



## **Good governance, Elections and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

The threatening presence of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, conflict, discrimination as well as climate devastation across the globe calls for serious global concern. In dealing with these challenges among others, the United Nations Organization evolved in 2015 a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all societies. The achievement of these goals is dependent on the efforts made by individual countries to tackle the global challenges they face. The aim of this paper is to show the connectivity between credible elections and good governance in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa. As a speculative research, data for the paper were collected through secondary source of literature search and document review analysis – a qualitative method used for gathering information. The paper argues that good governance is an elusive phenomenon in the African political landscape and is likely to challenge the attainment of the SDG in the continent. The paper recommends among others the consolidation of Africa's democracy through the conduct of credible and true democratic elections through automation.

**Keywords:** Good Governance, Credible Election, Automation, Sustainable Development

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### **Introduction**

Governance and good governance have become central terminologies in development discourses across the world. Development experts have argued variously that good governance has the potential to cure most ills including poverty. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations opines that “good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development”. Apart from the



United Nations, many development institutions have been so concerned about the governance system in developing countries. Rahman (2016:40) observes that “international organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU) and other donor agencies, have given rigorous importance to the issue of governance –particularly for aid receiving countries”. No society provides quality services to its citizens when the governance. System is numbed and depraved. A governance system needs to be effective in the first place for people oriented services to be provided. Rahman’s (2016) view aligns with this submission. He argues that “Good governance is believed to be the key issue for providing quality services through ensuring quality management”. The World Bank was apt when it argued that “Governance sets the parameters of management. A mismanaged enterprise cannot flourish” (World Bank, 2000:59).

In a worrisome manner, Africa may become highly un-inhabitable in a few decades to come if the trend of bad governance is not reversed. From Egypt to South Africa, Ghana to Kenya and from Nigeria to Sudan, the agitation for people-oriented governance has occupied the central thinking of citizens demonstrated in several protests and violent conflicts across the continent. The civil societies’ occupation of the Flag house in Accra as well as the strike and demonstration embarked upon by Ghanaian civil servants in the past were all blamed on the governance system in Ghana. Zuma of South Africa suffered integrity crises of diverting public funds for personal advantage. The story is the same across Africa and Nigeria in particular is not spared having witnessed mass protest by youth to end the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and Police brutality which culminated to the massacre of many youths at the Lekki Toll gate by the Nigerian Soldiers on Tuesday 25 October 2020 (Ojigbo, 2020). To have a stable society and a conflict reduced system, there is a need to have a system of governance that is founded on equity, fairness, rule of law, accountability, and responsiveness.

Juwah-Ogboi (2018), Lawal & Oluwatoyin (2011), argued that mismanagement of material resources, bad leadership, and corruption explain leadership malfeasance in Africa, and if



unchecked could make for slow sustainability in providing better standard of living for its citizens.

Global action is imminent to address the misery witnessed globally. The United Nations emphasizes sustainable development as global practice that can lift the world especially developing countries from misery and inhuman condition of existence. It identified 17 goals to be met by 2030 to bring about sustainable development. The goals are concerned with achieving a better and enduring future for all. The goals are the universal calls to end poverty, hunger, ensure good health, protect the planet and ensure all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The question is; how can these be achieved in Africa with the seeming leadership failures? What role does credible election play in guaranteeing leadership responsibility in Africa? In What ways can credible elections be conducted in Africa? What is the linkage between credible elections, leadership accountability and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals? While it is the concern of this article to address these questions, this paper argues that good governance, which is lacking in Africa, is conditioned by the poor conduct of elections and is likely to jeopardize the attainment of the SDG in Africa by 2030. As a defining factor in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals serious commitment is required at the level of governance to address the concerns of the SDG. The objective of the paper is to establish a nexus between credible elections through automation and good governance in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa. Leadership impunity and backward electoral practices which compromise good governance justify the argument of this paper.

### **Exegesis on Good Governance**

The concept of good governance is not of recent origin. It has occupied the central discourses of early political thinkers in their exegesis of what an ideal society should be. It has therefore been a concern of society since men began to live an organized political life. As far back as 350BC, writing in his famous classics *politics*, Aristotle argued that “the most practical form of government was that of polity, which embraced personal freedom, the rule of law, and which was dependent upon a large middle class”. Polity according to him was “one of the correct regimes and it occurs when the many rule in the interest of the political community as a whole”.



By his analysis of what the city should be and the appropriate regime type for a political community, Aristotle lays the foundation for the theory of good governance. As he asserted, “any political regime that is underlain by good governance functions for the common happiness of the citizens”; a philosophy that utilitarian strive to pursue. “The entire action of all the institutions that made up the state mechanism was obligatorily required to achieve the city’s state of happiness if it wanted to achieve good governance” (Dumitrescu, 2010:9). Governance, therefore, by Aristotle’s reasoning, is by nature, aimed at some good.

In the Plato’s republic, good governance is placed on the messianic qualities of an ideal person. For Plato, “good governance is the rule of the philosopher Kings”. Plato states in the republic thus; “until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princess of this world have the spirit and of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils, nor the human race, as I believe, and then only will this our state have a possibility of life and behold the light of day” (Plato, Reeve & Grube, 1992:208). Political philosophy of Plato in this regards seems to lead to personal absolutism (Azfar, 2014) and suggests elements of authoritarianism.

The works of Hobbes and Locke also present a contrasting conception of good governance. Hobbes for instance was at pains with the right of the individual because for him individual liberty breeds excessive recklessness. He “believed in the authoritarian state to enforce the law and to protect individuals from a state of nature”. His seminal work the *Leviathan* described the state of nature as poor, nasty and rough. The life of man was solitary, brutish and short. It was war of all against all and the survival of the fittest. This kind of existence does not bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. An authoritarian state was therefore necessary to stem these negative characters of man and enthrone good governance. On the other hand, Locke’s conception of good governance “consists of a government, which espouses the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness”.

The exegesis above shows clearly that early political thinkers share commonality in what is appropriate for the citizens of a political community. They argue in various discourses that good governance brings stability and provide common happiness for the greater number of citizens. What however seems to differ in their argument is how good governance is



attained. A quick recap shows that Aristotle's pathway to good governance is founded on the regime type of polity (a mixture of oligarchy and democracy). Plato talks of the rule of philosopher kings as a *sin-qua-non* to good governance. For Hobbes, an authoritarian state is ideal to crack down on the excess liberty of man and bring society to proper shape. Locke's philosophy suggests that good governance could be attained through guarantee of the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

The universal Declaration of Human Right adopted by the United Nations in 1948 seems to have taken a departure from Locke's political philosophy of how good governance could be attained. The general question is what makes governance good? Here we need to quickly turn to the moral dimension of political thinker's good governance. Governance has been attributed different meanings over the years. The UNDP views it as "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences". Graaf and Paanakker (2010) capture it "as the process of agenda setting and rule enforcement by actors". All these simply translate to the process of decision making by a state as well as how such decisions are implemented (Kaufman, Kraay, & Zoido-Lobotón, 1999). Kaufman et.al went on to identify three dimensions of governance. They include Process; involving how government is enthroned and dethroned; the capacity to regulate; involving how policies and legal frameworks are made and implemented and finally the respect for the rights of citizens and state institutions and the interactions that ensues among them (Kaufman, Kraay, & Zoido-Loboton, 1999).

Governance could also be gleaned from what states do in adapting to their external environments. In this case it conjures an empirical manifestation of the actions of a state in the exercise of its political responsibilities. Governance therefore, is an embodiment of what the state does in engaging its environment for peaceful co-existence. Pierre and Peters (2000) call it co-operation structures. For them "governance is about 'sustaining coordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives such as political actors and institutions, corporate interests, civil society, and transnational organizations" (p.4). However, this is feasible only in organised climes. In backward and rogue societies, the state muscles non state actors such as civil society



organisations and civil right groups from engaging the state on governance. The value a country pursues in the course of administering its polity determines whether the governance system is good or bad.

Contemporary conceptualization of good governance could be traced to the submission of the World Bank in its 1989 report of Africa titled ‘Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth’. In that report the World Bank concluded that the crisis facing Africa was the crisis of governance and attributed the failure of aids to cause change in Africa to governance issues (Singh, 2003). Good governance is conceived here as that process of administering a state that brings greater happiness and improves the wellbeing of the citizens. This conception would become clearer if we explore the basic characteristics of good governance as captured in the UNDP definition. The process of ensuring accountability, rule of law, equity, fairness, and transparency, inclusiveness in the exercise of political, economic and administrative responsibilities of a state constitutes good governance. Rhaman (2016:45) extrapolated the concept in the following expressions: “Good governance is characterized by an accountable government at the top, an independent judicial system, freedom of thought and expression, and above all, freedom of choice for its citizens. Governance can be viewed as the sum of three major components: process, content, and deliverables. The process of governance includes factors such as transparency and accountability. Content includes values such as justice and equity. It must ensure that the citizens, especially the poorest, have the basic needs and have a life with dignity”. Is this a common practice among public officials in Africa? It is either rare or non-existent. The quality of governance in Africa will have a deep-seated effect on sustainable development as enunciated by the United Nations. Africa lags behind in all these and could be attributed to the nature of the enthronement process of its political leadership.

### **Methodology**

Data for the paper were collected through secondary source of literature search and document review analysis – a qualitative method used for gathering information. The method attempts to answer the question “Why”. In the context of this paper, the “Why” interrogates the snag in leadership accountability in Africa, what could be done to address it in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030. As a speculative research, it



places emphasis upon the not-yet, the possible, the emergent, the potential and the co-becoming (Michael & Wilkie, 2022). It is always intended to provoke thoughts to guide against failure. It provokes new ways of thinking and to bring particular ideas or issues into focus (Ross, 2017).

### **African Leadership and the Character of Governance**

Practicing good governance is imperative in meeting the sustainable development goals in Africa. This practice is slow and in most cases completely absent in the public administrative system of Africa. People oriented governance is not a common practice among those who occupy public offices in Africa. The character of self-centeredness, wanton stealing of public funds as well as nepotism and disregard for rule of law are common occurrences in Africa's leadership style. Nsoho (2012) writing for Forbes Media chronicles the five worst African presidents whose leadership style impedes good governance. They include:

Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea whose "country ranks very poorly in the United Nations human development index with highest under 5 mortality rates with about 20% of its children dying before the age of five. José Eduardo dos Santos, President of Angola has about 68 percent of the country's total population lives below the poverty line of \$1.7 a day, while 28 percent live on less than 30 cents. Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe's inadequacies overshadowed his achievements. Zimbabwe's unemployment rate was the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. It was over 60 percent" (Nsoho, 2012). King Mswati III, King of Swaziland is an absolute monarch whose country's average life expectancy is the lowest in the world at 33 years; nearly 70 percent of the country's citizens live on less than \$1 a day and 40 percent are unemployed.

The president of Sudan Omar Al-Bashir's reign was characterized by a civil war in which over one million were killed, while several millions were displaced. A diplomatic wikileaks cable revealed that Al-Bashir likely siphoned some \$9 billion of his country's funds into his private bank accounts in the United Kingdom" (Nsoho, 2012). The authoritarian leadership exuded by these leaders makes existence in those countries a nightmare. There are so many authoritarian regimes in Africa and which could be likened to dictatorship.



The World Population Review 2019 identified the following African countries as dictatorship; Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Eritrea and Ethiopia. Others include Gabon, Libya Mauritania, Rwanda Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. A leadership adjudged dictatorial loses the quality of entrenching good governance. Authoritarian regimes come with its bad consequences. It suppresses the rights of citizens, muscles the press, it becomes unaccountable, disrespects the rule of law, unresponsive, never transparent and lacks integrity and honesty. These explain the widespread corruption common among African Leaders. A few of the revelations as put up by IVCC are presented as follows: “Mobuto Sese Seko (DRC) embezzled over \$5 billion from his country, Sani Abacha (Nigeria) embezzled between \$2-5 billion from his country. Idris Deby (Chad) embezzled \$30 million in foreign aid to build an oil pipeline through the country, the proceeds of which were meant to feed the desperately poor people were used instead to buy military equipment to keep his minority government in power. Somalia adjudged 2010 most corrupt country has 50 percent of the population relying on food aid to survive, but 50 percent of that aid is stolen by warlords. It is estimated that corruption costs African states 25 percent of their GDP, or \$148 billion dollars a year” (IVCC, 2019). Given this scenario that, cuts across the continent, African Leaders are far from entrenching good governance.

The 2023 corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for Africa released by the Transparency International is damning. The report indicates a continent “consistently marked by its poor performance, with most African nations showing stagnation or failing to make progress against corruption”. The report shows that Africa maintains an unchanged average score of 33 with ninety percent of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa scoring below 50 on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). This presents a largely gloomy picture for Africa. On a scale of 0 to 100 where 0 represents very corrupt country and 100 representing most corruption free country “Seychelles scores 71 (20 out of 180) - a significant improvement from the 66 of 2018, to put it at the top of the African region. Seychelles is followed by Cabo Verde 64 and Botswana 59 – a decline from it 61 position in 2018 (Transparency International, 2024). The report holds further that “at the very bottom of the index for the twelfth year in a row, Somalia scores 11 points ranking 180 out of 180, followed by South Sudan 13 (177 out of 180) to round out the lowest scores in the African region. In the last





few years, several countries experienced sharp declines in their CPI scores, including Burundi, Congo, Mozambique, Liberia and Ghana. With a score of 25, Nigeria remained unchanged on the CPI as she ranks 145 out of 180 countries surveyed. Below is a chart showing the regional overview of top scorers and bottom scorers in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for Sub-Saharan Africa for 2023.

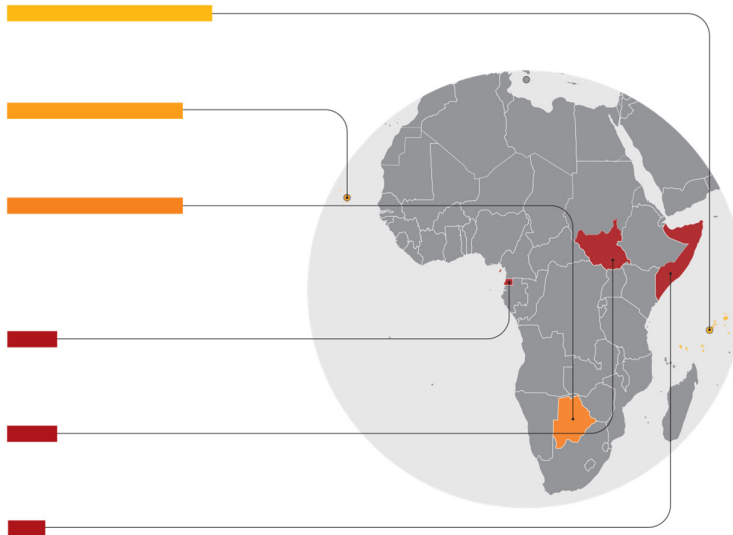


FIG. 1: Top and Bottom scorers in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 2023 CPI  
Source: Transparency International.

#### Top scorers

SEYCHELLES

71/100

CABO VERDE

64/100

BOTSWANA

59/100

#### Bottom scorers

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

17/100

SOUTH SUDAN

13/100

SOMALIA



11/100

Africa is internally caged by those who occupy political offices with daunting effort to remain in office in perpetuity largely driven by greed to accumulate wealth at the detriment of the citizen. Africa as a continent with “autocratic regimes, weak institutions, and unresponsive political systems continually undermining anti-corruption efforts”. (Transparency International, 2019). The prevalence of Africa’s leaders who wants to remain in power for life is captured in table 1.

**TABLE 1: Sub-Saharan African Longest-serving Leaders 1960-2023**

	<b>Total years.</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>Time in office</b>	<b>2023</b>
Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (Equatorial Guinea)	44			
Omar Bongo Ondimba (Gabon)	42			
Paul Biya (Cameroun)	41			
Denis Sassou Nguesso (Republic of Congo)	39			
José Eduardo dos Santos (Angola)	38			
Gnassingbé Eyadéma (Togo)	38			
Yoweri Museveni (Uganda)	38			
Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe)	38			
Félix Houphouët-Boigny (Ivory Coast)	33			
Isaias Afwerki (Eritrea)	32			
Mobutu Sese Seko (DRC)	31			



Idriss Déby  
(Chad) 30

Hastings Kamuzu Banda  
(Malawi) 30

Omar al-Bashir  
(Sudan) 30

Mathieu Kérékou  
(Benin Republic) 28

Ismail Omar Guelleh  
(Djibouti) 24

Paul Kagame  
(Rwanda) 23

Source: Council on Foreign Relations, 2023

Common characters exist among entrenched leaders of Africa; they are fantastically corrupt, they are self-interest oriented, they bother less about their citizens and country and they are excessively authoritarian. The African leadership mindset is antagonistic to public progress and will deliver nothing towards achieving the sustainable development goals. Understanding how they are elected is important in interrogating this mindset and their performance profile. Achieving the SDGs will begin with entrenching good governance. When need driven services are rendered by the state, the goals of sustainable development are rapidly met.



The diagram in figure 2 explains this model.

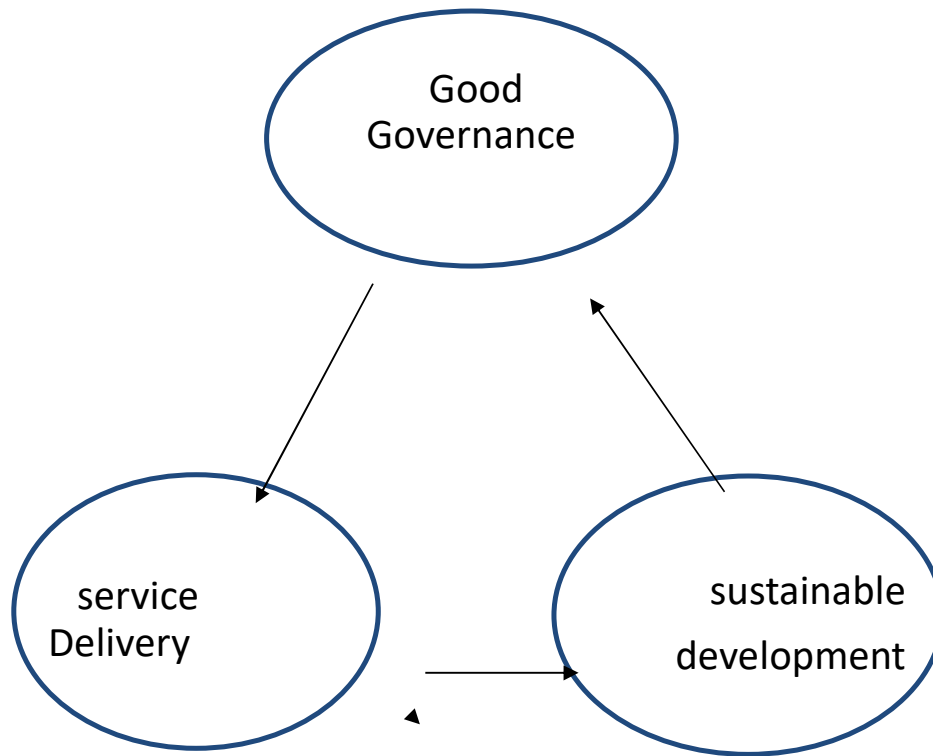


FIG. 2: Model of the relationship between good governance, service delivery and sustainable development

Source: Author's configuration.

In this model, good governance brings about service delivery, service delivery leads to sustainable development and sustainable development becomes the focus of good governance. This completes a cycle of stable society.

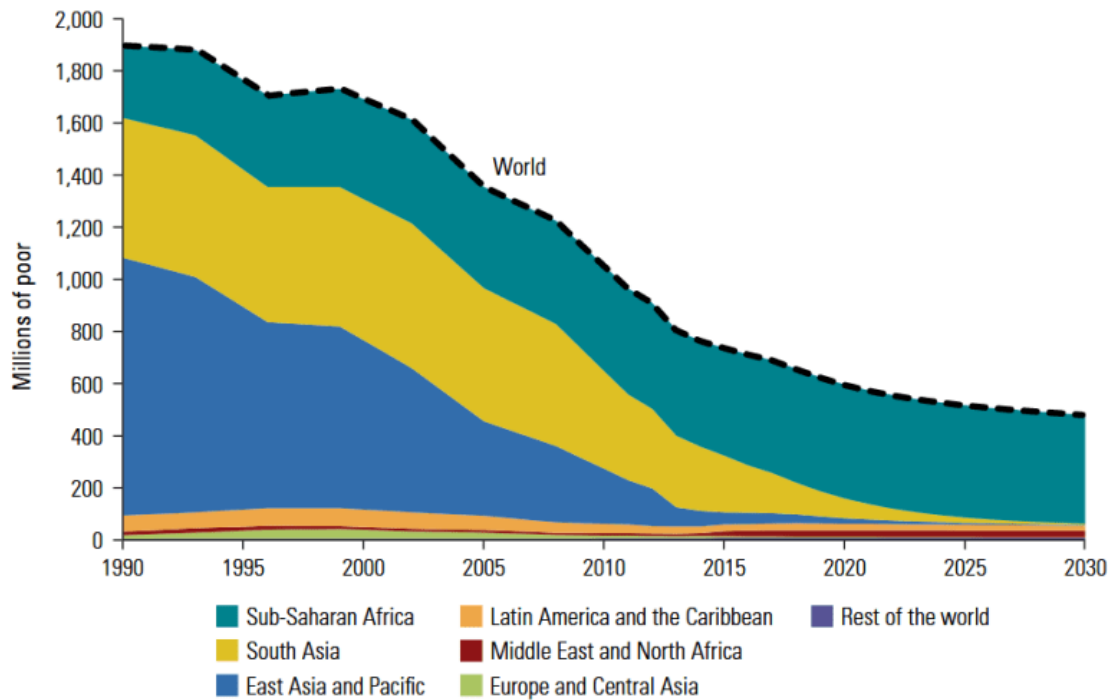
### **Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and the African Scenario**

The most often-quoted definition of sustainable development was coined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. It submits that sustainable development “is that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs”. The millennium Declaration of the principles of the United Nations charter identifies principles and treaties on sustainable development including economic development, social development and environmental protection. In this frame, sustainable



development is seen as “a system approach to growth and development and to manage natural and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations”. Egalitarian conception of sustainable development (Jacobs, 1999) generates a more nuanced definition of sustainable development. It is conceived as “the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems” (Agyeman, Bullard & Evans, 2003, p.5).

The SDG 1 in this regard talks about ending extreme poverty in all its forms. “More than 800 million people around the world still live on less than \$1.25 a day—that’s about the equivalent of the entire population of Europe living in extreme poverty”. (UNDP, 2017). Many do not have food to eat and clean drinking water. Majority of this impoverished population are found in Africa. The World Bank argues that “extreme poverty is becoming more concentrated in Sub Saharan Africa because of the region’s slower rates of growth, problems caused by conflict and weak institutions. The number of people living in extreme poverty in the region has grown from an estimated 278 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015. Of the world’s 28 poorest countries, 27 are in Sub-Saharan Africa, all with poverty rates above 30 percent. In short, extreme poverty is increasingly becoming a Sub-Saharan African problem” (World Bank, 2018, p.2). Africa ranks the poorest in the comity of poor continents in the world. The extremity of the poverty profile in Africa is captured in figures 3 as presented by Patel (2018, p.1).



Source: PovcalNet (online analysis tool), World Bank, Washington, DC, <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/>. World Development Indicators; World Economic Outlook; Global Economic Prospects; Economist Intelligence Unit.

FIG.3: Number of poor by region, 1990-2030



SDG 2 points to ending extreme hunger and malnutrition. About 821 million people are estimated to be chronically undernourished in 2017 (UNDP, 2017). Hunger is also extremely profound in Africa with astronomical malnourished children. “Sub-Saharan Africa is also a hotbed of chronic hunger due to extreme poverty. According to the FAO definition, people suffer from chronic hunger if their daily energy intake for an extended period of time is below what they would need for a healthy and active life. The lower limit is an average of 1,800 calories per day. According to this measure, 226.7 million people are starving in Africa. This means that sub-Saharan Africa, along with southern Asia, remain one of the poorest regions in the world” (SOS Children’s Villages, 2019).

SDG3 bothers on ensuring good health and wellbeing. This would entail putting in place a good and functioning health system with standard health facilities. The health challenges in Africa tend to be significantly high with preventable deaths occurring frequently. Pheage (2017) reported that “approximately 1.6 million Africans died of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV-related illnesses in 2015.

SDG4 targets inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. About 103 million youths worldwide lack basic literacy skills and more than 60 percent of them are women (UNDP, 2017).

SDG5 speaks to achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. “In just about every way, women and girls lag behind. There are still gross inequalities in work and wages, lots of unpaid “women’s work” such as child care and domestic work, and discrimination in public decision-making” (UNDP, 2017).

SDG 6 addresses availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. “Water scarcity affects more than 40 percent of people around the world, and that number is projected to go even higher as a result of climate change. If we continue the path we’re on, by 2050 at least one in four people are likely to be affected by recurring water shortages” (UNDP, 2017). The water conference in Africa 2012 concluded that “Sub Saharan Africa had the largest number of water-stressed countries of any other place on the planet and of an estimated 800 million people who live in Africa, 300 million live in a water stressed environment. This is a serious threat that African leadership has to take seriously.

SDG 7 talks of affordable and clean energy. “As the world’s population continues to rise, more people will need cheap energy to light their homes and streets, use phones and



computers, and do their everyday business. How we get that energy is an issue; fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions are making drastic changes in the climate, leading to big problems on every continent.”(UNDP, 2017). This emphasizes that countries has to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

SDG 8 canvasses for decent work and economic growth. “An important part of economic growth is that people have jobs that pay enough to support themselves and their families. Countries are advised to promote policies that encourage entrepreneurship and job creation and eradication of forced labour, slavery and human trafficking (conditions prevalent in Africa). Jobs in Africa where they exist do not pay enough to sustain individual or family livelihood. The work condition is not decent and available employment is not productive. The labour force is either not employed or under employed. The potential of the work force in Africa is not maximally utilized.

SDG 9 Industry, innovations and infrastructural development. “Technological progress helps us address big global challenges such as creating jobs and becoming more energy efficient. For example, the world is becoming ever more interconnected and prosperous due in part to the internet. The more connected we are, the more we can all benefit from the wisdom and contributions of people everywhere on earth” (UNDP, 2017). How committed is Africa in building resilient infrastructure to support industrialization and economic growth in the continent? Infrastructure is needed to support individual drive towards innovation in a fast competing world system

SDG 10 espouses reduction in inequalities. The United Nations says that the old story remains that “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. Income inequality is a global problem that requires global solutions. The strength to reduce inequality in global relationship lies in the hands of Africa. When African leadership continues to create internal crises that keep the continent in perpetual war with its citizens, there will be no room to plan and execute robust development plan for the continent. Displacement and refugee will continue to be on the rise which will continually necessitate the call for humanitarian interventions. Africa will remain, under this condition of perpetual recipient of foreign aid; an identity that is not only humiliating but considered sacrilegious. The wanton corruption in Africa diverts public money meant for critical investment to personal uses and keeps the continent in continuous poverty. This is a major factor in the escalated inequality witnessed by Africa.





SDG 11 projects sustainable cities and Communities. Most cities in Africa cannot pass for suburbs in the developed countries. Cities are poorly planned with dilapidated infrastructure. The urban-rural migration in search of greener pasture creates uncontrolled influx into the urban areas which mounts pressure on the already moribund infrastructure that further worsens the situation. Africa needs committed action in urban renewal.

SDG 12 talks of responsible consumption and Production. “We can have a world where everybody gets what they need to survive and thrive. The hard part is how to achieve that goal. Africa needs to manage its natural resources more efficiently, cut per capita food waste in half and get businesses and consumers to reduce and recycle waste.(UNDP, 2017).

SDG13 is on climate action. The goal emphasizes climate action on common standards and achievable targets to reduce carbon emissions and manage the risk of climate change.

SDG 14 centres on Life below Water. Responsible exploitation of the sea and ocean is emphasized by this goal. The dumping of waste and other toxics in the water is not sustaining life below the water. Action needs to be coordinated on how to responsibly exploit water and make safe this generation and the one in future.

SDG 15 focuses on Life on Land. According to this goal, countries have to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” (UNDP, 2017).

SDG16 discusses Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. It emphasizes reduction in local and international crises and supports relationships based on justice, equity, and fairness.

SDG 17 calls for Partnerships for the Goals. The final goal buttresses the need to create a synergy towards meeting these goals. About 193 countries have committed to work together to achieve these goals. It will require assistance from strong countries to support weak ones to achieve these goals in their domain.

There is a serious interconnection between all the 17 goals. In other words, the success of or otherwise of one goal could affect the other. Achieving better health could help to reduce poverty. A peaceful and inclusive society reduces inequality and could prosper the individuals and the economy.



### **Credible Election as a Precursor to Good Governance and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals**

The central idea of good governance as a contemporary development terminology buffers around democratic practices. Countries where democratic ideas and practices are shoddy may have the best of social facilities but the citizens are not free. The starting point in our drive towards good governance is in consolidating Africa's democracy expressed in the kind of elections they conduct (Udu, Nkwede, & Ezekwe, 2015). Let it be established clearly that credible election in the context of this study is that election where the votes count. This is not the situation with African elections. Election is the foundation upon which liberal democracy is built. In its shabby state a political community drifts towards dictatorial tendencies and personalized rule leading to unaccountability and unresponsiveness to public yearnings. Elections are a barometer to measure among others the level of a country's democracy and how it is fairing. Where an outcome is constantly marred by irregularities, it produces, in the case of Africa, public officials who are not accountable to the people.

A democratic election remains an important factor in building democratic legitimacy and entrenching democratic ethos in any society. "The failure of elections or their absence largely defines the predominance of political dictatorships and personalized rule in Africa" (AdeJumobi, 2000:59). What you find in African governance is political despotism laced under civil democratic governance. While it is evidenced that holding election alone does not account for genuine democracy, conducting credible election has the potential of stabilizing and sustaining a people's democratic practice. Elections with utmost credibility have the propensity to promote accountable leadership and the tendency of being responsive to the citizens' aspirations. Even though it is a fact that all democracies hold elections, it is also very clear that not every election is democratic. Africa's democracies fall within the categories of democracies whose elections are not democratic. From Nigeria to Kenya, Ghana to Cameroun, Equatorial Guinea to Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire to Bourkinafasso, the story of election malfeasance is the same. One common experience in Africa is that election results in the past have brought more of social and political mistrust, devastating crises and loss of confidence in elections than stability and good governance. Every election is heavily rigged and highly flawed.



The outcome of Africa's elections has manifested the following problems; election and post-election violence where over ten thousand lives have been lost and property worth millions of dollars lost. Examples are the 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria with the attendant ravaging Boko Haram terrorist devastation of the country, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and the depraved 2007 and 2008 election violence in Kenya where over 1200 people were killed and over 600,000 rendered homeless. Very heart breaking is the social revolution that swept across Libya, Tunisia and Egypt in an attempt to challenge and remove undemocratic regimes. The damage in Libya is unprecedented in the history of democratic struggle in Africa. Other outcome includes the proliferation of unconcerned elected officials who feel not accountable to the people thereby conducting themselves with impunity. They seek solace in the fact that the electorates cannot remove them from the office since the election process does not provide that opportunity.

Consolidating a countries democracy is "meant either to remove the threat of democratic breakdown or to move towards some higher stage of democratic performance (or both things together). And a consolidated democracy is meant to be either a crisis-proof democracy or a high-quality democracy (or both things together). African democracy falls within the borderline cases of "mixed regimes" or "hybrid regimes," which possess some but not all of liberal democracy's essential features and which therefore fall somewhere in between democracy and authoritarianism" (Collier & Levitsky,1995). Democratic Consolidation attempts to avoid an authoritarian regression, a "quick death" of democracy. Credible elections have the capacity of enthroning accountable leadership which is likely to govern in a way that addresses the challenges of citizens. The SDG in its entirety identifies problems faced by mostly low income countries and calls for concerted efforts to address them. Addressing them will only be possible in Africa when the leadership is accountable. Part of how to guarantee accountable leadership is the conduct of credible elections that bring in the leaders. The linkage between credible elections and meeting the SDG is demonstrated in the model below:

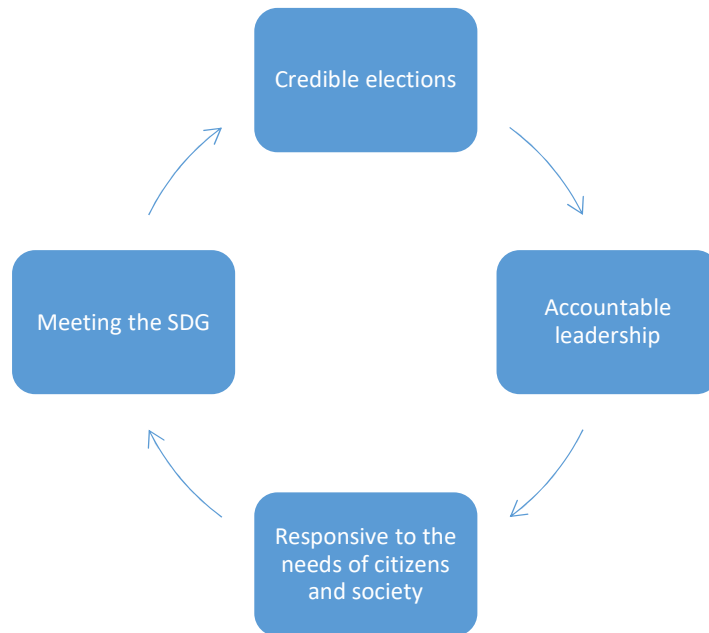


FIG. 4: Linkage between credible elections and meeting the SDG

Source: Author's configuration

When elections are credible it shows among others that the people's votes count. Under this condition, elected officials understand clearly that underperformance is likely to see them out of power in the next elections. African leaders are not wary of this because the so called electorates do not actually determine who is elected. Elected officials are predominantly products of massive rigging and all sorts of election malfeasances. We argue here that when African elections begin to enthrone public officials through the peoples' choice, elected officials will strive to become accountable. By accountability we mean that leaders will execute public offices as trust. They will be massive reduction in corruption and public resources will be applied to solving the challenges of the citizens and society. Addressing these challenges among others is likely to automatically lead to meeting, if not all, some of the SDGs by 2030.

#### **Automation as a Pathway to Credible Elections**

How, in the case of Africa can credible elections be ensured to guarantee accountable leadership? Studies in African elections have shown that elections in Africa are marred by irregularities leading to unacceptable outcome and massive violence (Adejumobi, 2000; Norris, 2016; Abu-Bakarr, 2017). We suggest here automated electoral process that has the capacity to streamline electoral behavior to acceptable pattern. This simply suggest electoral



infrastructure required to properly support the democratic process of election. African countries can choose whichever form of election automation that can easily be managed by them. However, this paper suggests the application of Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) machines as a form of electronic voting. DRE “are computer terminals that allow voters to enter their votes by pressing buttons or touching images on a computer screen” (Ace, 2020, p.2). This machine terminals are linked to the internet for public monitoring at various election situation rooms. The DRE machines are designed to display both texts and photographs. DRE has been considered to be very easy for a voter use. It is voter friendly in the sense that it is accessible to illiterates and the physically challenged.

Another good feature of DRE machine is that “voters make unambiguous choices and no voter intent dispute can arise” (Ace, 2020, p.4). It also allows votes to be recorded on 2 separate devices as a backup in the event of one device getting corrupted. It is often argued that power outages on Election Day can obstruct the use of DRE machines. This problem can easily be addressed by ensuring that the machine can also run on batteries. Emergency generators can be made available for the duration of the election. These are easily affordable given the amount of money voted for administering elections in Africa that turn out to produce unacceptable results and illegitimate elected public officials. Developed countries have been at home with electronic voting system which makes the elections substantially credible. Belgium for instance has been using electronic voting since 1991, as well as Spain that has also experienced electronic voting system. In 1999, Japanese voters of Kawaguchi applied electronic voting system. Why is election automation necessary? There are some motivational concerns driving the election automation initiative, these concerns justify its application.

- ❖ Election automation saves money. Costs associated with ad-hoc responsibilities can be removed through the application of automation in the election process.
- ❖ It increases the efficiency and delivery of election responsibilities. Automation in this regard is likely to provide quick information on candidates, parties and voters. It will facilitate reliable registration of voters, creating voters identification cards and identification of voters at voting sites. It will facilitate the recording of votes, counting of ballots and transmitting local tallies to central tallying facilities.



- ❖ Automation increases the speed of obtaining election results. The time it takes to release election results would be reduced drastically. In other words, delay in the release of results will be eliminated. Automated methods of ballot counting is more reliable and faster than the manual method which in the case of Africa is prone to manipulation.
- ❖ The automation guarantees accuracy of election results. It reduces human error to the barest minimum when votes are counted electronically. “When voters enter their votes directly into the computer, inaccuracies introduced as a result of voters’ unclear ballot marks can be eliminated” (Ace, 2020, p.4).
- ❖ Automation has improved capacity to identify and prevent fraud. When votes are cast and ballots transmitted electronically, the possibility of some kind of election fraud such as stuffing of ballot boxes, snatching of election results and other sensitive materials will be eliminated. This is a serious factor in African election as reports of election observer missions will always indicate cases of ballot box stuffing and snatching and destroying of results by thugs (EUEOM, 2019).
- ❖ Automation increases public confidence in the electoral process. The likelihood that election technology will reduce massive fraud associated with African elections will increase public confidence in the electoral process. This is likely to increase participation and restore legitimacy on the election outcome.

Automating the election process in Africa will ensure automated behaviour control – an outcome that streamlines voter behaviour along acceptable patterns. The African elite electoral behavior is such that consciously promotes malfeasance for selfish political gains. A device that checks that behavior is needed to bring about responsible electoral processes in Africa. A rescue is sort through automation of African elections. The automation option must be driven by institutional change framework expressed in an electoral act. The Act must clearly state the adoption of automation in the electoral process with the accompanying sanctions in cases of violation. The laws governing elections in Africa are so weak that overzealous politicians take advantage of such weaknesses to commit election frauds. In Nigeria for example, the electoral act 2010 as amended does not reflect automation in the electoral process. Criminal politicians in this case were at liberty to rig elections unperturbed. A sharp legislation in this direction is needed to check this moral decay.



We suggest here that regional integrations such as African Union should commit member nations to enshrine election automation in their various legal frameworks. Finally we call for attitudinal change on the parts of politicians and election administrators. They should be committed to the moral sanctity of what is right. They should commit to evolving legislation that can guarantee electoral credibility. This is an appeal to their conscience. In Nigeria for instance, President Buhari refused assent to the Electoral Act 2010 as amended until a section of the Act that required the use of Smart Card Reader (SCR) for accreditation of voters was expunged. His decline apparently could not have been unconnected with the fear that the Smart Card Reader was certainly going to exposed the over bloated registered voters which incumbent political office holders use to rig elections to their advantage. This is a moral decay and has to be done away with if a polity wants to establish accountable leadership.

In Zimbabwe, the constitutional review that preceded the 2013 presidential election could not address the issue of tenure limit. The president under the law was still allowed to contest as many times as possible. Given the depraved nature of conducting elections in Africa, such constitutional requirement can keep one person in office for a life time as the case of Mugabe tended to show. Even the opposition political party that was decrying the prolong stay in office by Mugabe did not formidably challenge that provision in the constitution during the review process. The reason is very clear. Most African politicians wear similar mindsets towards public offices. Given the opportunity, they will remain in power for life. The opposition felt that external neo liberal capitalist regimes were going to support them to victory and if this should play out they were also going to have the opportunity to perpetuate themselves in power. African leaders must take moral responsibility of doing what is right and acceptable by all moral standards. This is a precursor to accountable leadership that can eventually move Africa to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030.

### **Conclusion**

Conducting credible elections has the capacity to institute accountable leadership that is oriented towards good governance and sustainable development. As argued by Roy and Tisdell (1998:1310), “sustainable development requires good policies and effective provision of institutions conducive to good governance”. A state that wants to improve its



public governance and better the lives of its citizens must conduct its activities with utmost transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, integrity and honesty, equity and participation. These are values that make a governance system good. The utility is that good governance promotes effective service delivery and guarantees sustainable development. Good governance is eluding Africa by the prevalence of corruption that assumes monumental dimensions every other day. The level of primitive accumulation is appalling and erodes a continent's ability to provide public goods and services. Part of this problem, lies in the manner in which political office holders are enthroned. The mode of conducting elections gives room for monumental electoral fraud. For sustainable development to occur and be beneficial to the people of any society, governance needs to be fair and committed to evolving processes that fight poverty and reduce it. It must evolve actions that improve the quality of life of citizens, ensures good health system and provide critical infrastructure for the enhancement of the living condition of the people. It is the strong submission of this paper that if the state leadership begins to have a positive attitude to public offices as well as improving the electoral process by automating its elections to wear substantial democratic elements, Africa will begin to lay the foundation for good governance and eventual service delivery preparatory to meeting the sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

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