Introduction

Should we really be speaking of good governance rather than democratic government? Is good governance the same as democratic government? The answer is simple: good governance and democratic government are not the same. In fact, good governance does not necessarily entail democratic government. To understand this, we need to return to the history of the concept of good governance, particularly in the 1980s.

This was a period during which many parts of Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America were living under various authoritarian governments, including military regimes and civilian authoritarian governments.

At the time, the idea of good governance became very popular amongst international donor and financial communities. It was promoted during a period when the West had many friends in authoritarian regimes and sought to reconcile the continuing support for their political authoritarianism with economic reforms. The relationship between economic reform and political liberalization became a major concern in these relationships, and good governance became a way of reconciling and resolving the obvious contradictions which political
II

Dimensions of Good Governance

Good governance as it was promoted during the 1980s had two dimensions:

a) Good governance meant the existence of certain desirable regimes. By regime I mean a system of rules, systems and controls. It represented the institutional framework on which politics was conducted. Governance was regarded as good if it met these principles and regimes. Among the most popular of these was the promotion of market forces, particularly through the liberalization of trade, adoption of macroeconomic policies consistent with strengthening the market, monetary policies that allowed local currencies to float and the overall contraction of the public sector and influence of the state. These were a precondition for continued credits to these countries, as these conditions were regarded as “good” for them.

b) At the same time, good governance did not incorporate a definition of government as a unified political process involving the arms of government and serviced by a bureaucracy. Instead, government became a series of spaces to be governed. Each space was subject to specific desirable regimes and political governance is only one of the governed spaces. Thus we have economic governance, natural resource governance, etc.

Conceived in these ways, it is clear that the tenets of good governance could be achieved under both democratic and authoritarian
governments. For instance, donors and Western governments celebrated several authoritarian regimes in Asia for their commitment to good governance, as expressed in economic reforms, which supposedly led to the rapid economic development of their countries. Indeed, authoritarian governments largely propelled the so-called Asian Tigers and Asian miracles. On the other hand, some democratic governments were castigated for neglecting good governance through problematic economic policies and corruption, which crippled their countries.

III
Critique of Good Governance

Good governance is ideological: it is borne out of a desire by Western countries to universalize the Western model of society. While it is good in their view, what it portends is not necessarily good for African countries. Good governance is not necessarily democratic. It has been associated with the policies of very authoritarian regimes across the world. The measure of "good" is predetermined and entails the domination of capital and Western way of life. The idea of governed spaces is a ruse meant to disperse responsibility for the poor policy choices imposed by the West on underdeveloped countries.

Government is a unified process, not a dispersed one. Political elites must take full responsibility for their actions and not deflect it to the rest of the population. Governance is not only about control. It is also about responding to the needs of citizens. Good governance assumes that what it predetermines as good is necessarily what citizens define as good. For example, citizens have roundly rejected privatization and removal of subsidies, which are promoted by proponents of good
governance as desirable, across Africa and indeed the world. That these
policies are forcefully imposed against the wishes of citizens is a clear
indication that good governance and the policies associated with it are
not necessarily democratic.

IV
Africa’s Third Democracy Movement

For the foregoing reasons, I would rather speak of accountability as a
principle of democratic government than as a principle of good
governance. But first, a few remarks on Africa’s recent democratic
experience. The notion of good governance blossomed at the same
time that Africa was undergoing rapid democratic transformation in
what may be called the continent’s Third Democratic Movement. At
the beginning of the 1990s when this third movement (not to be
confused with Huntington’s *Third Wave*) was gathering pace, a major
question raised was the type of democracy on offer. The first of Africa’s
democratic movements - the struggle against colonialism - ended
largely in the enthronement of orthodox, liberal and multiparty
electoral democracy. In the decades of the 1960s, it became clear that
this type of democracy was far from meeting the democratic aspirations
of Africa’s people, leading to repeated calls for a second independence.¹
Again, the democratic aspirations embodied by the second
independence movement were never actualised as a rash of military
coups and authoritarian regimes stifled that second phase of Africa’s
democratic struggles. In this third phase, therefore, it was not
unexpected that a central part of the struggle would be waged for the
type of democracy that would finally meet the aspirations of Africa’s

people. Calls for a return to the second independence movement were rife, particularly in the National Conference models that appeared to be taking roots.

However, this struggle for the essence of the third democratization movement in Africa was by no means unanimous because the terrain was replete with several supporters and pseudo-supporters of democracy, each with its own agenda. Ake rightly captures this medley of interests:

The movement has many components: out of power politicians for whom democratization is less a commitment than a strategy for power; ethnic, national and communal groups who are obliged to wage struggles for democratic incorporation because a manipulative leadership has seized state power in the name of an ethnic or national group; ordinary people who are calling for a second independence having concluded that the politics of the present leadership, far from offering any prospect of relief from underdo, has deepened it immensely; international human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are only just beginning to perceive the relation between human rights and democracy; international financial institutions, especially International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, for whom democracy provides the political requirements for the operation of market forces; and Western governments who support democracy in Africa as the process through which the universalizing of the Western model of society can take place.²

Indeed, these interests variously informed the academic debates on Africa’s transition to democracy at the time. Some of these interests, and the several academic positions they fostered, helped to either elucidate the meaning of democracy or to demean it. It was in fact the

powerful forces that dominated the terrain and their demeaning of democracy that shepherded Africa’s democracy movement into the path of orthodox liberal, electoral democracy.

For several Western scholars, democracy represented a diffusion of democratic institutions from the West to other parts of the world, including Africa. For this diffusionist perspective, the world at the time was experiencing a “third wave of democracy” or the third democratic transformation, representing a “process by which democracy spreads across the world”. Democratization emerged as the modernization of the 1990s, a process in which non-Western societies that were not familiar with democracy were sucked into its “irresistible and universal” vortex. Consequently, Modelski argues that democratization is:

...a technology, that is, a means to an end, a technique of collective choice or a form of macrodecision making, [then] its dissemination may be subject to patterns observed in the diffusion of technological and other innovations. For societies unfamiliar with such practices, democracy is indeed a bundle of innovations.

It is not difficult to see that in this reincarnation of modernization, “developing areas” are “unfamiliar” with democratic practices, which will inevitably reach them through association. This is the connection between democracy and globalization. It is partly true that global events such as the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism in

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7 Modelski, op. cit., p. 1361.
the former Soviet bloc and end of the sphere-of-influence syndrome among the superpowers had an effect on democratization in Africa. However, they only served as a stimulus to popular discontent arising from economic stagnation, social decay and political repression, which in many cases were sustained by the policies of Western governments in specific African countries. To be sure, democratization in Africa has its own internal logic quite apart from the thaw in East-West relations. But sadly, the limits of Africa’s Third Democratic Movement were prematurely fixed by prevalent orthodoxy as liberal, multiparty democracy. Thus, orthodox liberal democracy guillotined the mass-based ferment and political struggles in which Africa’s current democratization was initially being shaped.

Liberal democratic theory, as Schumpeter forcefully argued, was foisted on Africa’s Third Democratic Movement. The essence of this theory, as Schumpeter stated nearly seventy years ago, is to make the power of “the people” in deciding political issues secondary to the “election of men who are to do the deciding”. For him, “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote”. To be sure, this perspective goes further back than Schumpeter. In fact, if we excavate a little we find the Federalist papers. And if we dig even further, David Ricardo, who wanted suffrage only for those who would not abolish private property, and Hegel whose “universal class” is fitted by property and training to rule, are sure to appear. The democratic content of these formulations should not be taken for granted. As Ake has perceptively noted, “liberal democracy has significant affinities to democracy but it

is markedly different”. Instead of the collective, liberal democracy focuses on the individual and substitutes government by the people with government by the consent of the people. In place of sovereignty of the people it offers sovereignty of the law. Above all, liberal democracy completely repudiates the notion of popular power.\(^{10}\)

Surely, after the disappointments of the first and second democracy movements, the mass of Africa’s peoples were certainly expecting more than quadrennial rituals of selecting men who do the deciding on their behalf. Indeed, they were not just looking for elections. They were also looking for improved economic conditions, welfare and dignity that is not blighted by poverty or power. Incidentally, again powerful global forces and their intellectuals also joined issues with these unique demands of African democracy and demeaned them. Essentially, these issues were posed as the link between economic reform and political liberalization.\(^{11}\)

In other words, this was posed as the relationship between market-oriented structural adjustments and political liberalization. International financial institutions and Western governments used the issue as the so-called political conditionality for aid and credits that they demanded from Africa’s authoritarian regimes from the end of the


Cold War. Thus, between 1990 and 1992, the United States suspended military and/or other aid to some of its abiding dictator-friends in Africa like Mobutu, Moi and Doe, over the question of political liberalization.

The truth however is that Africa’s democratic struggles have always had this as a cardinal component. In fact, during the anti-colonial struggles and in the immediate post-colonial period, ordinary people in Africa were clear on the relationship between democracy and better economic conditions. Popular demands on the colonial and post-colonial governments in African were not only about votes and political voice, but also even more emphatically about better economic conditions. Such demands were at the core of the first independence struggles against the colonial state, and the “second independence” struggles against the post-colonial state in parts of Africa. In both cases, the people’s demands and object of struggle were clear: that there is an organic unity between economic well-being and democracy. The struggle for one is the struggle for the other. And this is where their position diverged from that of the petty bourgeoisie - their allies in the first independence struggle. The latter had admonished the need to seek first the kingdom of political independence. But when this did not materialize, the people declared the first independence struggle a failure. Writing on Zaire, Nzongola-Ntalaja aptly observes:

For the people, independence was meaningless without a better standard of living, greater civil liberties, and the promise of a better life for their children. Instead of making these promised benefits available to the masses, the politicians who inherited state power from the Belgians lived in much greater luxury than most of their European predecessors and used violence and arbitrary force against the people. For the latter, the first or nominal

\[ \text{Op. cit.} \]
independence had failed. Their discontent with the neo-colonial state served as a basis for an aspiration towards a new and genuine independence, one that the 1964 insurrections were to incarnate.\textsuperscript{13}

During the early days of Africa’s Third Democratic Movement, these issues were posed in a number of distinct ways. For authoritarian regimes, political liberalization and economic development are separate and should be pursued consecutively, with the former only coming after economic development. The position adopted by some African scholars in reaction to this position is also that they are separate and consecutive, but in a reversed order. Thus, Anyang’ Nyong’o argues that “political liberties and the accountability of the state to the people (in particular the popular classes) is a precondition for material progress”.\textsuperscript{14} For the IMF, the World Bank, Western governments and many liberal social scientists, economic reforms epitomized by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and political liberalization are also separate, but should be pursued concurrently. But evidence clearly indicates that there was a strong link between SAP and political repression in many countries. In response, it has been argued that SAP is not necessarily antagonistic to democratization. It may give rise to social and political tension, but that does not mean that it must result in political repression or undermine the democratic transition process. The farthest those that argued this position went was to acknowledge later that economic reform is a burden on democratization.

The democratic position of Africa’s masses, which they stated in their struggles against the economic exploitation and political repression of

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p. 113.
the colonial state and maintained in their struggles against the post-colonial state, is clear and consistent: that material well-being and political freedom express an organic unity. They cannot be separated either in a consecutive or a concurrent sense. As has since become clear, the issue is not whether SAP coheres with political opening – it may. Instead the issue is whether SAP is the path to popular economic well-being – it is not! Therefore, the peoples' struggle for democracy was also a struggle against SAP.

In short, Africa’s Third Democratic Movement lost the second independence and was left with the next best alternative – multiparty electoral democracy. Professor Ake perceptively notes that in the face of the powerful international and local forces it had to confront, it was unlikely that Africa’s third democracy movement would avoid settling for “the line of least resistance, that is, for orthodox liberal democracy”.\(^\text{15}\) Indeed, he concludes: “any deviation from orthodox liberal democracy, any distrust of the market, will invoke retribution”.\(^\text{16}\)

It is in the context of this electoral democracy that I pose the question of accountability.

V
Meaning and Forms of Accountability

As a principle of democratic government, accountability entails three related things, namely, responsiveness, responsibility and openness or transparency. In other words, a democratic government is accountable to the extent that it is responsive, responsible and open.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid, p. 242.
a) **Responsiveness**: This means that an accountable government must respond to the needs of the vast majority of citizens, not the vested interests of an elite few. Responsiveness also means that government must be alive to its campaign promises. It is this principle of responsiveness that justifies the tracking of campaign promises. Accountability means that citizens devise a means of tracking these promises and holding government accountable for them. In fact, in the final analysis democracy is about responsiveness of government to the wishes of the people.

b) **Responsibility**: This means that on the one hand, government must act responsibly; that is to say, it must act by the rules. A government that routinely undermines rules, including laws that it has itself passed, is not accountable. On the other hand, responsibility also means that government, collectively and individually, must take responsibility for its actions. A government that is accountable should be ready to step down if it loses public confidence.

c) **Openness**: This means that government must be conducted in a transparent and open manner. It requires that government should at all times be honest to citizens.

We can identify three types of accountability: statutory accountability, auto-accountability and citizen accountability. Statutory accountability refers to accountability requirements contained in the extant legal framework, particularly the constitution, existing legislations and other subsidiary legislations. The most common formulation of statutory accountability can be found in the principles of checks and balances. The oversight functions of parliament, as the incarnation of the
collective will of the people-nation, constitute a major site for statutory accountability.

Auto-accountability refers to accountability systems to which government or its agency subjects itself. Auto-accountability mechanisms are meant to go beyond what is statutorily required of government. Many opposition political parties and candidates usually develop auto-accountability mechanisms for themselves to demonstrate their readiness to surpass the existing government if elected. There are a number of factors that make auto-accountability robust. Among these are the strength of the internal rules of the party and the robustness of the whip. These are necessary to ensure that agents of a political party, including candidates when elected, conform to accountability mechanisms designed by the party. The second is the history of the formation of the given political party and candidate, especially their ideological positions. Candidates and parties that have a history of standing with the people are more likely to give to themselves strong auto-accountability mechanisms. Such parties are also more likely to show higher levels of internal party discipline and stronger leadership.

Citizen accountability refers to accountability mechanisms driven by citizens and that draw from both statutory and auto-accountability mechanisms. Citizens’ accountability usually arises from the failure of statutory and auto-accountability.

Election promise tracking projects such as Buharimeter are examples of citizens’ accountability mechanism. The general principles for the
success of such mechanisms include, but are by no means limited to, the following:

(i) They must fully understand the statutory and auto-accountability mechanisms and use them effectively in designing the tracking system.

(ii) They must be well-designed. They have to be clear, simple and citizen-driven.

(iii) They must target advocacy. Usability for advocacy is a central plank on which citizen’s accountability is built.

(iv) Citizen’s advocacy mechanisms must aim at public consensus.

(v) They should aim to provide remedies, including policy alternatives to be pursued by government, rather than become mere tools for criticizing government. This is what some would call “constructive criticism”.

(vi) Finally, they should be neither apolitical nor partisan. Instead, they should be political. By being political and not partisan I mean that:

   a) They should be critical, progressive and honest. They are progressive to the extent that their driving motive is to improve the lives of the vast majority of citizens, rather than the elite - however defined.

   b) They should be conscious of important political issues, how they affect the majority of citizens and engage them vigorously.

   c) In the process, they must avoid canvassing any specific political party lines. Their positions may coincide with the positions of a political party, but they must be arrived at dispassionately. Citizen’s accountability mechanisms must not regularly canvass any partisan position. This does not
mean political neutrality, but rather balanced interaction with all political interests.

VI
Election Promise Tracking: Prospects and Challenges

As a citizen accountability mechanism, election promise tracking holds both strong prospects for West Africa and many challenges. In recent times, there has been a growing interest in using election promise tracking for citizen accountability. As a result, we have seen Mackymeter in Senegal, Rochmeter and later Presimeter in Burkina Faso and Buharimeter in Nigeria. They are designed to track the electoral promises of presidential candidates and their political parties and to use them as accountability tools after they win elections. There is no doubt that this could be a very powerful citizen-driven mechanism for holding governments accountable.

Although each “meter” has been tailored to specific national contexts, some common characteristics and best practice are already emerging, which may be summarised as follows:
1) Focus is at the national level, specifically on the promises of the President/Head of State and/or ruling party. However, the designs also have possibilities for tracking other levels of government and candidates.
2) Electoral promises are the main interest of the meters. These are mostly sourced from candidate/party manifestos and other programmes and declarations. These are usually identified during the campaign period before the President is elected into office.
3) In the design of most of the meters, there are usually pre-election activities. Particularly, there are party manifesto analyses and
involvement of political parties and candidates in programmes to showcase their promises during campaigns.

4) Baseline assessments are conducted where possible to record the situation before the President gets into office.

5) They are largely electronic and available online. However, they also include additional approaches for gathering information and presenting results.

6) The meters are principally citizen-driven. The general public is able to participate in providing information and have access to the meters. Crowd sourcing, surveys, etc. are commonly used.

7) There are periodic analytic reports from the meters based on sectorial analysis. The reports are usually widely disseminated using popular media like radio, television, social media, etc.

8) The meters create opportunities for government to respond to their findings. There are also opportunities for opposition parties to respond.

9) The meters are usually designed to provide feedback mechanisms for the public.

10) There is a lot of emphasis on building national, sub-regional and international partnerships in developing and implementing the meters.

Several challenges are nevertheless discernible. There are a number of contradictions that the election tracking meters are faced with, including:

a) How to be independent of political interests and yet remain engaged with critical political issues of the times. An issue here is how to be political and yet avoid becoming partisan.

b) How to be ICT-driven and yet be accessible to ordinary citizens.

c) How to employ methodologies that allow for crowd sourcing and still apply strict statistical analytics.
d) At the sub-regional level, how to balance the need for commonalities and yet retain the uniqueness of each country.

Another important challenge is financing. Although some development partners are currently supporting election promise tracking in the sub-region, particularly the Open Society Initiative For West Africa (OSIWA), adequate finances to scale-up each meter and expand coverage to all countries of the sub-region will remain a challenge. Furthermore, there is a challenge of capacity. Different countries have different capacity challenges and there are differences in the level of local expertise to drive the meters. Also, there is the challenge of precision in the metric system itself, including finding measurable indicators for the promises, as well as the denial by politicians of the promises they made. Finally, election promise tracking is like walking a political high wire. Politicians will always try to pressure organizations working on the meters, and, where possible, try to discredit its outcome.