilities. It requires an enhanced state capacity as well as institutional and government stability.

Historical records show that Africa is the cradle of civilization (Davidson, 1991, 1992, Face, 1997). Besides, the continent is rich, well endowed with enormous human and natural resources (Onomode, 1989; Oyekanmi 2002). In terms of technological and economic advancement pre – colonial Africa was at par with other parts of the world (Rodney, 1972). Records show that Africa invented writing on papyrus in ancient Egypt and Mathematics at the University of Timbuktu in West Africa (Onimode, 2000).

The rising profile of Africa in the world economy was however suddenly truncated through its contact with the outside world and was the beginning of Africa's development failures. For instance between 1451 – 1867, a total of 11, 641000 Africans were taken as slaves during the Atlantic slave trade (Fase, 1997). The impact of the slave trade on Africa is reflected its massive depopulation of the African continent with a heavy toll on development.

The onslaught of the Europeans in the form of colonialism coupled with about 425 years of continuous slaved raids impacted negatively on Africa in form of physical destruction, depopulation of manpower resources, technological demobilization and economic backwardness. (Fase 1997, Davidson, 1992; Ake, 1990).

Apart from the retroversion and outright denial of African history, the colonial state being an illegitimate state, relied on the illegitimate use of force for its survival (Osaghae, 1980; Mamdani, 2002) amidst the ensuing deeply entrenched legitimacy crisis, the resort to violence became inevitable to accomplish its imperial objectives. The substantive legacies of colonialism still endure (Mamdani, 2002) and are manifested in the form of imported and transformed socio-structures, technologies and services which still remain largely unchanged. The failure of African states to adapt these social and technological structures into African realities or to dismantle them even in the face of glaring opportunities at independence has remained a potent force in the neo-colonial enterprise. Africa is still entrenched in attributes of dependence, economic and legitimacy crisis, underdevelopment and contradictions (Osaghae 1999; Onimode,1983).

In absolute figure the number of Africans living in extreme poverty rose from 89.6 million to 233.5 million from 1960 to 1990. Also of the 49 countries classified as least developed countries 33 of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ogwu, 2002).

Besides, about 186 million people are chronically undernourished with one out of every three African suffering from extreme poverty (Onitiri 2001). With the exception of South Africa, average per – capital income in 1997 was and $315 making Africa one of the poorest part of the world. The total GDP of all 48 countries in the continent combined came to little more than the income of Belgium and is put at and $2 billion (Bush and Mohan, 2001).

The deplorable performance of African economy between 1995 – 97 put at 17.8% (i.e. investment to GDP ratio) compared to 34.8% for Asia excluding Japan. Africa's share of world trade has declined steadily and today stands at 1%. According to World Bank estimates Africa's loss of market share in merchandise exports from 1970 – 1993 is put at and $68 billion equivalent to 21 % of GDP (Akagwu, 2002).

There is also the foreign Debt profile put at $288.3 billion in 1990, $309.9 billion in 1994 and $325.5 billion in 1996 (Onimode, 2000). The frequency and intensity of conflict in Africa are equally deplorable to the extent that all parts of the continent are in one form of conflict or the other, examples are Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi and Rwanda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote D'voir (Ntalaja, 2001) and the current devastating security challenge in Nigeria perpetrated by the Boko Haram religious sect in the Northern part of the country.

The region is also being ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, food insecurity, environmental degradation, bad governance and economic retrogression among others.

Despite these critical challenges to development facing the continent, opportunities and natural resources needed to transform its economic, political, social and technological backwardness into a more prosperous, stable and technologically advanced continent still abound abundantly, if all stakeholders shall remain resolute, committed and result – oriented in the pursuit of the development enterprise.

This research paper is specifically aimed at highlighting the critical elements required to sustain Africa's developmental initiative as well as make concrete recommendations on future roadmap to economic, political and technological transformation of the continent to prosperity and for posterity.

Building a Strong Economic and Political Framework through the African Union:

The African union was initiated on June 12, 2000 but was formally established in September 2001 in Sirte (Steinberg, 2001,) with a fundamental objective to improve pan – African welfare and to provide Africans with a solid voice in international affairs (Steinberg, 2001), achieve greater unity and solidarity between African countries, defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, of member states, accelerate political and socio – economic integration of the continent, promote peace, security and stability on the continent, promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance, promote and protect human and peoples rights in accordance with the African charter on human and peoples rights, advance the development of the continent by promoting research in all fields in particular science and technology among others.

The fore-going analysis shows that the African union is indeed a new regional initiative put in place to address Africa's development paradox within the context of globalization.

In order to achieve these lofty objectives of the African union, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) was initiated, NEPADS objectives include: to achieve and sustain an average gross Domestic Product growth rate of above 7% per annum for the next 15 years, to ensure that the continent achieve the agreed international development goals which according to (Ogwu 2002) are: to reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015, to enroll all children of school age in primary schools by 2015, to reduce child, infant and maternal mortality by two – thirds between 1990 and 2015, to implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2015, so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015 etc.

The following analysis also reveals that NEPAD was born out of the desire to rescue Africa from the stronghold of underdevelopment which is ravaging the entire continent.

The viability of NEPAD as an instrument of African union is seen by some as a positive light while others argue to the contrary (Animashaun, 2002; Melber 2001) However I strongly hold the vision and hope that Africa will one day in the near future be prosperous less dependent, technologically advanced and politically stable as long as good governance is entrenched in their culture. This is because good governance is the ability of a government to ensure political transparency, provides efficient and effective public services, promote public health and provide a favourable climate for economic growth. The African union is making progress in actualizing these objectives through the New African partnership for African Development. There is need for African leaders to remain totally committed and resolute in maintaining a stable, corrupt – free and economically viable society through good governance.

Recommendations for a New Economically and Technologically Advanced Africa.

The following recommendations if implemented will accelerate socio-economic

development in Africa both at the short and long term periods.

1. African countries should be able to formulate a traditional home-based economic development plans and policies that will suit their cultural, technical, political and religious backgrounds to enhance easy implementation and propel economic development. The master-plan must be demand- driven and people- oriented for increased public-private partnership.

2. African-based democracy must be encouraged which will involve the inclusion of traditional rulers, Oba's, sultans and Oba's and other interest groups to enhance greater participation of all in entrenching good governance.

3. A functional police and army must be put in place to reinvigorate the security sector, of most African countries. This becomes necessary in view of the current devastating security challenges facing almost all the countries in Africa. Peace-keeping as well as security of lives and property is sin qua non to the development of human and material resources in the region.

4. Policies that encourage the advancement of technical skills through skill acquisition centers should be pursued vigorously to advance technology in the region. To this end the establishment of small scale industries is inevitable just as improvements in the energy and power sector is important. The emergence of a dynamic private sector will create more employment, increase gross domestic product and overall economic development.

   In order to enhance technological development in Africa, local technical initiatives must be recognized, and encouraged. This is because new technologies are built on top of existing ones through successive elaboration and co-operative idea-sharing and through a combination of skills, access to finance and markets.

5. Africa must build a strong regional integration network to comfortably be accommodated in the new economic globalization scheme.

   Finally, to ensure technological advancement, economic growth there is need for good governance, strong intra-African market linkages and absence of external influence on the management of the countries resources. This will surely put Africa on a fast lane of economic, political and technological development in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Despite the critical economic, political and technological challenges facing Africa, its future seems to be bright if leaders dispense good governance, encourage local innovative ideas and implement demand – driven socio – economic policies needed to accelerate development using the abundant human and natural resources that are yet to be tapped.

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