

Full Length Research Paper

# The dynamics of political competition and the future of democratization process in Cameroon: challenges and opportunities

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The paper looks at the process of democratisation in Cameroon and its failure to respond to the basic tenets of democracy that meets the aspirations of the people. It argues that though there have been some quasi moves following the collapse of the Soviet Union in trying to open the political space, this has been done to meet donors wish and not in the genuine interest of the people. Hence both internal forces have stifled the democratic process with the compliancy of the international community. It goes further to question whether there is hope for Cameroon and the rest of the continent to claim the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The focus is on examining the return of Cameroon to the democratic fold of nations following the collapse of the dominant one-party system. To what extent has the process of the newfound political pluralism been of potential reward to improving the quality of livelihood of the people and empowering them in the political process? In short, the paper looks at the process of political evolution and the reformation of the country's institution to make democracy more participative and responsive to the needs of the people in respect of a number of inter-related issues that can improve the quality of the living standards of the vast majority of the population. It adopts a comparative analytical approach and argues that women need better representation in the decision-making machinery and political hierarchy of the government and party. The conclusion is that sustainable political development should build on the principles of inclusion.

**Keywords:** Democratisation, participation, exclusion, inclusion, ethnic hegemony, political divide, marginalisation, dictatorship, liberalism, poverty, ruling class, competition, exploitation. Rigging.

## INTRODUCTION

"What we need to know is whether and under what conditions transformation toward democracy is possible today in those countries which suffer from authoritarian rule:" (Adam, 1986).

"When a term has become as universally sanctified as 'democracy' now is, I begin to wonder whether it means anything, in meaning too many things." (Eliot, 1940).

"Government is a trust, and the officers of government are the trustees: and both the trust and trustees are created for the benefit of the people" (Henry Clay, 1829).

The question whether democracy means anything is obviously important to social scientist. To compare democracies, to identify factors that promote their

consolidations, to examine the effects of democracy on economic development, to determine the causes and consequences of democracy require us to determine what makes a regime, state, or society count as democratic. How far or near is democracy to Cameroon? What must be done to sustain the process to avoid returning the dark days of tyrannical and authoritarian governance system? What role should the international community play in the process? Is the international community part of the current problem of derailing the genuine political emancipation of the country though it is ganging up with the ruling elites for selfish interests? Have Cameroonian elites become what Fanon described as *"Black Skin, White Mask"*? Where is civil society in the

political chase game?

Many African states gained their independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The difficult tasks they faced have built a durable and self-reliant nation-state system. These tasks – which involved substantial social and economic changes as well as the construction of responsive public institutions – continue to pose grave problems for both African societies and the international system. At stake in the African continent are the issues of the credibility and legitimacy of the governments that came to power at the end of the long era of colonialism, the unitary of communities delineated by the arbitrary drawing of colonial borders, and the prosperity of economies that are among the least developed, and in some cases, the poorest in the world. In some cases, they are in the midst of plenty. This implies that the power these leaders gained in the independence struggle has not been adequately translated into effective public institutions with broad authority to address and meet the aspirations of the people, nor has unity and solidarity been forged among diverse ethnic groups.

The focus is to examine the return of Cameroon to the democratic fold of nations following the collapse of the dominant one party system. To what extent has the process of the return to political pluralism been of potential reward to improving the quality of livelihood of the people? In short, the paper looks at the process of political evolution and the reforming of the country's institution to make democracy more participative and responsive to the needs of the people in respect of:

- Creating transparent and responsive administrative structures that serve the majority of the people, not a selected few;
- Extending social infrastructure to the rural areas and the vulnerable groups (women, children, etc);
- The preservation of peace and the establishment of law and order.

The paper looks at the second independence of Cameroon and where the sovereignty of the state rests with the people – where state institutions are functional, transparent and officers of the state are held accountable for their activities. After close to over a decade of the democratisation process, Cameroon is in political and economic distress and deep in bad governance, poverty, corruption, insecurity to life and property and the marginalisation of those who do not belong to the ethnic affiliation of the governing regime. The rule of law has been placed at bay. There is a deliberate return to the old status quo of the dominant party system through rigged elections. The disguise return to the dominant one system is articulated in the diabolic notion of maintaining stability. A stability, which turns out to be the preservation and dominance have and ethnic hegemony of the ruling party over the control of state apparatus and looting of state funds. What rules Cameroon are ethnic hegemony and the politics of exclusion?

It becomes imperative in light of these and other related problems to undertake a critical study of issues that con-

tribute to the derailment of the re-democratisation process in the country. Why is the government dragging its feet in the implementation of a number of clauses of the 1996 Constitution designed to accelerate, enhance and institutionalise the democratisation process? Where freedom is fragile, development would be fragile too. Therefore, the country need to build a system that can provide, promote, strengthen and defend the freedom and liberty of the people in order to make development harmonious and solid for the common good of all.

The point is that only a really free human being within a free society and enjoying all his human rights can really contribute to the development of the society within which (s)he lives: so only can a really free and independent Cameroon, with a democratic government, where the sovereignty of the state rests with the people can contribute to the building of a sustainable society. A democratic Cameroon must therefore necessarily join with other democratic nations to work for a better and free world where Fundamental Human Rights are respected and poverty, want, racism and diseases eradicated.

The conceptual framework builds on the concept of governance- with governance defined as the science of government behaviour and performance. The purpose of governance includes the maintenance of law and order, the defence of the society against external enemies, and the advancement of what is thought to be the welfare of the group, community, society, or state itself. It includes the exercise of Administrative, Economic and Political Authority (AEPA) to administer the affairs of the country at all levels. Good governance presupposes the existence of effective domestic institutions. Good governance imposes demands on policy makers and political leaders in their exercise of power. This encompasses:

- i the State
- ii Civil Society and
- iii the private sector.

Fox and Meyer (1996) noted that *“Governance is possible only as long as governments manage to enforce their will.”*

African history is a frustrating search for the ideal government. Africans want to be part of a global community with a system that enforces rules that keep everyone well behaved. People also value their freedom and rights in all aspects. These expectations may be hard to realize because community and freedom are like intellectual oil and water. They mix badly in any utopian recipe for government. The Anglophone community knows this and will continue to live it for many years to come. The solution to the plethora of problems may better be provided by democracy. Democracy like government is what you make it. Dictators use it to dominate their subjects. Free citizens use democracy and governance to work toward a common goal. Democracy has the potential to serve us better than any other avail-

able style of government. The Cameroon situation is laden with recipes depicting undemocratic governance form. Interesting enough, a governance form has been accepted by the ruling Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement [CPDM] and its cohorts who have successfully imposed their hegemony over the rest of the nation through flawed elections and other forms of mechanizations thwarting the return to genuine democratic governance.

By and large, Churchill was partially right when he stated that democracy is the best of many bad choices a people or nation could make. Of course, Churchill's mildly depressive approval was linked to the world environment at the time. Dictatorship and authoritarian governance was wrecking the globe, while democracy pattered along, sometimes making progress, sometimes, faltering but generally leaving their people without direction. Africa in 1990 found itself in the periscope of Churchill's prescription. However, Churchill missed an important fact that democracy comes in variety. It is not a fixed recipe for government, but provides a levelling playground for political competition and responsibility sharing.

Some African countries among them Cameroon, Uganda, Gabon, Ethiopia, Zambia etc continue to capitalize on this recipe to manufacture a government and a system that reflect what they see as the wishes of the people: where minorities continue to force on the majority what they perceive as good for the country. Today, the common cliché in Cameroon is that of "advanced democracy", "democracy of appeasement" by forcing opposition parties and interest groups to work with the ruling party. The question yet to be answered by African countries is simple. What principle has Africa learned that makes democracy the best choice instead of the worst choice? To get a government that, Africans want at a price they can afford, citizens need to see what their leaders care doing. If they do not like what they see and get, the population should be able to vote in fresh talents or simply adopt a system of passive positive public initiative and action – boycott. Rephrased differently, good democracies, as the Swiss have learned, run on competition which is free, fair, operating on a levelling play ground for all competitors.

Competition simply implies that no leader or political party can harass, trick, and cajole voters for too long or slow down the public when it decides the time has come for a change. The time for change has not reached the shores of Cameroon's political landscape. Some dramatic action is necessary to trigger the forces for change. In this respect, a country gets the kind of government it deserves. Cameroon is no exception in this dictum. Since belly politics of the individual over-rides all other issues in the body politics of the country, democratic change cannot be expected. The 11 October 2004 Presidential elections depict "the politics of the belly" attaining the highest stage in Cameroon. America's 11 September 2001 was repeated in political jargon in Cameroon on 11 October 2004 – the day politics saw its greatest nose dive in the country.

The essentials and threats of being removed from office or from power for bad performance, that is, poor output functions, have a sobering effect on those in office. It reminds them of their failure to effectively and efficiently produce quality 'outputs'. People want good, stable government capable of providing the essential human needs at low cost. People want security in all its dimensions. The problem with anarchy and dictatorship is that there is no competition. For those in power anything goes, including theft, pillage and brutality, strict rules that stifle political competition and equitable wealth sharing. Democracy lies between these extremes and is best thought of as a way of getting government services with a minimum of government bullying and incompetence. Democracy is nothing more than a way of controlling the people in power. There is need for governance structure that operates under the banner of three conditions:

A democratic political structure which allows  
Opposition parties to exist;

An atmosphere on enabling environment of  
varying degrees of uncertainty; and

An electorate of rational voters that can fairly  
and freely vote and un-vote a government

The call therefore, is for a democratic participatory governance system. A democratic form of participatory political system requires as well a political culture consistent with it. However, the transfer of the political culture of the old democracies to transitional or emerging nations (Africa for example) encounters serious difficulties. As depicted in the study, two principal reasons account for the difficulties in transferring western political culture to the continent. (Box 1).

Given these and other related reasons comprising the difficulties of western political culture in the architecture of the African political environment, it is not surprising to perceive the social mechanisms making the state possible in Africa. Because the differences are enormous, we are confronted with terms like primitive state, traditional state, archaic states, feudal state, colonial state, national state, totalitarian state, modern state, democratic states and many other phrases in political literature. Skalnack (2001) asserted, "These signalise the culture variety, both evolutionary and structural traits which Africa has to address in the process of its political evolution "

It is not difficult to see that post-colonial Africa is littered and submerged in the concept of the state which remains the most conspicuous agency or set of agencies with nothing to compete with its power on the local level. "In seeming contradictions to this statement the outside powers, be it states, multinational or international organizations of various types, have managed in Africa to a stage that which elsewhere in the world is not so apparent: The State in Africa seems at the same time omnipotent and helpless (Skalnack op cit.): with disorder

**Box 1.** Difficulties in the Transfer of Western Political Culture to Africa.

**1.** Concerns about the nature of the democratic culture itself:

The ideas of democracy – freedoms and dignities of individuals, principle of government by consent of the governed – are elevating and inspiring

Working principles of a democratic polity and its civic culture, i.e. Ways in which decisions are made by political elites, their norms and attitudes – relation to government and fellow citizens – are subtler cultural components.

Western social science has not finally codified the operating characteristics of the democratic polity itself:

**Transfer of 2** Objective problems confronting these nations: **Western Political** Transitional nations entering history on the modern **Power** political space with archaic technologies and social systems, drawn towards the gleam and power of the technological and scientific revolutions.

It is not difficult to see why they should be drawn toward a technological image of the polity: a polity in which authoritarian bureaucracy predominates and political organization becomes a device for human and social engineering. Though transitional societies may be fascinated by western science and technology and are drawn to an impatient technocratic polity as a mechanism for altering the new values of the West, they as creatures of their own traditional cultures would prefer to preserve this as long as possible and to deal gently with the new culture if these choice were available. For further details, see Almond and Verba, (1965) *Civic Culture*. Little Brown series in Comparative Politics, Boston, USA

widespread characterizing the vehicle for its malfunctioning. The State in Africa for now remains different from what the nation-state concept is in western modern Europe; where the state is weakly institutionalised and informal. In Africa, the state is actively strong enabling its patrimonial or neo-patrimonial character making it impossible to distinguish between the state as an imperial institution and the incumbents of offices in the states.

African Heads of States identify with the state to the extent that institutions, authorities and powers of the state converge as their personal powers and properties. Can one possibly postulate a “*crises of modernity*” or a “*crisis of traditions*” from Africa creating a state of underdevelopment and disorder for the continent? Chabal and Deloz (1999) argue that it is the Africanisation of the colonial heritage that gave birth to the neo-patrimonial state. This statement has some commonality with Buell's (1928) research on Africa aimed at providing information to the West on the continent understood by Europeans of the time. Buell wrote: “*The elevation of the black man in Africa will not come by the 'contact' which, after all, is a mere adaptation of the French theory of assimilation. It will come by the development, and not the destruction, of the native group. The policy of assimilation is what the French themselves are discarding; and it is difficult to believe that the radically intolerant Englishman can succeed where the racially tolerant Frenchman has failed*”.

Discussing democracy and development in Africa offers a different alternative, arguing that “in most of Sub-Saharan Africa unlike East Asia, the state is not only rudimentary, if it can be said to exist at all, but also displaced” by colonialism which violently assaulted the indigenous state” (Skalnack 2001). Today's political authoritarianism prevents the crystallization of the state or even the political class. Ake (1996) noted that

“authoritarianism coming from outside “*tends to constitute a plurality of 'informal' primary groups that are largely the repository of loyalties... centrifugal forces that render the polity incoherent*” (1996). His conclusion being that no state, liberal or autocratic exists in Africa. “What exists is a public force that should be the state that is only nominally so because it is essentially privatised. It becomes a contested terrain where contending parties vie for the appropriation of resources, including the power base of the state”. The outcome being political competition effectuated under the conditions of lawlessness. Politics is basically warfare, or at best an anarchy of dedicated self-seeking” people who alienate themselves from their people. This issue is echoed by *The Economist*, 7 August 1999, which noted that “the colonial inheritance of an independent class of civil servants who could detach themselves from ethnic or religious roots and serve the nation: could save Africa and ensure her development. Ake's thesis advanced four kinds of democracies needed in Africa. (Box 2).

Misguided policies and concepts from the West have devastating consequences on the people. There is the confusion in transferring democracy and transferring westernisation. The values of the basic tenets of democracy are cherished the world over, not the values of western beliefs. Here western liberal democracies in the wake of the cold war while trying to globalise democracy reduced it to mere pluralist elections which somehow gripped Africa following Huntington's “third wave” and the collapse of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and its satellites states in the late 1980s. We see the same under the concept on the 'war of terrorism'. Skalnack (2001) noted that the return to pluralist elections “enabled authoritarians such as Kenyan President Arap Moi and Cameroonian President Paul Biya to stick to power and boast democracy without really reforming their repressive regimes”. Enyih (1999)

**Box 2. Ake's Ingredients of Democracy for Africa.**

A democracy in which people have some real decision-making power over and above the formal consent of electoral office:

A social democracy where concrete political, social and economic rights have primacy over abstract political rights characteristics of liberal democracies:

**Kinds of Democracy for Africa =====>**

Preference to collective rights as much as individual rights implying total recognition of nationalities, sub-nationalities, ethnic groups, and communities as social formations that express freedom and self-realization:

Be an incorporative democracy which is as inclusive as possible, thus giving chance to mass organizations, especially youth, the labour movement, and women's groups... without whose active participation there is unlikely to be democracy or development. (Ake, 1996).

**Source:** Forje (Compiled from Ake 1996).

had a different opinion concerning the situation of Biya. *"He highlighted the need to serve the general interests of his people through a sustained democratic culture firmly rooted on a number of independent priorities – ten in all"*

Situating democracy within the Cameroon context, President Paul Biya (1996) stated: *"there is nothing like a unique or universal model democracy. The democracy we are forging in Cameroon will be done at our pace; will take into account our peculiarities, our context, our traditions – a solid, lasting and strong democracy"*. Drawing from AICE (1996) "Africa is still far from liberal democracy and further still from participative social democracy", but has "internal motivation for democratisation," strengthened by "the failure of development strategies." Rather, African leaders are 'seeking democracy as a matter of survival.

In the same vein, Nwokedi (1995) called for a very detail discourse and complete 'orientation in political culture' in Africa through a 'correct perception by leaders and followers alike of the means and ends of politics.'" This political struggle for power is not ends in them. They have underlying societal projects. It is necessary to transcend the state-society dichotomy which virtually reduces politics to war. To address the situation, Nwokedi believed in the possibility of a positive use of 'primordial identities' which could be 'used creatively in a consociational manner to foster the evolution of a national outlook instead of an exclusive or a functionalist sub-national orientation that has led to the tragic situations.

Building on the views expressed, democracy as it works now gives the men and women in power too many cloaks under which to hide. African countries are using this to remain in power. Therefore, there is the need to uncloak democracy with a few simple rules, some of which have already been advanced: rule of law, respect of fundamental human rights; free and fair elections, transparency, level play field for all contestants. There are probably many other ways to shine a light into the dark workings of government as well as expose the inner side of the opposition parties to vigorous scrutiny and transparency. Cameroon's 11 October 2004 Presidential

Elections depict the fragmentation of the opposition parties and the hidden hand of manipulation by the ruling CPDM party and government. Cameroon cannot be said to be making progress towards consolidating a democratic culture of universal acceptable norms.

Africa can only move forward by experimenting democratic consciousness, tolerance, and nationalism, but without violating the basic tenets of the fundamentals of the democratic creed. The need to build a political culture in African can no longer be emphasised. Without a solid political culture and civic culture framework, the region runs the risk to ultimately destroy the process of democratisation and good governance.

Africa is now at the turning point of the democratisation process. The 'point of no return' is just behind, there is no way back to the authoritarian and centralized system that plagued the continent for many decades. The emerging strategies of democratisation in Africa should ensure and avoid the dangers of returning to antidemocratic activities and its effects on the society. Africa must brave the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond: and this can only be through a democratic governance system. The political crisis that has plagued and continues to plague the region for more than four decades is not the end of Africa, as many scenarios would suggest, but is, from a realistic perspective, the beginning of a new Africa. That new beginning is the results of the efforts of civil society through popular movements that have continuously questioned the legitimacy of the existing African leadership to continue to be in power and to make irrelevant and detrimental policies.

The political revamping of Africa or the political reinvention or democratisation remains for now a complex operation and choice especially for a continent which has been perhaps the most physically and culturally brutalized, dependent, segmented, ethnicised and marginalized for the past five hundred years or more. We must candidly admit that the process for change cannot be a spontaneous operation. What we should not run from is to face these existing challenges. There can be no change if the bad policies and other related issues are not properly addressed.

### Box 3. Underlying Virtues of What Democracy Is.

Democracy puts control of government in the hands of temporary caretakers. The caretakers are politicians, or say [traditional] rulers:

Democracy keeps the costs of government down by giving voters the ability to remove irresponsible or incompetent leaders. The “ability to remove” implies several things. It may imply citizens voting a leader out of office or recalling him to office. A leader can be effectively removed from authority if voters use initiatives to bypass his decisions:

#### What democracy is?

Democracy implies competition. In an ideal democracy, competition is free in the sense that no appreciable costs or artificial barriers prevent an individual from running for office and from putting a platform before the electorate. That there is a level playing field for all competitors and above all, that it avoids the “tyranny of the majority and minority

Democracy is a lesson we learn as we march on. Here one may agree with the views of Paul Biya (1984, 1996). The debate on what kind of democracy to have perches on two unrealistic extremes. The dominant view is that government is exclusively the business of professionals. Populists answer that everything should be run by direct democracy. Neither of these views is right. A mix of direct and representative democracies is needed. Direct democracy may work well only in certain special circumstances, where many forces join to make government by and for the people a success. The answer for democracy to succeed is to return power to the people and stop giving democracy a mystical perspective and dimension. Thus with power at the bottom – the people – the important direct or representative democratic votes will take place at the bottom. With power resting at the bottom makes democracy a system for controlling government that rests on political competition. To control government citizens need to see the connection between what politicians decide on their behalf and what they get. A citizen that cannot make these connections has no way of judging its leaders and loses control over them. If Africa follows a few guiding principles and never abandons the search for the perfect government, Africa will surely get there one day.

Unfortunately, Africa can never get there when countries like Cameroon defile the golden rules of the basic tenets of democracy. If fraud and personality-cult worship, is the priority of the democratic game as it is in Cameroon and other countries, it is difficult to see how the culture of democratic governance can be implanted throughout the continent. A long-term view and optimistic perception have to be cultivated based on success stories like South Africa, Mauritius, and Ghana. However, overzealous individuals to highjack the democratic process for their common selfish interests must derail success stories.

#### Democratisation and Its Constraints

To talk of democratisations, we must first find out what democracy is and whether it had existed on the continent. According to Bujra and Buthelezi (2002), democracy denotes the ability of the citizens in society or participants

in an organization to effectively take part in the choice of their representatives or leadership and to effectively participate in the decisions made on issues that affect them in society in general. As a system, democracy should be biased in favour of social justice and equality of access to national resources. It, therefore, must embody a number of hallmarks including: openness; competitiveness; representativeness; accountability; transparency; rule of law and separation of powers; politics of consensus rather than coercion; respect and observance of human rights; constitutional government; and regular, free and credible multi-party elections among others. Democracy is a control system that is supposed to short-circuit abuses. Could it be seen as a thing found and lost and an ongoing search to discover the valuable product or what? The democratisation process in Africa has entered a crucial stage—a process where windows of political opportunities exist for the people to crossover the totalitarian era of the past.

As indicated, only few countries like Benin, Ghana and Nigeria have made significant strides in that direction, particularly in the process of structural reorganization and civilisation in the case of military regimes and conducting competitive elections, to please external donor bodies. Some countries like Cameroon, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Nigeria are clothed in visible reluctance and autocratic/dictators haggling with parties agitating for change in flatly resisting pressures. These countries join those that show strong signs of departures from democratic principles which closely parallel defects as what once existed in the former Eastern Europe. South Africa, Mauritius and Botswana remain the few existing democracies.

Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, Togo, Benin etc. exhibited the supremacy of the ruling party over the government, the vanguard party concept, politicisation of the public service and security services, monopoly of party power in perpetuating, subordination of mass organizations, e.g. Trade unions, youth groups, cultural associations, the media etc. to party control. The prevalence of the cult personalities, abuses of power, including corruption, partial and permanent states of emergency, gunning down of peaceful unarmed demonstrators etc. (Angling, 1990) remain common. Box 3 depicts some of the underlying elements of the basic

tenets of democracy.

There is the need to link this to good governance. Good governance is a somewhat elastic concept like democracy. It is often interpreted to many different ways so as to encompass many different aspects of social organization and the institutional framework within which social and economic activities are performed. Democracy is a virtue we all claim to cherish, but its meaning is often in the eye of the beholder. Even tyrants swear by it, often calling their totalitarian contraptions democratic republics.

Like a chameleon, democracy can swear different shades of colours of convenience. Some of the gloss of colours it has received in Africa include imputed liberalism, the radiance of socialist egalitarianism, or the earthly hue of traditional communalism. In Cameroon, Paul (1987) saw this through the periscope of "Communal Liberalism". Democracy has become a political minefield in Africa between struggles and democratic consolidations, with the possibilities of democratic consolidation firmly engraved with the demanding ox-cart of development. Both Onimode (1992) and Ake (1993) see political democracy and economic democracy as indissolubly linked. What is essential is to epitomise the basic tenets and values of democracy as the best way forward in building a sustainable society.

Both civilian and military regimes have fared poorly on the continent. Whether these countries will continue to behave so in the years ahead as the unstoppable forces of globalisation swamp them and the democratisation bandwagon remains to be seen. On the other hand, if democratisation continues to the logical conclusion in Africa, (which is the wish of the majority population) what is its significance and prospects of survival? Will Africa sustain the new trend of political development and changes? Will the new leaders withdraw from politics, personality cultism and presidents for life syndrome to be above politics presiding for fixed period of tenure of office and strongly adhering to the context of the constitution?

How politicians and party leaders behave will determine the "second independence" and the sustainability of democracy on the African continent. A new democratic charter is needed for Africa, one with a dispensation and good will to govern, providing the necessary political space, expanding modes of representation and commitments, upholding the basic tenets of democracy, respect for civic and human rights, a free press and independent judiciary, including an impartial civil service structure (not tied to the aprons of the ruling party) prepared to render quality service and management to whichever political party that assumes office. The first phase of independence resulted in a situation where political democracy failed in giving birth to a solid social space. Rather, it stimulated and even cemented ethnic hegemony. This attitude destroyed the political enabling environment for the practice of good governance, as well as it stifled any meaningful economic progress and industrial take-off in the continent.

One thing is clear: democratisation has opened powerful floodgates, swamping states with scores of poli-

tical parties, most narrow ethnic and personal, and thousands of power aspirants. Cameroon today accounts for almost 200 political parties, many often created on the eve of elections, and particularly in view of the fact that the state funds political parties that contest elections. The former Zaire (DRC) has about 109 parties. This trend is common throughout the continent, particularly in French speaking Africa that has witnessed an upsurge in the creation of political parties with the activities of some of the parties not extending beyond the bedroom of the founders. Benin for example saw more than 1800 candidates of 26 political parties contest for places within its 64 member parliament structure: while fourteen candidates presented themselves for the presidential elections. The 2004 Presidential elections in Cameroon had 13 candidates, which worked in favour of the incumbent. The election was tactical designed to ensure the failure of the opposition parties presenting a common candidate. Cameroon opposition parties failed to learn from the strategic devices of Kenyan opposition parties in throwing out the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU).

A major characteristic of development is that of ethnic voting, inter-ethnic frictions and political intimidation, which have spilled into the life of the "new democracies" as if length one-party interregnums never took place, (Decalo, 1992). Does this imply that a return to the one-party system offers hope for ethnic cohesion and unity in diversity? I doubt. The state of unstable democracy and existence of endless rivalries were deployed to explain the general aversion to multi-party systems across much of Africa, (Uwazunike, 1990). The one-party system did not restore ethnic unity and cohesion, but rather laid the architectural framework fanning the state of institutionalised corruption, and enrichment of a few persons and ethnic groups.

What is fundamental is not to look backwards but forward, to draw useful experiences from the past in order to construct a better future. In short, Africa now has a new opportunity to opt entirely for new political and economic dispensations and functional institutions to pilot the continent through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They have to do what they failed to do in the 1960's. To better understand why Africa's attempt at nation building, socio-economic and human development and especially the eradication of the state of underdevelopment and poverty alleviation fell on the wayside, one has to critically examine pre-independence constitutional discourse and the choice of rules.

The chronic vulnerability and instability of Africa's democratic transitions and constitutions and its lapses into extended periods of authoritarian, dictatorial civilian and military rule attest to the continent's failure to evolve a political order based on the principles and ideals of constitutionalism. In Algeria, Cameroon, Benin, Nigeria, Kenya, Gabon, Congo as elsewhere in much of Africa, democratic impulses and aspirations have not been able to sustain democratic processes and institutions. Colonial governance in its heyday but pro-democratic at its twili-

**Box 4.** The Distributive System and Its Impact in African States.

It prohibits the flourishing of crosscutting functional as distinct from sectional linkages and loyalties by reinforcing the tendency in the state to perceive issues of equity and welfare

Lead to persistent, vociferous and politically irresistible communal pressures for decentralization

It prevents the emergence of a genuine process of decentralized development and entrenching a sense of local dependence on central patronage:

**Distributive**

Ethnically or sectionally based distributive pressures have contributed **systems being** significantly to the contentiousness and unreliability of census figures in **counter-many** countries, Nigeria, Cameroon for example in the allocation of seats **productive to** and other services,

**National cohesion**

Distributive syndrome inhibiting development of an overarching sense of nationalism or identification within each country

ght, therefore, afforded littler experience with the operation of democratic institutions prior to independence. Neo colonialism replaced colonialism which plunged the continent into the hell fire of underdevelopment, mismanagement, instability and ethnic conflicts (Diamond, 1993; Decalo, 1992). The politics of exclusion replaced that of inclusion, national unity was over-taken by ethnic hegemony, common interest replaced by personality cult-worship. Money became the overriding factor in deciding elections. It is not surprising that the continent has plunged into political decay, election apathy and rigging.

Instead of decentralisation practiced by the colonial powers, Britain for example, over-centralization became the order of the day in post- colonial Africa. The impact being that over -centralised features of the African system of administration generated scepticism of the centralised nature of the continent's polity. The visible process of decentralization that took place was one of fanning ethnic hegemony. In other words, African nations portray what could be fashioned as "*centralised state in ethnic disguise*". Most African countries operate an 'irregular centralised state' or a 'united state' except in the name. France's politics of assimilation had taken over, by ethnic hegemony dictating the pace and form of governance.

By and large, no African state has developed into a united states but acquired what may be characterized as a patchwork of ethnic hegemonies entity exercising their muscles and authority over others as long as one of them wields the spectra of state power. The situation is implying that African states are not being a nation, but a collection of ethnicities fighting for the national cake. This takes us to the distributive system practised in African states. The neo-colonialist approach, attitude and behaviour of the new custodians of power and authority in post-independent Africa have largely been counter-productive in its impact. The issue in question is illustrated in box 4 – The Distributive System and Its Impact in African States.

An inequitable wealth-sharing or distribution justice breeds secessionist tendencies and instability. Tow cases out of many stands out clearly: the situation in Nigeria, Niger-Delta region and the Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy in Cameroon. The marginalisation of the minorities and establishment of tribal hegemony or ethno-clienletistic wealth-sharing networks constitute a ruinous pattern of public behaviour, which helps in winning some toleration for political corruption. Ethnoclientelism links civil servants and often functionaries to their sectional constituents through an instrumental or reciprocal fashion. Such attitudes invariably contribute to the erosion of the integrity, legitimacy and efficiency of public institutions. Without astute civilian political leadership and an effective, efficient, non-partisan state bureaucracy backed with the full-participation and support from civil society, the democratisation process cannot make sustainable advances.

Cameroon presents a pathetic case in this context of distributive system. The political contract for state construction agreed upon during the Fouban accord that led to the reunification of the British and French Cameroon 44 years after has turned out to be an unholy marriage with painful scares of francophonisation of the Anglophone part of the territory or betilization of state power (Ngoh, 2004, and other publications).

For example, out of 25 Brigade generals, only 2 are Anglophones, less than 10 Anglophone ministers out of a cabinet of 50; less than 0 Anglophone senior administrative officers out of 60 and so on.

The failure of the continent to significantly improve on the living conditions of the people in post- independence period can be traced to the adoption of inefficient and non-viable institutional arrangements and excessive state intervention in private sector exchange and with no priority focus agenda on its socio-economic transformation activities. There has been poor institutional arrangements and inability to deliver quality services to the people. Such institutional arrangements



**Box 5. Factors Contributing to Africa's Failed Post Independence Governance System.**

Constitutional rules adopted at independence were weak, inefficient and no viable. The apparatus of government established created political coalitions that easily captured it and used the regulatory power of the state to redistribute income and wealth unfairly, inequitably and so on

Constitutions failed to adequately constraint the power of the state to intervene in the private sector. The only constraint on the coercive power of the government being majority voting. For the military and civilian dictators. Governance was by decree with no limit on the state's ability to intervene in the private sector.

**FCAFPIGS**

Constitutions were not endowed with qualities that created and sustained political and economic competition in post-constitutionally society.

The qualities required or absent being freedom of citizens to migrate between political institutions, economic freedom, separation of powers, devolution of powers, autonomy for regional and local political jurisdictions, equitable resources distribution

Note; **FIAPFIS** – Factors Contributing to Africa's Failed Post-Independence Governance System

permitted a few persons and select ethnic constellations to misuse or inappropriate utilize the apparatus of government machinery as an instrument to plunder the economy for their personal benefit at the expense of the suffering masses. Mbaku (1995) stated that “political opportunism, including bureaucratic and political corruption, perverse economic policies, political violence (including military coups) and other behaviour designed to help individuals and groups subvert the rules in order to enrich themselves became endemic to the region.” Africa’s failure in post- independence effort to develop can be attributed to many and varied reasons, as depicted in Box 5.

The conclusion is simple and straightforward – poor and inappropriate constitution making is partly to blame for the absence of efficient and self-enforcing laws and institutions in the post-independence states in the continent. Second, and perhaps most important, is the gross lack of 'political will' on the part of the key actors to ensure the functioning of a democratic system. In all, the outcomes of democratisation efforts in Africa stem from the dialectical or contradictory nature of the processes that lead to social change. The forces that create pressure for democratisation may also subvert it. In some countries these forces whose positive influence on democratisation may be completely absent or lacking in the critical mass necessary to counter authoritarian tendencies.

Liberal democracy is knocking on the doors of African states. Yet liberal democracy and its bed partner {capitalism} face a profound contradiction in Africa. Embracing liberal democracy implies containing economic rights. So far this is not the case in Africa. Here living standards remain the lowest in the world, the newly enfranchised citizens must use their muscle to turn back market reform and connect political rights with economic rights

The present poor conditions and living standards of the African population render more radical vision of democracy. Are African elites prepared to accept the

issue of “putting the last or poor first and the rich or affluent last”? Or will they with their western allies hatch plans limiting democracy to its bourgeois form to maintain the existing status quo? The dialectical nature of democratisation and of social change will be determined by the push and pull of various forces

What is evidently clear is that no part of Africa can roll back the democratisation bandwagon. As the continent muddles its way through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the region and its people must learn to cope with uncertainty and change. In the process, some countries have and will continue to make great progress. Others will not. But the struggle should not be discarded. The tendency points towards a more radical vision of democracy which remains inevitable.

If there are factors inhibiting democracy in Africa, are they factors facilitating democracy development? This is our next topic

**Factors Facilitating Democratic Development**

Given the plethora of problems confronting the African continent, there is still a way out on the road of democracy and development in Africa. There are forces facilitating the move towards a democratic government. These include:

- A relatively strong and vibrant economic infrastructure. Despite all problems as summarized here, Africa remains a continent with rich, vast and untapped natural resources and human capital potentials, when developed. Taking just a few cases, Nigeria, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Egypt remain centres of pulling factors for an economic take-off. We may term this the 'cross of Africa' or to be more precise, the linkage between the Cape and Cairo, the Nigeria and Nairobi converging in DR Congo. This is again supported by other states like Cameroon. Sudan.

Angola, Tunisia, Ghana, Mozambique. Many African countries lack a developed agricultural, manufacturing and distributing sector, with relatively ineffective and inefficient economic and technological capabilities and infrastructures which need to be developed to make them competitive in the global market.

- What is disturbing is that some of these countries had a higher per capital income in the late fifties and sixties than countries, which today are referred to as Asian Tigers.

The draw back in Africa is the degree of corruption and mismanagement and the general attitude like the continent is not theirs. This impedes the development of the region. These areas must be seriously addressed. A country like South Africa has shown its technological powers within the global world. What the continent need is to link up the technology of mobility and violence with the technology of knowledge to provide quality living standards to the people. The people of the continent deserve more than the token offered them by their leaders and the international community. Kwame Nkrumah's seeking the political kingdom did not imply excluding the female gender.

### **Developing cultures of moderation and tolerance**

Despite the ideological orientation of African countries to any form of political orientation, it must be apparently clear to all shades of political opinion and governance form that they have to tolerate one another as well as moderate their own politics within a multi party democratic system and context so as to achieve a comprehensive compromise in the negotiations, transition process and governance system practised.

The collapse of the Soviet Union makes it difficult for its adherents (through the one-party system) to explain why it should succeed in Africa. That this governance system is gradually being abandoned is victory for the evolution for a particular democratic governance system on the continent in tandem with the basic principles underscoring the rule of law and separation of powers, freedom of speech, etc. The international demise of centralized authoritarian one-party system in the minds of the probable emerging new policy and political elites in the continent should be sufficient food for thought that a new political dispensation is required if the continent is to claim the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is hoped that this will facilitate the development of effective multi-party democracy by pressuring political actors into policy modes that acknowledge the primacy of participatory governance system through regular, free and fair elections.

In this regard, decentralization, devolution of power – federalism – and power to the people offer a more authentic approach to a sustainable governance system – one that incorporates a holistic and peoples' participatory approach of inclusion not exclusion, it is time for the ruling class to dialogue with the masses and to get

them on board the development wagon for the common good of all. It is now a serious and compulsory issue of '*seeking yeh the belly kingdom for all*' not a selected few.

### **Addressing the fundamental issues of ethnicity and minorities**

Given the geopolitical setting of the continent, two fundamental issues have to be addressed, namely: (i) that of ethnicity and (ii) minorities African states, Cameroon for example, have acquired considerable importance over the past two decades. The growth of these states as measured by the reach of policies and programmes, the size of budgets and bureaucracies, as well as states overall responsibility to their citizens – is unprecedented. Their problems too, are unprecedented, and changes in the governance system pose important challenges for the states to address.

This increased visibility and influence are tied to a major shift in how the state system of government operates. During this period, the economy of the country has not been healthy; and this has significant impact on the structure and functioning of the state. Though there are signs for a re-democratisation process and the economy is picking up, these developments have not been translated into concrete realities in improving the living conditions of the vast majority of the population.

Despite this shifting between bad news and good news, there is an urgent need of putting into correct perspectives the dynamism underscoring the second seven-year mandate of the president, particularly in addressing the degree of divide existing within the body politic of the nation. Cameroon can be taken not as a state but a suigeneris system of multi layered and polycentric governance that uniquely combine the following properties:

Many African states are still ego-led in ethnic divide or construction. The only way forward to constructing national unity is to put in place a constructive resources distributive mechanism where the people reap the benefits of the fruits of the nation. There should be no ethnic hegemony over-riding national interest, nor should minorities be subjected to oppression. In short, the constitution and functioning of the state bureaucracy should be one that eliminates the tyranny of the majority and minority. There are cases where minorities have developed the political power base of lording their value belief systems over the majority, (the Beti hegemony in Cameroon is a good example) or where the majority has taken advantage of their strength to subject the minority to human indignation. The Francophone hegemony over the minority Anglophone community in Cameroon presents a typical example. Many other examples abound throughout the continent. Thus, majority or minority tyranny must be detested at all levels and forms.

Therefore a governance system or mechanism for dealing with a broad range of problems and conflicts in which actors, mostly those of the ruling party or ethnic group arrived at as binding decisions and then imposed

**Table 1.** Highest Ranking Countries in Terms of Women's Representation, 2003.

Rank	Country	% Women
1	Rwanda	49.8
2	Sweden	45.0
3	Denmark	38.0
4	Finland	36.5
5	Norway	36.4
6	Costa Rica	35.1
7	Iceland	34.9
8	Netherlands	34.0
9	Germany	32.2
10	Argentina	30.7
11	Mozambique	30.0
12	South Africa	29.9
13	Seychelles	29.4

**Source:** IDEA (2004). *The Implementation Quotas: African Experiences*. Idea No 3 Stockholm, Sweden

on the rest of the society must be put in place to address the growing degree of social divide within the country. It means articulating policy strategies and measures engulfing the entire nation by looking at ethnic diversity as an asset and not as a liability. A polycentric society is needed, one with a system of making decisions binding over a multiplicity of actors that delegate authority over functional tasks to a set of dispersed and often centralized and controlled institutions. Finally, an ethnic layered arrangement for making decisions that engages an ethnicity of politically independent but otherwise inter-dependent actors – private and public at different levels of territorial aggregation is needed.

These and other related problems indicate that the underlying litany of Africa's problem is that of a crisis of governance, poor leadership and exclusion. History suggests that political legitimacy and consensus are a precondition for sustainable development. Here, the World Bank (1989) posited a causal relationship between democracy and sustained growth. The cases of Botswana, Mauritius, Libya and South Africa top Africa's performances. Apart from Libya, the rest are those with a true multi party political system. Departing from this, Ake (1996) noted: *"the persistence of underdevelopment in Africa is related to the lack of democracy. Democracy is not just a consummate value but also an instrumental one"*. Ethnic animosities and the marginalisation of minorities hamper democratisation. There are ethnic conflicts not only between native peoples but also between the natives and immigrants. Political parties have emerged on ethnic lines. Such situations do not gun for national unity and sustainable development. The concept of having hundreds of political parties {which is now fashionable in many countries} is not a sign of advancing the democratic process. On the contrary, it is a

systematic process of regressiveness in the democratisation process

### **Incorporation of the Female Gender**

No country can make substantial progress when it neglects the majority of its population. For various reasons, many African states have down played the contributory input of the female gender. Yet without their participation in the political and economic spheres, Africa will still be a colonised region. The reunification of Cameroon was due to the massive voting of women in Southern Cameroon for example. The contribution of the African women has not been significantly rewarded. They need more than what they deserve in the current political dispensation of the continent's member states. Imagine six women ministers out of a total of sixty-five ministers following the 8 December 2004 New Government of Achievement by President Paul Biya in Cameroon. Without the massive participation of women, the CPDM could not have made it, keeping aside the fraud and rigging strategies deployed throughout the electoral process. The strength of any political party in the country lies in the hands of women.

African states have approached the threshold of democracy through the aegis of the participatory role of the female gender. Their inputs in the political process must reflect their output. For now this is not the case. Of course, significant efforts are being made in a number of countries to bring women on the plus side of the decision-making process. Here South Africa, Rwanda and Botswana are making tremendous efforts in righting the wrongs of past policies of marginalisation and representation South Africa, Rwanda and Burundi have made significant progress in female gender representation in local councils, parliament and cabinet posts. A look at the global level shows Rwanda ranking high on the list, Table 1 depicts the global situation. Mazrui (2005) noted that *both Liberia and Kenya have had women presidential candidates who had campaigned hard for the ultimate political office. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia did lose to Charles Taylor and Charity Ngilu in Kenya did lose to Daniel Arap Moi. Both women put a spirited fight and demonstrated substantial support. Before Rwanda and Burundi collapsed in the 1990's, they were experimenting with women Prime Ministers*. Even though the Constitution of Senegal, adopted in 2001, is relatively progressive when it comes to women's rights, there is no institutional mechanism to promote them politically. As for Senegal's representation in the National Assembly, Senegal is among the leading countries in Francophone Africa with a rate of 19.2% since 2001. Political parties must play a more aggressive role to ensure gender equality female empowerment. Political parties in Cameroon with a woman's wing have not been forceful to advance the role of women in political process except to get them out on party rallies and other activities.

For the first time, Cameroon has a woman as the 1st Vice President of the National Assembly (Parliament) in person of Madam Rose Makia Abunaw. Current female representation in the National Assembly is, however, low. Cameroon has for over ten years had a female Vice Chancellor, (Dr. (Mrs.) Dorothy L. Njuema) of the University of Buea and now of Yaounde I. She is also a member of the African Peer Review Panel of NEPAD. That is not enough. The male – female divide, like the digital divide to gender constitutes a serious problem that must be adequately addressed for the country and continent to move forward. Women should and must be part of the political and development process. Any country that fails to adopt this strategy is bound to end up in chaos and in a state of perpetual underdevelopment. The countries and their institutions must adopt a more affirmative action, as the present approach is discriminatory in nature and holding back the progress of the nation.

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### **Conclusion: Overcoming Obstacles**

The idea of democracy without inclusion defeats the very purpose of the word. Democracy is an ongoing process that requires the participation of all. The socio-political and cultural environment of the society must be taken into consideration without, of course, destroying the universally accepted basic ingredients or tenets of the rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of speech, free and fair elections, equality before the law among others. Presently, efforts to ensure better female representation in politics remain rather timid in Cameroon even with the existence of a Ministry of Women's Affairs. That ministry needs a new focus to dynamise the political process.

Exclusion on grounds to staying in power forever has been a serious problem in derailing the democratisation process of the country. Women should adopt new voting strategies so as to better empower themselves as well as send the right messages to political parties about their continued marginalisation and exclusion from the political and decision-making processes. Their role in the realm of the informal market economic sector is well known. We need to move beyond the policy area in which women's influence has been most apparent in the gradual development of a politics of care – which addresses the women's responsibility to care for the family and husband and thus provide opportunities for women to combine the obligations of motherhood with the right to economic independence. A new Cameroon Renaissance Agenda (CRA) is called for, one which looks at people in terms of one country for a common goal, not the currently held view of ethnic hegemony and winner takes all, over-riding the system. Cameroon finds itself in the extant dispensation. No wonder women are relegated or down graded to the periphery of the periphery and left with neither the opportunities nor the means for active and vibrant participation in the process of consolidating the

freedom and independence of the country.

Existing obstacle must be over -come through strategic planning and networking towards changing existing male-dominant world environment as well as creating an enabling/conducive political environment for all to operate. Consolidating the democratisation process is necessary and this can only be achieved through partnership, participation, and responsibility sharing between the political leaders, the state, civil society, the private sector and the international community. We live in a global world requiring global solutions to our problems.

*The burden rests with the people of Cameroon to fashion their development path in tandem with evolving global situation.* Cameroon should not be left behind in this global democratisation evolution. It is imperative that it joins the bandwagon to give more vigour and vibrancy to a system that has proved so far to be the best accepted governance system. Windows of opportunities exist for the country to make a contributive impact in advancing the democratisation process, not retarding it. Politics matters for development. Democracy is vital for economic growth. The relatively slow pace of economic growth and expansion has not been sufficient to significantly reduce the high level of poverty in the country. It has given room to corruption and bad governance. The ascendance of democracy has brought invaluable benefits in terms of the protection of human rights, the scope of individual freedoms and the breadth of opportunities for citizen involvement in public-decision never witnessed before. The many flaws found in the country's system and process in the democratisation process should not derail the people to continue the struggle for a total onslaught to crutch totalitarian regimes once and for all.

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