

## **MAGISTERIALISM, DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The current magisterial disposition of religious and political leaders has not fostered democratic justice and sustainable development in Africa. The African Agenda 2063, rooted in African Renaissance as a framework for addressing past injustices and a microcosm of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is poised to transform the African continent. However, freedom, although solidly encapsulated in the United Nations Human Rights, is oftentimes hampered in regards to religion and politics; a trend that is sustained without qualms, by dictatorial African leaders. This study examined the dogmatic style and fiat system observed in the long tradition of religious and political administration in Africa in relation to human values derivable from leadership. Phenomenological design as qualitative research approach was used to describe religious and political phenomena in terms consistent with the orientation of both religious and political audiences. This design focused on shared experience in Congo and it is used to identify phenomena of colonial power through how they were perceived by the Congolese and Africans in general. It was discovered that self-centeredness and totalitarianism are the bane of growth and development in Africa and the vicious cycle seems not to be diminishing. It is concluded that democratic justice in both religion and politics would facilitate sustainable development, and to achieve this, it is recommended that the onerous religious and political ideologies be reformed to meet the contemporary dynamics without violating the guiding principles of divinity and social governance to advance African nations.

**Keywords:** Political Practices, Religious Magisterialism, Sustainable Development.

### **Introduction**

Political activities ought to be properly structured, and political ideologies communicated according to social expectations of the citizens in regards to governance without jeopardizing the central proposition of government to make it beneficial to the generality of the people. However, the prevailing challenges in the political milieu are deeply rooted in magisterialism which has made leadership transactional rather than transformational, and the consequences are now a commonplace in Africa. The experience has been ‘too much of politicking but with too little impact. The African democracy is not well-savored with democratic justice and equity and the implication is grievous, therefore making sustainable development in Africa a herculean task. Magisterialism is largely anthropocentric with authoritative, socio-cultural and racial nuances which are not necessarily beneficial to all, rather for selfish reasons. Magisterialism, which was once fringe, has become almost mainstream dogma of the political space in the African continent.

Democracy which is the government of people by the people and for the people has long been bastardized, especially in Africa. It could rightly be said that African style of democracy was predicted by Socrates to fall and fail. Aver and Hellandenda (2020) consider current social challenges in Nigeria, especially crime and criminality as a function of the failure of leadership and government.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study examined the impact of magisterialism on sustainable development in Africa., and other specific objectives are:

- a. analyse the relationship between magisterialism and democratic governance in Africa.
- b. investigate the role of democracy in promoting sustainable development in Africa.
- c. identify the challenges and opportunities for promoting democratic governance and sustainable development in Africa.
- d. propose strategies for strengthening deeper understanding of the complex relationship between magisterialism, democracy, and sustainable development in Africa.

### **Magisterialism**

Magisterialism refers to a political approach that emphasizes strong state control and top-down decision-making, often at the expense of citizen participation and democratic processes. The term 'magisterialism' derived from 'magisterium' is often used among the Roman Catholic church to mean church's authority to give authentic interpretation of the word whether in its written form or tradition. Promise (2023) asserts that ethnicity, godfatherism, and political instability are the bane of democratic failure in Africa. In other words, magisterialism implies 'authority', and this so-called authority is vested in a top hierarchy or position to be obeyed without interrogation. The word magisterium derived from the Latin, *magister*, meaning 'teacher', 'president', 'chief', 'director', 'superintendent'. Magisterialism is, therefore, a fixation on tradition, doctrine, or ideology without any review to meet the contemporary needs and dynamics. Magisterial tendency limits participation and inclusivity in both politics and religion.

### **Democracy**

Democracy is commonly defined as the, 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Democracy is a system of government by all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives with free and fair electoral processes. Democracy is the control of people by the majority of its voting members of the society. Adegbemi (2013) perceives that the spate of insecurity in Africa is not unconnected to incessant threats and intimidation coming from bandits and terrorists in several ungoverned spaces in Africa and it is democratic governance that can correct the trend, in other words, democracy is a solution to social challenges.

### **Sustainable development**

Sustainable development covers a broad spectrum of a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Amao (2022) contends that sustainable development cannot be possible without adequate transparent

electoral process which requires improvement in Africa. Sustainable development implies stewardship of natural capital including many processes and pathways to achieve sustainability of development for both the present and future generations. The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Clapham and George (2019) comment that political dilemma is a big challenge to sustainability of institutional infrastructure in Africa and except corrected, the African nations would still continue to take the back seat in the comity of nations.

### **The Interplay between Magisterialism and Democratic Governance in Africa**

The relationship between magisterialism and democratic governance in Africa is complex and dynamic, influencing the continent's political, social, and economic development. Albert (2019), while commenting on the hazy agenda and politicking that have characterized the Niger Delta concludes that patronage system includes neopatrimonialism which is a system of social hierarchy where patrons use state resources to secure loyalty of clients in the general population. Peter and Blanch (2020) argue that patronage is more of elite politics while clientelism is more of mass control. Politics produce winners and losers, and victories relate to both the acquisition of power and the fulfilment of interest and values. Politicians frequently champion themselves as conciliators who will bring conflicting parties together, however, the possibility for interest-based bargaining exists in politics. Adedapo; Olaogun; Oluwadele; and Oluwadele (2022). argue that political calculation, based on ethnicity and prejudice cannot afford peace because of magisterial influence which is the tendency to control and manipulate public resources for a few people. The thrust of the argument is that cultural diversity and selfishness engender democratic injustice in Africa, especially in Nigeria and Rwanda.

Magisterialism and democratic governance in Africa have a complex relationship. The state wields and emphasizes authority, hierarchy, and tradition in both public and private affairs of the citizens, thereby limiting fundamental human rights of the governed. In Africa, magisterialism is inherently associated with colonial and post-colonial regimes that centralized power with the tendency of manipulation and control of people. This observable scenario is common in Africa where democratic governance is supposed to alleviate the suffering of the masses. Democratic governance is instituted in many African countries; however, popular participation, representation, and human rights are yet to be fully promoted and enjoyed. In view of this trend, the relationship between magisterialism and democratic governance in Africa can be seen in several ways:

- a. Paradox of democracy: Magisterialism and democratic governance are often in tension. While political leaders are elected through democratic protocols, they become magisterial with authority and control of the people in violation of participation and accountability.
- b. Mixed-method: Many African countries have adopted hybrid systems that combine elements of authoritarianism and democracy, leading to uneven and sometimes contradictory outcomes.
- c. Hinderance: Magisterialism is a principal factor in democratic governance, as seen in an attempt to suppress civil society activism, resist political opposition, and maintain state control over institutions and resources. The Nigerian government has always struggled with civil protests such as 'The EndSARS', Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) which are extant cases that attest magisterialism in governance even in Nigeria as the giant of African nations.

## Cases of Magisterialist Regimes in Africa

Africa is notorious for magisterial leadership style in a democratic dispensation and the situation is so critical to the extent that the continent has been blackmailed for post-colonialism. The continent is fraught with selfishness with grave implication for peacebuilding and sustainable development. Many regimes in Africa have been implicated for using various degrees of authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and restricted political participation, reflecting elements of magisterialism in their approaches to governance. Cases of magisterialist regimes in Africa include:

- a. Egypt under Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). His regime was characterized by a strong centralized authority, limited political participation, and suppressed dissent.
- b. Libya under Muammar Gaddafi (1969-2011). Gaddafi's regime was marked by an authoritarian rule, strict control over society, and restricted freedom to fundamental human rights
- c. Sudan under Omar al Bashir (1989-2019). This regime was characterized by a military-dominated government, restricted political opposition, and human rights abuses.
- d. Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe (1980-2017). Mugabe's regime was characterized by authoritarianism, suppression of political opposition, and state control over economy and media.
- e. Equatorial Guinea under Teodor Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (1979 till present); Mbasogo's regime is characterized by a highly centralized authority, limited political participation, and widespread human rights abuses.
- f. Eritrea under Isaias Afwerki (1993 till present): Afwerki's regime is a highly authoritarian rule, restricted individual freedoms, with indefinite military service.
- g. Burundi under Pierre Nkurunziza (2005-2020): This regime is marked by magisterialism, suppression of opposition, and violation of fundamental human rights.
- h. Democratic Republic of Congo under Joseph Kabila (2001-2019): Kabila's regime was characterized by a centralized authority, limited political participation, and widespread human rights abuses.
- i. Other African countries where magisterialism is rampant include Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritania, Rwanda, Togo, and Uganda. In all of these countries and some more others, including Nigeria, there is progress towards democratization or have varying degrees of authoritarianism.

Specific examples of authoritarian regimes in Africa include: Mathieu Kerekou's regime in Benin, which was pronounced corrupt, incompetent, and illegal by a national conference of ruling-party members and other leaders; Gnassingbé Eyadema's regime in Togo, which called out troops and declared the end of the transition effort on the final day of the national conference; and Kamuzu Banda's regime in Malawi, which rejected opposition on quasi-theological grounds.

## The Imperative of Sustainable Development in Africa

The imperative of sustainable development in Africa requires a shift away from magisterialism towards more democratic and inclusive approaches to governance. Current governance in Africa is characterized by manipulation, force, coercion, deception, and selfishness. Thus, efforts to mitigate the trajectory of bad governance can involve strengthening institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and empowering citizens to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities. For instance, the African Union (AU) has been

promoting democracy and democratic governance in Africa, with the adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. This is good news for Africa, to move African nations toward sustainable development of the continent.

Democratic justice is essential for sustainable development in Africa and this is feasible by empowering citizens and promoting participatory governance. No doubt, democracy can help ensure that development is inclusive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable. Sustainable development, in turn, is critical for addressing Africa's pressing challenges, such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. Bala and Usman (2021) express fear concerning the trajectory of politics in Africa, while Idowu (2022) reiterates general political thought that the 2023 elections should bring Nigeria, the giant of Africa closer to democratic justice, but it was generally far from expectation. This study advocates participatory governance for a renewed hope and peacebuilding framework for Africa to achieve transformative change characterized by people-centered, human rights-based, inclusive and participatory governance and peacebuilding systems.

### **Role of Religion in Promoting Democracy and Sustainable Development in Africa**

Religion has a significant role to play in promoting democratic governance and sustainable development in Africa because Africans are inherently religious and the main two religions across African nations are Christianity and Islam. Dowd (2010) complains that religious intolerance and hostilities have always undermined sustainable development of the society. In view of this, religion should encourage values like justice, honesty and compassion which are significant moral and social values needed in advancing the society towards democratic governance. Religion also encourages civic engagement by mobilizing followers to participate in political processes, holding leaders responsible and accountable. To a reasonable extent, religious institutions and political educators have always helped in curbing crime and criminality in the society by promoting human rights and social justice which are critical for democratic governance and sustainable development.

Religion is significant in peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation, which, at times, cannot be achieved by government and political leaders. Marshall (2019) opines that 'political spirituality' and 'Pentecostal revolution' may undermine democracy in Nigeria, but his position is not well justified in political economy since every citizen has equal opportunity to fundamental human rights and freedom of expression in socio-political affairs. Religious interfaith and dialogic efforts have always been impactful in securing environmental and national peace; therefore, religion is *sine qua non* for sustainability of peace and development across African nations, especially if magisterial tendency and disposition of religious leaders in Africa is reviewed to meet contemporary realities

### **Relationship between Democracy and Sustainable Development in Africa.**

Democracy and sustainable development are intertwined. While democracy provides the foundation for sustainable development in Africa, sustainable development reinforces democratic governance. Arogbofa (2022) attributes slow and epileptic development in Africa to bad leadership and short-term vision for the continent. Democracy ensures accountability which is crucial for sustainable development. Stewardship responsibility of leaders demands that leaders must answer to the people, ensuring resources are used efficiently and effectively. True democracy affords participatory governance in which citizens are considered as partners in decision-making through free and fair elections to cater for the needs and aspirations of the people. The interface between democracy and sustainable development creates an opportunity to promote human rights, including access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which are essential for



sustainable development. Democracy fosters good governance, reducing corruption, ensuring transparency in the management and implementation of policies related to natural resources. Democracy attracts investment, promotes economic growth, and creates opportunities for sustainable development. In the same light, democracy enables environmental protection, ensuring sustainability of natural resources for the good of all citizens. Democracy guarantees social justice, reducing inequality and ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities to foster peace and stability that are conducive for sustainable development.

Democracy provides avenue for human capital development to thrive, however, Ashindorbe (2022) asserts that democracy in Africa cannot produce the desired result with the orientation of 'zero-sum politics' that is currently practiced in Africa. It is a truism that investment in human capital and capacity building are necessary for sustainable development to reduce needless migration of intellectuals and professionals, especially young Africans that abandon African countries on a daily basis, for western countries. To this purpose, democracy and sustainable development are interdependent and should be strengthened to take African continent away from current socio-economic and political quagmire. The postcolonial government of newly independent African states had evolved into domination by a single party in a one-party system, which has often resulted in dictatorship.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Challenges in Africa**

The current challenges of sustainable development in Africa can be addressed, using the critical framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve the continental objectives. The 17 SDGs adopted by the United Nations in 2015 are spelt out to include, "no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institution, and partnerships for the goals". Although, Africa has made significant progress in implementing the SDGs, but challenges still remain.

Achieving the SDGs in Africa requires intensive collaboration among governments and stakeholders including civil society, private sector, and international organizations. It is noteworthy to address the challenges facing sustainability in Africa but the challenges can only be surmounted if the critical SDGs framework is intentionally implemented. Africa faces several challenges in achieving sustainable development, including: widespread poverty and inequality, political instability, limited access to education, climate change to which Africa is highly vulnerable, dependence on exporting primary commodities which makes African people vulnerable to global market fluctuations, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, rapid urbanization, limited technological advancement and brain drain. In Africa, where many countries are still consolidating their democracies, magisterialism can be a significant obstacle towards a realistic democratic governance and sustainable development.

### **Strategies for Promoting Democratic Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa**

Political ideologies adopted after the Cold War have not yielded positive outcomes in Africa because some African countries adopted liberal democratic practices (multi-party-political systems) without *Africanness* in its content and context. Organized contestations for power by militia groups, armed non-state actors, and civil wars have ravaged some African countries due to authoritarian regimes, military and one party, tyrannical political system. Belligerents have

complex and ubiquitous strategies in ungoverned spaces against legitimate constituted authorities. Even though the African Union had aimed to “silence the guns” by 2020, the efforts have not yielded positive outcomes. It is believed that digital technologies would revolutionize peacebuilding activities to mitigate democratic injustice and ultimately promote sustainable peace in the continent. To achieve this noble goal, Mietzner (2020) encourages every stakeholder in both religion and politics to leverage digital technologies to advance religion and politics. This advice is very timely for African leaders in both religious and political spaces where magisterialism is rife.

Various fundamental policy options for addressing magisterialism and promoting democratic consolidation in Africa require strategic and multi-faceted approach which include:

- a. fostering of culture of democracy: Democratic values and principles through education and media should be encouraged, most importantly among emerging young people.
- b. Ensuring free and fair elections: African leaders should cultivate transparent, credible, and inclusive electoral processes in the spirit of democracy.
- c. Strengthening and building institutions that are pro-democracy and pro rule of law.
- d. Diversifying economies: African leaders should reduce dependence on primary commodities
- e. Investing in human capital: African leaders should prioritize education, healthcare, and capacity building and improve infrastructure such as roads, renewable energy, ports, and promote digital infrastructure to enhance global development.

### **Reducing Magisterialism, Promoting Democracy, Achieving Sustainable Development**

Mohammed (2022) reflects on the trajectory of politics in Africa and concludes that youth participation in politics would definitely reduce authoritarianism and coercion currently being experienced in Africa. Reducing magisterialism and promoting democratic governance are essential steps towards achieving sustainable development in Africa. Magisterialism, characterized by centralized power and decision-making has always hindered democratic governance in Africa but there are solutions to the problem. It is necessary to decentralize power; encourage and foster engagement of citizens in the political processes through political and citizenship education; promote transparency and accountability; ensure free and fair elections; provide resources for local leadership to promote grassroot development; and leverage technology to enhance governance and access to information. Ishola (2019) opines that young people should be motivated without being marginalized, to participate in democratic governance in Africa as a means of liberalizing ‘tradition’, ‘stereotype’, ‘patrimonialism’ and authoritarianism in this digital dispensation a trend that is repressive to young Africans.

Albert (2020) comments on alternatives to external intervention in African conflicts with emphasis on indigenous knowledge system in African context. Promotion of peace, justice, and strong institutions is the foundation upon which the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) rest. The interrelated nature of national and international interactions in a globalized world implies that a threat to peace anywhere is a threat to peace everywhere as globally corroborated by the Seventeen Development Goals (SDGs). These SDGs are aimed at overcoming poverty, inequality, injustice, hunger and climate change, and enhance quality education, health, clean water, energy and a sanitized environment by 2030. All these Goals are predicated on Goal 16 which specifically relates to the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions to facilitate peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding with minimal efforts. Thus, without peace, justice and strong institutions, it will be difficult to stop contemporary agitations and insecurity. It is commendable

that the judiciary is playing a crucial role in promoting democracy and the rule of law in Africa, with some courts delivering landmark judgments that have advanced democratic governance, nevertheless, African leaders cannot continue to be dictatorial in governance.

### **Conclusion**

The study on magisterialism, democracy and sustainable development in Africa has led to the conclusion that magisterialism, which implies excessive control in governance is no longer desirable in the contemporary democratic dispensation. Africa faces the challenges in consolidating democracy and achieving sustainable development, therefore, it is imperative for African leaders to strengthen institutions, promote citizen participation in electoral processes to foster a culture of democracy which is crucial for democratic governance. Governments at various levels have been implicated to have not engaged and implemented robust global democratic principles and policies towards achieving sustainable development in Africa. Technological development is slow and not yet well contextualized in Africa just as regional economic communities and continental frameworks have not been properly marshalled. International support for democracy in Africa is crucial, with organizations like the European Union and the United States enabling Africa with provision of technical and financial assistance to promote democratic governance.

### **Recommendations:**

Having considered the findings and conclusion of the study based on the interconnectedness of democratic governance, religion, and sustainable development in Africa, it is imperative to emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to address the continent's challenges therefore, the study recommends that:

1. African governments should prioritize democratic governance and sustainable development.
2. International organizations and development partners should support African-led initiatives
3. Civil society and the private sector should collaborate with governments to promote democratic governance and sustainable development.
4. Religion, as a strong institution, should give more attention to inherent values of religion to promote democratic governance and sustainable development in Africa.
5. Regional economic communities and continental frameworks should be strengthened to foster economic growth and development.

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