

Common Good, Social Order and the Quest for Sustainable Peace in Africa

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Abstract: The study attempts to examine the prospect for maintaining peace in African continent. It specifically examines the factors that establish and enhance peace as a central factor to African development. It also look at the possibility of creating a better world where people with sense of human decency and belief in ultimate goodness of humanity can live peacefully and realize their aims, devoid of the circle of violence which perpetually hunts Africa. This is imperative as scholarly perspectives and observations uphold peace as a central factor for the development of African nations. Employing the critical and analytic method, we are able to x-ray the African situation and cursorily identify the specific factors that undermine African development. The study ultimately submits that the notion of common good is prerequisite for African development.

Key words: Africa, communal, common good, continent, economics, family, peace, politician, universal, violence

INTRODUCTION

The concern of this study has been topical issue that is central to African development over the years- Africa and peace. The hope that the new millennium would usher in a transformed Africa has continued to dwindle; as a result of circles of violence, which have brought with it, destruction, anger, fear and communal hatred. While other continents have come to an understanding that, it is possible to create a better world where people with sense of human decency and a belief in ultimate goodness of humanity can live peacefully and realize their aims, the African situation is the exact opposite therefore this sensitive issue be highlighted so as to establish a mutual co-existence in Africa nation.

We are therefore concerned with how we can adequately resolve the problems that generate conflicts in Africa. One way that has been suggested in this study is the common good. Common good for Africa, demands respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights, as well as respect for and the promotion of the rights of nations on the universal plane^[1].

Consequently, this work shall examine the African situation and at the same time expose the causes and the effect on the continent. We will also discuss common good and why it is a solution to Africa's problem.

The African situation: Africa, according to Tony Blair the British Prime Minister, has remained a scare on the conscience of the world^[1]. This scare has motivated many world leaders with the same view as Blair to propound different policies for African emancipation. However, these policies have not yielded good dividend. For

example; African's problems from the 1960's to 1970's ranges from lack of capital, lack of infrastructure, investment and export. In the 1980's 'structural adjustment' was introduced as a reprisal and in the 1990's, privatization and good governance were the buzzwords.

All resources for Africa development can only work in countries where freedom, peace and justice reign. Because Africa does not lend itself succinctly to the exercise of the values inherent in a peaceful society, Africa's situation remains the same and there is the need for a total overhauling because of the following noticeable inadequacies: The state machinery of many post-colonial African states is visibly and notoriously oppressive, since they embrace authoritarian and racist paradigm. African leaders are observed to be oppressive and to remain in power perpetually. These leaders do not see themselves as statesmen who are expected to develop a keen awareness of collective responsibility in the long term^[2], but are like colonial administrators, overseers who are in power to ensure that the people adjust to the structures of oppression and exploitation which they manage^[3]. Chinua Achebe^[4]. Opines that most African leaders are not morally upright. They characteristically coerce all personals and other arms of government to work in their interest. It may therefore not be possible to record any meaningful development under such a powerfully coercive state system.

Furthermore, Africa is a quasi-capitalist society; where capitalist superstructure is fully established. Economically, the material bases of most African countries have not been developed to the level that can sustain aggressive individualism. For instance the North-South Round Table. In its review of the region's economic, social performance declares; Africa's economic

and social performance during the 1980's.... was predominantly negative. This was manifest within Africa by severely depressed economic growth rate, stagnant agricultural production, deteriorating social services and a decline in living standards. Externally it was marked by a rising debt burden, inadequate resources flows and a sharp fall in commodity prices for African's key exports^[5].

Also the World Bank laments that Sub-Sahara Africa as a whole has witnessed almost a decade of falling per capital incomes, increasing hunger and accelerating ecological degradation. The earlier progress made in social development is now being eroded The Bank concludes that "Africans are almost as poor today as they were 30 years ago"^[6].

The consequence of this is poverty. Poverty has remained one of the obstacles to African development. The effect is devastating such that nearly half of the continent's population lives below \$1 per day 34 of the world 49 least developed countries are in Africa^[1]. It was discovered that only three countries; Mauritius, South Africa and Botswana have made progress so far, the existence of high level of abject poverty have made it practically impossible for other countries to progress talk less of giving peace a chance.

Relatedly, ethnographic accounts and oral histories have shown that internal dynamics of communities were less egalitarian; They were racial and discriminatory. It was observed that interpersonal stratification in cases such as land ownership and class differences, which usually affect the role of the individual, in community affairs, most especially between ordinary people and the royal courts, was the order of the day.

It should be noted that the culture of violence has been instituted in the African system. The government survives on the control of the means of violence, thus any agitation is often met with official violence. This has affects the political society to the extent that politicians often result to the use of violence as an instrument for achieving their goal. This political immorality brought military into power. In Africa today the struggle for political power and control of state resources have brought instability in terms of peace and social order to most African countries, we now have militias or gorilla group who as a result of their activities, serves as a clog to peace and progress. Countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea are just few examples.

In addition, the African government abhors the winner take-all stance instead of uniform and equitable development. Many Africans were made to feel that they are second rate citizen, possibly because of their political alignment. A non member of the ruling party becomes target for attack, in the long run; many were either

assassinated or incarcerated. Furthermore, those areas that fail to support the ruling party were usually left undeveloped, which accounts for the uneven development of many areas in Africa. No citizen who feels estranged by the government under which he lives can give to that government, that instinctive loyalty which is the outward and visible sign of true patriotism^[7].

What is common good?: Common good is a familiar political thought with a venerable history. The purview of common good concerns the making of the social system, institution and environment work in a way that every body will benefit within the community. Catholic Tradition as expressed in *Gaudium et spes*^[8], notes that: Interdependence grows, so does the point of "the common Good which is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, as groups or as Individuals, to reach fulfillment more fully and more easily. Every group must take into account the needs and aspirations of every other group and of the whole human family. At the same time, because of the dignity of the human person, the individual has rights and duties that are universal and inviolable. Every human being should have ready access to every thing necessary for living a truly human life, including food, cloths, housing, education, work, respect and the right to act according to correct conscience.

Thus, according to Rawls^[9] common goods pertain to certain general conditions that is equal to every one's advantage. Through this, everybody will have equal access and benefit from the needs of man such as food, security, clothing, shelter etc. Common good therefore is a good to which each members of society have access and from which none is easily excluded. It requires the cooperation of many people, just as keeping a part free of litter depends on each visitor picking up after himself^[10].

It is possible for any individual to possess the whole common good, not a piece of it but all and at the same time not serves as hindrances to other people's right to possess their own. Common good is a universal concept, it is accessible to everybody and it is diffusive, distributive but not a collection of singular good^[10]. opines that common good is communicable to many and that it is possessed as a whole by each of us without becoming an individual's private good. Hence each member of the family can possess the whole common good, not just a piece but all, without being a hindrance to others who hopes to have as well. However, notably the most important common good in a family is domestic tranquility and in the wider society, what can be compared with common good is peace and order. This peace and order therefore, is what should be instituted in African homes and states.

Common good and Africa: The pertinent question here is that, why do we think that common good can solve Africa problem? Common good by its nature can solve Africa problems, because African society has largely and historically been built on the notion of duty. The concept of duty required an individual to place the common good before the individual satisfaction. Those that went against these norms were seen as outcasts and an appropriate sanction would be place on erring individuals. This explains why for a very long time African communities farmed and harvested in groups. Africa case is not unique at all other developing societies such as the Asian societies have had similar experiences^[11]. The concept of relying on duty presents some difficulties because Africa is faced with many over-enlarge oppressive states bureaucracies, as a result of this, the concept can not capture the civil obligations of the African state.

That is where the problem lies; there is the need for the African states to change their oppressive bureaucracies and also, there is the need for the concept of duty to capture the obligation of the African states. Since the idea of common good is already in Africa system before, then to make it work again will not be difficult, provided, African is ready to remove the bottle neck that has been serving as a stumbling block for common good in Africa

If Africa is truly interested in removing the stumbling block on her way, everybody in the society must share a common understanding of the potential of each individual to become self directed, empowered and active. By so doing everybody will now take into account the needs and aspiration of every other group and of the whole human family. If these is done individual will have rights and duties that are universal and inviolable.

Furthermore, the common good will promote the culture of peace that Africa really needed at this particular time in African history. Many African states have literally collapsed. More are at the verge of destruction. The event in Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria, Sudan and Congo, remind us that, there is the need for desperate workable solution to African predicament. The rejection of violent approaches to conflict resolution that will give dialogue a chance in Africa is a must. Common good have the potential of engendering forgiveness, reconciliation and peace in Africa. If this culture of peace is allow to grow, Africa we be living behind a worthy legacy for her children.

More so poverty is one of the banes of Africa development. Africa poverty is chronic, brutal and widespread. In most cases, poverty in Africa is usually associated with injustice. And the only way to remove poverty is to challenge injustice. If justice is done, poverty will certainly reduce in Africa, because, there will

be concern for others, economic and social fairness and human rights will be guaranteed in the society. To do justice in the word of^[11]. is to feel the pain and to become one with the sufferer is to ask fundamental questions about the roots of injustice and to fight for their removal. If this is done, then poverty will be eliminated.

Common good brought to realization the need for gender equality, because common good involve living and working together in harmony and equality. In Africa women are seen as second class citizen. The men are regarded as the head and bread winners in various homes in Africa. This is because; women are seen to be *unreliable, irresponsible, fickle-minded* and above all ready to give away anything for the sake of material gains. In fact one of the *Odu Ifa* bluntly declares women are liars/ women are traitors/ let no man open his mind to women^[12]. It is on record that^[13] and many of early western Philosophers never saw any leadership quality in women. The male is more fitted to rule than the female, unless conditions are quite abnormal". The fact express here is that, men are more superior to women. We need to deconstruct this idea; men and women should live and work together in harmony and equality, to build stronger, more creative communities in Africa.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing reveals that African states, no doubt, are not enjoying relative peace which has been a clog in the wheel of progress. For there to be a notable economic, technology, social and industrial advancement in Africa, there is a desperate need for the entrenchment of the notion of common goods in the ways, life and governing of the African states.

This undoubtedly suggests that there is a strong need to uphold the power of check and balance on the government and the incessant need to introduce favorable policies that will uplift the standard of living of the people as well as boost the collapsing African economy. The international community, institution and government are enjoined to support African people by promoting a society of hope, compassion, justice and peace. Hope is restored when individuals groups and community act courageously to right wrong and to reach out to others. The cause of history can change when the causes of desperations are recognised, when justice is honestly pursued and hatred is pacified^[10].

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