

**GOOD GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION,
COMMUNICATION, AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUB-SAHARAN
AFRICA**

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Abstract

For decades, the state has been considered as the sole agent of development and governance. However, since the dawn of democracy (which is considered to be the basis for good governance) in the 1980's there has been a paradigm shift in the governance process in sub-Saharan Africa. Different kinds of civil society organizations have mushroomed in the Sub-region, and these have in one way or another contributed to the democratization process of the Sub-region. Civil society organizations play an intermediary role between the citizens and the state. Their contribution to the democratisation process, both during and after the transition period in the different countries of the Sub-region is as varied as they come. On the whole, and to a large extent, the success of democratic transition in sub-Saharan Africa can be attributed to civil society organizations, especially the locally brewed ones, who with the support of the donor community managed to dislodge the hitherto autocratic regimes. The article considers the role of information and communication, the civil society organizations, Librarians and Information Scientists in good governance, with particular reference to sub-Saharan Africa. It is divided into four sections, namely; Section 1 which introduces the concepts of governance and the role of information and communication in the governance process. This is followed by Section 2, which examines the concepts of good governance, the civil society and how they relate to each other; then Section 3 discusses the role of the civil society organizations in the democratisation process of sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, Section 4 presents some concluding remarks of the discussion.

Keywords: Civil Society, Good Governance, Information, Africa

Background

While there is no consensus on the definition of the concepts of “governance” and “good governance”, these terms have become buzz words in the political and development literature of the 21st century; and major international funding institutions like the World Bank and the IMF are currently advocating “good governance” as criteria for development assistance. This section will examine these concepts, and the significance of information and communication to good governance.

Governance defined

Neumayer, (2002:916) defines governance 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 interests, exercise their legal and human rights, meet their obligations, and mitigate their differences.

While the government is the major actor in the governance process, each actor is accountable to those who may be affected by the decisions or actions it takes. Public accountability covers three areas, namely: political accountability, administrative accountability, financial and budgetary accountability. Further, public accountability requires that those who hold public trust should account for the use of the trust to the citizens or their representatives. It thus, signifies the superiority of the public's will over the private interests and tries to ensure that the former is superior in every activity and conduct of a public office. However, such accountability cannot be enforced unless there is the rule of law, transparency and the free-flow of relevant information among the stakeholders in the governance process.

On the other hand, transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are executed based on stipulated rules and regulations that are understood by the stakeholders. Such a scenario presupposes and requires that the institutions of governance in the

public and private sectors as well as the civil society organizations are designed in such a way that they mutually contribute to good governance. The government as the major actor in the process must create conducive environment for citizen-participation in the decision-making process and service delivery systems. Governance can be either good or bad. It is good when the governed reap the positive benefits they expect from their government and bad when the opposite is the case.

What is good governance?

According to UNESCAP (2003), good governance is concerned with the institutional environment in which citizens interact among themselves with government bodies and/or government officials. Good governance is equated to pluralist politics or multi-party democracy, and is said to prevail when the government manages public institutions in an efficient, transparent, and responsive manner, and when an informed citizenry participates and is engaged with the government in pursuit of their mutual and beneficial economic, social, political and cultural objectives. Theoretically, good governance is supposed to usher in more effective and accountable governments and advance peace and prosperity. It is also believed to be the basis for sustainable human and economic development.

Demonstration of good governance

According to IFES (2002), good governance is demonstrated and measured by the key democratic principles of accountability, predictability, transparency, rule of law, citizen-participation, efficiency and effectiveness, and respect for human rights, which include freedom of association and expression and the right of access to information in whatever format. Good governance is participatory in that it transcends the state or government (the political and the public sectors), and includes the private sector, the civil society organizations, and the general citizenry, each having a unique role to play and contribute towards the governance process.

Thus, in a quest for economic and human development, as elsewhere, significant political changes have taken place in Sub-Saharan Africa since the end of the 1980s. A majority of countries in

the Sub-region now practice pluralist politics by holding multi-party elections on a fairly regular basis, and this has resulted in a number of governments being unseated through democratic elections.

However, whether democratic transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa have advanced peace, human and sustainable economic development is subject to debate. Indeed, while democratic multi-party elections are held at a fairly regular basis in most countries of the Sub-region, civil wars have gone unabated, for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda (the Lord Resistance Armies), etc. Further, the Sub-region still suffers from massive unemployment, declining educational standards, poverty, and hunger. This has been exasperated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic sweeping across the African continent, which has rendered all the post-colonial economic, health, and educational advancements of no effect. In spite of these problems, and of equal importance to the Sub-region, is the fact that democratic transitions have generally ushered in far greater freedoms of association and expression than was the case during the one-party autocratic state regimes of the post-colonial era.

The role and significance of information and communication to good governance

The success of political persuasion is dependent on the quality and relevance of information as well as the timing and method of dissemination of the said information. It is a well-known adage that information is power and those who hold it have the power to make or destroy. It is a recognized fact that without information, there can be no accountability, and equally important, the civil society and the general citizenry can neither participate in their governance nor monitor and verify the quality of governance.

Communication among the stakeholders, i.e. the government, the private sector, the civil society, and the general citizenry is extremely crucial to good governance. It acts as a vehicle for instruction to the public and conversely, as a feedback to government. As a vehicle of public instruction, communication is designed to arouse and persuade, and not merely to recite or chronicle. It involves the selection, ordering or sequencing, and presentation of information with an eye to the influence it will exert on the public to which it is addressed. The

direction of the flow of information or communication may be highly unequal, with some rulers broadcasting, but hardly receiving; while at the extreme end, subjects may bombard their leaders with messages and appeals that barely elicit any coherent response. Whatever the case, there is no other way to govern except by influencing the understanding of those who are to be governed through communication of relevant information that will yield the desired results from either the governed or the government. Thus, all forms of governance, whether good or bad need to influence their subjects, because there is need for constant communication between the rulers/leaders and their subjects.

The arts of political persuasion are indispensable to democratic systems of governance and central to good governance and the process of democratization. Modern governments may deploy more diverse and sophisticated methods of feedback, such as public surveys, focus groups, minutely disaggregated analysis of voting behaviour, computerized personal e-mails, etc., unlike in the past when governments mainly relied on the traditional instruments of oratory and crowd management. Notwithstanding these differences, the aim of communication remains the same, and that is to influence the behaviour of both the rulers and the governed in order to gain their compliance and cooperation.

The key principles of good governance of transparency, accountability, rule of law, and people's active participation in governance depend on the free-flow of understandable information, which must be accessible and readily available to all the stakeholders. This necessitates putting in place effective information and institutional capacity, which is not only important for economic development, but also for monitoring by the citizenry and the civil society organizations the quality of governance, (i.e. government's efficiency and effectiveness in achieving its stated or proclaimed objectives). Indeed, it is only an informed citizenry and a responsive civil society that can positively participate and monitor the quality of governance.

A government that neglects to interest and persuade its people would in due course lose the people's attention and later their compliance; and in countries where democracy is well-entrenched, governments can never afford to cease anticipating the reactions of their subjects,

including the civil societies, an audience that poses the autonomy to respond with approval or reproof as it sees fit. Thus, the significance of information, and the communication of timely, understandable and relevant information to good governance cannot be overemphasized.

Good governance and the civil society

For decades, the government was considered to be the sole agent for governance and economic development. However, over the years, this attitude has changed due to the diminishing faith in the necessity and efficacy of the state as a sole agent of development as explained by the growing interest in the civil society and its various agents, especially the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This thought has been enhanced especially during what Huntington (1991) calls "The Third wave", that is, the global democratization process which has seen a number of one-party states turned into multi-party democratic governments either through peaceful democratic elections or forcefully through the barrel of the gun. In Sub-Saharan Africa, "The Third Wave" has also resulted into the mushrooming of a number of civil society organizations and independent newspapers.

The civil society defined

The definition of civil society is much debated in the literature. However, according to Diamond (1994:5):

Civil society is the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, and largely self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared roles. It refers to the ensemble of intermediate organizations that lie between the household, the individual and the state.

On the other hand, Camay and Gordon (2002:2) define civil society as:

Those non-profit organizations and groups or formations of people operating in the space between family and the government, which are independent, voluntary and established to protect or enhance the interests and values of their members.

From the above definitions, one can safely state that civil society is formed voluntarily by members of society to advance their interests

and values. Civil society could be formal or informal individuals or groups of individuals who always seek autonomy from the state. It is distinct from society in general or the general citizenry in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state and hold the state officials accountable. It plays an intermediary role between the general citizenry and the government.

The civil society, especially the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are thought to enhance access to public services by the poor and to augment their political power through organization. For example, NGOs can provide finance for village level public goods that are not controlled by the state, and thus create the possibility of an alternative political project at the local level. They can also strengthen pluralism in the classic sense of enhancing the power of given groups of people vis-à-vis the state.

Role of civil society in good governance

There are several key democratic functions that civil society organizations can perform to ensure good governance. These roles significantly overlap, and their enforcement depends on the specific realities of the different countries, and the type of civil society organization concerned. Gebre-Egziabher, (2002) identifies eight roles of the civil society as follows:

- To advance civic education and raising of people's awareness;
- To help people claim their rights;
- To complement the role of government in development activities;
- To reform the state through collaboration with government departments in improving service delivery to the people;
- To challenge the state when government policies and plans impact negatively on the lives of the disadvantaged groups in society;
- To manage conflict resolution and peace building;
- To monitor the democratic process, the rule of law, and violation of human rights; and

- To promote free and fair democratic elections.

On the other hand, Diamond (1994:7) has identified ten democratic functions of the civil society as follows:

- To provide the basis for the limitation of state power by monitoring and restraining the exercise of power of democratic states, democratizing authoritarian states, mobilizing society in general in exposing the abuses and undermining the legitimacy of undemocratic regimes thereby enabling society to control the state and consolidate and maintain democracy;
- To stimulate political participation by enhancing the political efficacy and skills of the citizenry and promoting an appreciation of their obligations and rights;
- To act as an arena for the development and sustenance of other democratic values, such as tolerance, moderation, a willingness to compromise, and a respect for opposing views;
- To create channels (other than political parties) of communication and access to power in the upper institutional echelons for the articulation, aggregation and representation of the interests and values of the disadvantaged groups, such as women, children, and racial/ethnic minorities thereby providing a strong foundation for participative governance by all the stakeholders;
- To generate a range of interests that may cross-cut, and so mitigate the principal polarities of political conflict, particularly in a relatively developed economy;
- To recruit and train new political leaders in technical, administrative skills, and the normative standards of public accountability and transparency;
- To monitor democratic elections in a non-partisan manner in order to deter fraud, enhance voter confidence and affirm the legitimacy of the election results;
- To disseminate relevant information to the citizenry in order to produce an informed society that can effectively participate in its governance and monitor the quality of governance;
- To mobilize support for economic reform policies by widely disseminating new information and ideas through the support of political (and/or professional) coalitions and the legislative economic policy-think tanks; and

- To enhance freedom of association, which in turn enhances not only, the accountability, transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, effectiveness, and hence legitimacy of the political system but also the capacities of groups to improve their own welfare independently of the state.

While the above may seem like a tall expectation of the civil society organizations in the process of democratization, especially in the emerging democratic transitions of Sub-Saharan Africa, where both the concepts of good governance and civil society organization are new and not yet entrenched in the otherwise ethnically and regionally polarised societies, in industrialized nations of Europe and North America, civil society plays a major role in ensuring that elected representatives, once elected, do not just do or act as they wish on behalf of the nation or to the disadvantage of the masses. In these countries, civil society organizations work tirelessly to ensure good governance.

For instance, and since its emergency in the early 1960's and 1970's, "The Greenpeace Civil Society Organization" has become a strong and formidable environmental movement in the developed countries. The "Greenpeace Empire" has consistently ensured that governance systems pay adequate attention to the effects of economic development on the environment. This movement now works at local, national, regional, and global levels to force their leaders to make better trade-offs between the environment and economic development. This means that the civil society in industrialized countries has realized that representative democracy in itself is not enough to achieve good governance and sustainable development, but that elected governments need to be constantly monitored and reprovved or quizzed on how they formulate and implement policies that negatively impact on the masses and on future generations.

The next section will examine the role of civil society organizations in the democratization process of Sub-Saharan Africa, with special emphasis on their political empowerment, advocacy, and watch-dog roles during and after the transition periods. The section will also highlight some of the problems faced by the civil society organizations in the Sub-region.

Civil Society and good governance in Sub-Saharan Africa

Political empowerment

Halfani (1993:200-203) is of the view that there is need to equip communities not only to develop themselves but also to become effective participants in public policy formulation, which at present is the sole prerogative of the state. It is only an empowered and informed citizenry that can effectively participate and monitor its governance and in this regard, the civil society organizations have a crucial role to play.

Sandbrook (1993:2) defines empowerment as: a multi-faceted process which involves transforming the economic, social, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of the currently powerless.

Based on this definition, we see that there are several levels at which an individual, community, or society can be empowered, and two key components of empowerment can be identified, namely:

- The development of a sense of efficiency in the individual, and
- The development of a group's ability to influence political and personnel decisions of government or powerful institutions.

Political empowerment can be measured by the amount of political clout an organization or an association has, or the collective ability to alter conditions, such as the political conditions that it finds itself intolerable, and its success at an educative role if applicable, as well as its ability to voice or address popular concerns or interests. It can also be gauged by determining if a constituency has more political voice in affecting their destiny through either direct or indirect actions and whether people have greater access to policy-makers, policy formulation and decision-making because of civil society influence.

While most foreign-funded civil society organizations, such as the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) played a very minimal role in the democratic transition of Sub-Saharan Africa due to conditional ties associated with the operation of such institutions, and the fact that most of them are development-orientated, credit is due to the donor community, notably the World Bank and IMF, who through their demands for economic and political reforms as conditionality for

economic assistance contributed immensely to the dawn of democracy in the Sub-region.

For example, Barkan (1993) has the view that the economic mismanagement and power monopolization by Moi's regime in Kenya alienated large segments of the population who demanded change. According to the most significant event in the process was the rigging of the 1988 General Elections to guarantee victory for Moi's royalists. The General Elections were characterised by widespread intimidation and fraud leading to voter apathy with a voter turn-out of 24.6 % only, the lowest ever in Kenya's history. The Election results and the 6th National Assembly that was constituted thereafter were widely viewed by the public as illegitimate, and this catalysed the demand for a return to multi-party democracy. Several senior members of Kenyan political establishment outside Moi's inner circle began to call for political and economic reforms, and publicly demanded for a return to multi-party politics. Riots and detention of political opponents was the order of the day, while Moi continued to resist the call for change. However, by 1991 Moi could no longer stand the tide as Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, one-time Kenyatta's Vice-President launched the National Democratic Party and declared that multi-party democracy was the only solution to Kenya's economic and political woes. Odinga was later joined by eight other prominent politicians and together they formed the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). They deliberately limited the number of membership to nine to avoid the legal requirement of registering FORD as an Association under the Societies Act, otherwise, the group would have been regarded as a political party since political parties were at that time banned. The Donor Community notably, the Paris Consultative Group (CG) for Kenya put the final nail in the coffin as they became increasingly convinced that broad-based economic growth requires political reform. Thus, in 1991 at their Meeting in Paris, the CG explicitly demanded that for further economic development assistance to Kenya, the country had to revert to multi-party democracy. This political conditionality for Kenya set a precedent for the rest of the autocratic governments in not only Sub-Saharan Africa, but also for the rest of the African Continent and elsewhere.

On the other hand, Barkan, (1993:89) is of the view that much as the donor community assisted in the initial stages of the transition, it is

the locally-grown associations, organizations and groups of the civil society that can be credited for the success of multi-party democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Trade unions, middle-class associations of teachers, lawyers, university professors, and students have all been active and contributed immensely towards Huntington's "Third wave" in the Sub-region.

While student protests in Mali, Benin, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, etc. against political oppression and economic mismanagement were important in setting the stage for pro-democracy activism in these countries, it is the Christian Churches in Kenya and Malawi, i.e. the National Council of Churches and Malawi's Catholic Bishops respectively who significantly played a vital leadership and educative role for the masses. In both countries, they set the stage for pro-democracy movements and they were immensely assisted by the foreign-based human rights civil society organizations, more especially, "Amnesty International" and "Africa Watch", who in both cases informed the world (of the hitherto unknown to the world), the political oppressions, corruption, economic mismanagement, and human rights violations in these countries.

In Malawi for example, press freedom was not only greatly muzzled, but nonexistent during the autocratic rule (1964-1993) of Dr. Hastings K. Banda. There was no independent press, and the one and only state-owned local radio station then, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), was used as a government propaganda mouthpiece to misinform and silence the masses. Thus, by contradicting the official stories, the foreign-based human rights organizations made it more difficult to cover up repression and abuses of power in autocratic regimes of Malawi, Kenya and similar regimes in the Sub-region.

In support of Barkan and Posner (1996:136) state that in Malawi for example, the Catholic Bishops in 1992 wrote "A Pastoral Letter" which was read, a week before the Easter Sunday in all Catholic Churches throughout the country. The letter openly criticized the economic mismanagement and political repression of the masses by the one-party regime of Dr. Banda. It not only set the pace, but the stage for pro-multiparty democracy in the country. The Pastoral Letter was followed by mass demonstrations by the students of the University of Malawi and a re-surfacing of pro-democracy underground

movements, such as the “Alliance for Democracy” (AFORD), and the “United Democratic Front” (UDF) which demanded an end to the one-party rule and a return to multi-party democracy. The situation became so tense that the government had to succumb to their demands and called for a referendum in June 1993 to decide on the form of government the people of Malawi wanted. The pro-multi-party democracy advocates had a landslide victory that led to the immediate unbanning of political parties; and further to the first historic democratic Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections for multi-party governance on 14th May 1994.

Thus, to a large extent, the democratic transition in Sub-Saharan Africa could be credited to the civil society organizations, especially the local Christian-based civil society organizations, which were greatly assisted by the Donor Community and the foreign-based human rights civil society organizations notably, the “Africa Watch” and the “Amnesty International”. Due to their credibility, commitment, political and leadership skills, the local civil society organizations managed to mobilize and guide the people through the transition. In many ways, they served as “honest brokers” in the bitter political conflict that ensued between the impatient democrats and the intransigent autocrats.

Advocacy, education, and watchdog roles

The education role of civil society cannot be over-emphasized. Civil society organizations engage in civic education and raise people’s awareness of their rights and obligations; and as watchdogs, civil society ensures that government policies address issues that most directly affect the citizenry, especially the poor, and further that such issues are implemented. The Christian-based civil society organizations play a vital role in educating the masses, especially in the rural areas of the countries in the Sub-region where they have quite a large following; unfortunately, the education provided is mostly geared towards economic empowerment at subsistence level and health-related issues.

If anything, and since the dawn of democracy, the civil society in the Sub-region is popularly known for its human rights advocacy role. It has not left any stone unturned where governments deliberately

violate human rights. For example, the case of the jailed journalists in Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia in the past years came to the international scene because of civil society intervention.

However, and unfortunate for the Sub-region, civic education has concentrated mostly on monitoring the democratic process and educating the people on the electoral process; and usually, this is done only close to the democratic elections. Again, the Sub-region lacks a coordinated and credible civil society due to financial and other resource constraints. Yet, in order to consolidate democracy in the Sub-region, civil society organizations need to provide civic education on a sustainable basis, and their curriculum should expand to include other pertinent issues of good governance, such as: the rule of law, accountability, citizen's rights to all forms of human rights, citizen's responsibilities and obligations, transparency, public affairs, etc. rather than concentrating on the election process only.

In order to enhance effectiveness, civil society organizations could collect and disseminate information, for example, on the citizen's rights to all forms of human rights in order to minimize the confrontations between and among people of dissenting political views, educate the masses on a sustainable basis on issues of tolerance to dissenting views, and empower the citizenry to meaningfully participate in their governance. They could also undertake research on topical issues, and engage in networking activities with the stakeholders, i.e. governments, international organizations, the private sector and the citizenry in order to identify problems, establish lessons learned, and promote best practices in the field of democratic governance and citizenry relations. Further, they could initiate and support debate at local level, on these and other topical issues with local authorities, parliamentarians, international organizations, and the general citizenry by organizing sensitization workshops, seminars, and debates at designated Community Information Centres. The Centres would also provide expertise and support to all interested parties, in particular, governments, local authorities, politicians, and the citizenry.

In order to minimize costs and maximize resources, School and/or Church buildings in the various communities could be used as Information Centres, that is, as education hubs for disseminating

relevant information to the citizenry and hold seminars and workshops. Alternatively, and funds permitting, municipal assemblies, rural and/or district development committee structures could set up Community Information Centres for coordinating the activities of the civil society organizations. This would not only enhance the latter's role as educators and watchdogs, but also result into a coordinated civil society with reduced duplication of work and optimal utilization of the human and other resources.

There is need, therefore, to empower civil society through institutional and human resource capacity building - and here lies an opportunity for information professionals and us librarians. We could collaborate and provide our expertise by searching, synthesizing, analysing and repackaging the relevant information as required by the civil society organizations for their sustained civic education programmes, and help them set up these Community Information Centres.

Unless there is an adequately empowered and coordinated civil society in the Sub-region, its effective participation and monitoring of good governance and national development is grossly affected. The challenge, therefore, is for the government, the civil society, librarians and information professionals to become relevant to the people, not only in the services we provide in our offices and library buildings, but also in the manner in which we engage with the people at community levels and the civil society organizations. We definitely have a big role to play in consolidating democracy in our various countries of the Sub-region.

Resistance to transition

While there has been a steady growth of civil society organizations since the return of formal democracy and the promulgation of constitutions with the usual checks and balances in Sub-Saharan Africa, government officials and politicians, still retain enormous power. Governments, including the elected ones (e.g. Malawi, Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, Zambia & Zimbabwe) have been determined to control civil society through the enactment of legislation aimed at developing a national regulatory framework that would have the effect of subjecting civil society organizations, especially the NGOs to a crippling degree of state-control. For instance, in

Zimbabwe and Malawi, the governments still use the vague and illiberal laws enacted by colonial or authoritarian regimes in the name of "public order" or "national security" to suppress activism and free discussion of issues. Through such enactments, civil society in the Sub-region has been too weakened in redressing the state-society relations in favour of the latter.

The governments are once again muzzling press freedom. Zimbabwe is a case in point. In January 2001, the Zimbabwe Government introduced a law under a Bill titled, "Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill" which bars foreign correspondents from working in Zimbabwe and requires all Zimbabwean journalists to renew their licenses annually in order to practice. The Bill further prescribes heavy fines for journalists who publish stories on "protected information" or "news likely to cause alarm and despondency", whatever that means! Then, in 2003, the Zimbabwe Government used the colonial draconian rule of "Criminal defamation" to detain the editorial staff of the Financial Gazette for writing on the life of President Robert Mugabe, which the government considered subversive and defamatory.

Similarly, the Ivorian Newspaper, *La Voie* was suspended, and the editor of the newspaper and two other reporters jailed for two years each for suggesting that the Ivorian National Football Team lost a game during the African Football Soccer Championship because of the absence of the president. It was construed that the president brought bad luck to the team. In Malawi, several newspapers that had mushroomed soon after *The 2nd Republic*, that is, the democratic government of May 1994 have closed down due to government intervention under such draconian laws of "national security", and under the guise of "defamation of character". In all these countries, police brutality is on the increase, despite police reform projects.

The press aside, trade unions, student bodies, etc. have not been spared from governmental control and repression. In most cases, demonstrations and antigovernment protests have been banned or highly policed under the so-called "public order" or "national security" laws. Similarly, universities and colleges have on a number of times, been indefinitely closed in Zambia, Malawi and Kenya using such draconian laws. Due to dependence, either directly or indirectly, on

government funding, trade unions and student bodies cannot afford to go on prolonged anti-government protests because of fear of loss of jobs and education respectively.

Ineffectiveness of the civil society

Partly, due to continued government control, the civil society organizations in the Sub-region have failed to curb nepotism with its accompanying attitudes, thereby defying the whole essence of democratization and economic liberalization. In most countries of the Sub-region, such as Malawi, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, etc. etc., physical and verbal abuse, monopolization of political power, sharp ethnic and/or regional divisions among political players, vengeance and retribution, as well as repression of any dissenting views are the order of the day, despite the democratic transition. As a result, genuine reconciliation among politicians with differing political views and among the different ethnic groups is not only difficult to attain, but may take a very long time to achieve. The weakness of the private sector, coupled with the pervasive dependence on the state, and “politics of the stomach” have induced subservience toward political authority by most of the social groups in our societies.

Gyrmah-Boadi (1996:136) supports the view that the civil society has failed to transcend the ethno-regional, religious, and other cleavages in any lasting way. One African country or another has seen its own particular movement for democracy fracture along ethno-regional and sectarian lines either during or soon after democratic elections. Malawi is a case in point. The three democratic Presidential & Parliamentary General Elections in the country (1994, 1999 and 2004), have witnessed voting on ethno-regional basis. In the 1994 Presidential elections for instance, voting was on ethno-regional basis with each region voting for a president from their own region; thus, the Northern Region voted for Chakufwa Chihana, the Central Region voted for Dr. Hastings H. Banda, and the Southern Region voted for Bakili Muluzi. Subsequent elections have followed a similar pattern. Unfortunately, this trend may continue for sometime, not only in Malawi, but also in other countries in the Sub-region unless politicians and the citizenry are economically-empowered and consistently educated on the basic principles of good governance and human rights; otherwise the periodic democratic general elections carried out

in our countries of the Sub-region would be a mere academic exercise to please the Donors rather than to improve the life hood of the masses and develop our economies.

Further, the civil society in the Sub-region still faces a myriad of formidable obstacles especially in the crucial area of ensuring public accountability due to sustained campaigns of official intimidation and repression as it pursues its consolidator role. In addition, the civil society in the Sub-region suffers from severe material, financial and organizational deficiencies. Nearly all of the government-promoting NGOs are run on soft money, usually from foreign donors. Consequently, implementation of locally initiated programmes must often wait for external funding. While there has been an emergency of independent newspapers with the zest to uncover official corruption, the same papers fail to carryout an in-depth analysis and sustained investigation; and pressure from civil society has seldom been strong enough to bring to book the culprits. For similar reasons, most of these independent papers have closed down.

Gyrmah-Boadi (1996:120), asserts that the civil society's major weakness in the Sub-region is in this very crucial area of ensuring public accountability civil society should be financially viable rather than be forever dependent on foreign donors if they are to meet the challenges and expectations of the citizens. They must spread and share information and knowledge that inspires the general citizenry to meaningfully participate in their governance. Here again lies an opportunity for librarians and information professionals to provide their expertise in empowering the general citizenry by collaboratively working with the civil society organizations.

The Sub-region needs an informed and an economically empowered citizenry that will elect candidates based on merit, and on an informed decision rather than on ethnicity. Further, if good governance is to be entrenched in the Sub-Saharan Africa, there is need to strengthen the civil society through institutional and human resource capacity building; otherwise the gains achieved through the return of formal democracy and the promulgation of constitutions with the usual checks and balances will be meaningless, especially to the marginalized in society.

Role and challenges of librarians and information professionals

Good governance as previously discussed is participatory, hence very much dependent on the free-flow of relevant information. This then calls for a new crop of librarians and information scientists who are willing to actively participate in the good governance process by providing the relevant information to a wide range of information seekers, and from a wide range of information resources that transcend national, regional and territorial boundaries. As Information professionals, we should pro-actively provide and disseminate relevant information without due hindrance, either due to outdated bureaucratic organizational structures, rules and regulations, or inadequate and irrelevant training.

The creation/recreation, analysis, packaging/repackaging, and dissemination of relevant information to information seekers constitutes the very fabric of our profession and hence our very existence as librarians and information professionals. We need and must change our mindset and move with the tide by actively and pro-actively participating in the process of good governance. Unfortunately, our library schools do not train us and prepare us for such challenges and for such an environment. The curricula we followed are either too theoretical or irrelevant to the environment we find ourselves in. The challenge, therefore, is for our Library and Information Science (LIS) Schools, especially those in the Sub-region to revise and re-design their curricula in order to produce the calibre of librarians and information professionals that are relevant to our emerging democratic societies. Further, there is need to retrain librarians and information scientists through life-long education so that we become relevant to the goals of the modern democratic states.

The divisive walls of distance, the type of libraries, such as academic, national, or special libraries, archives as well as the type of clientele we serve, have to some extent been broken by the advent of information and communication technologies (ICT). While this may be the case with the developed world, the information divide seems to be increasing by the day for most of us in the Sub-region due to resource constrains, especially manpower and technical resources to

fully implement and use ICT in our libraries and information centres. However, the little advancements we have so far made in automating library operations and connectivity to the internet, especially in institutions of higher learning, should encourage us to forge further ahead rather than become discouraged. Remember, "Rome was not built in a day", and as the Chinese would say, "a journey of a million miles starts with a single step", we are, therefore, on the right track.

What is required of us is a change of the mindset by aggressively advocating for the promulgation of legislation that promotes the citizen's right to access information, and create within our work places an environment that promotes quick access to credible and relevant information and, an environment that enhances the free-flow of information among the stakeholders in governance. The perennial financial constraints in our institutions should not be an excuse, because these will always be with us, but rather, they should encourage us to justify our existence. We need to seriously collaborate and support the civil society organizations in their advocacy and educator roles in good governance if we are become relevant, and if we are to actively participate and promote good governance in our countries.

Concluding remarks

Good governance is participatory and dependent on the free flow of relevant information among the stakeholders, i.e. the state, the civil society, and the citizenry because unless there is an informed citizenry, participative governance and the effective monitoring of the quality of governance is impossible to attain. Access to information and the active application thereof in an individual's or group's daily life is integral to effective decision-making and problem-solving processes. However, unless the people are economically and politically empowered, they cannot effectively participate in their governance. Central to this process of empowerment is the provision and access to credible and relevant information. Therefore, the civil society organizations, Information professionals and governments, all have a role to play in good governance.

Governments should formulate policies and institute legislature on the right to access information by putting in place the necessary

institutional and human resource frameworks; while librarians and information professionals should lobby and help governments formulate and implement national information policies. Similarly, the civil society organizations, librarians and information professionals should vigorously engage in civic education of the masses on issues of good governance, including the citizens' right to official information, and also in sensitizing government officials on the importance of disseminating timely and relevant information to the people and in a language that is easily understood. Such an apprenticeship role of civil society should be carried out on a sustainable basis, rather than on an ad hoc basis as is currently the case in the Sub-region whereby civic education concentrates only on the electoral process and worst still, it is only conducted during and between elections. Civic education by all concerned must be an ongoing process till principles of democracy are entrenched in our communities.

However, the effectiveness of civil society organizations in achieving their democratic roles is dependent on collaborative efforts among all the stakeholders, i.e. the civil society, the state and the citizens. This collaborative relationship is almost impossible without the free flow of relevant and credible information. The challenge therefore is for governments, the civil society organizations, librarians and information professionals to become relevant to the people, not only in the services they provide, but also in the manner they engage with the people on a daily basis. This is if good governance is to be consolidated and maintained in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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