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The Role of Opposition Political Parties in Enhancing Good Governance: A Case of Selected Countries in Africa

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Abstract: **-This article focuses on opposition political parties in enhancing good governance. It proceeds to demonstrate the potential of opposition political parties in Africa. It demonstrates the extent to which opposition political parties can promote a culture of good governance, taking several major opposition political parties and events as cases for analysis across the African continent. A desk review of various critical literatures from selected African countries on the topic was undertaken to provide comprehensive understanding. This paper provides a discussion to insights on the role of opposition political parties in enhancing good governance; holding governments in place accountable; serving as a credible alternative to the ruling government; promoting and stimulating debates in parliament; training ground for future leaders; commitment to transparency and capacity building among others. However, in most African countries, being a member of opposition party is a dangerous pursuit due to the harassment, imprisonment, press censorship and the murder of opposition politicians by those in power; as a result, this has curtailed opposition's performance of its ideal functions. The article concludes that comprehensive policy framework should be undertaken in understanding and appreciating the potential role of opposition political parties in Africa and detail the measures that can allow for stronger parties to have a more significant role in promoting good governance in the 21st century and moving forward.**

Keywords: **Opposition, Governance, Africa.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Good governance goes beyond the power of the state or the strength of political will to entail a meaningful partnership between the ruling party and the opposition political parties. In fact, Rakner & Nicolas (2009) argues that opposition political parties and their position in the national legislature is a central component of any strategy of democratization and good governance. Kadima (2006) posits that a political party is a structured association of people working together to compete for political office and promote common policies. Since the collapse of authoritarian political and economic regimes of East and Southern Europe in the enddecades of the twentieth century and the subsequent spread of neo-liberal democracy, it provided great political momentum in the world of democracy (Sulaiman, 2007). The development ushered in multiparty politics in Africa's political landscape leading to formation of political parties of different sizes, strengths and levels of acceptability (Chiroro 2006). It is this opening of the political space for the participation of everyone in the political process that has injected a new brood of alternative leaders to the political space unlike in the one party state era that dominated Africa's political landscape prior to 1989.

Teshome (2009) avers that in Africa, opposition political parties have been blamed by the ruling parties for undermining national unity. Despite the wind of change that gave rise to the flourishing multi-party systems in the continent, this kind of situation continues to prevail in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe to name but a few African states. Due to repressive rules instituted by the ruling party, many people do not want to be associated with the opposition parties. In a political system with a functional political opposition, the government is expected to be more approachable to the demands of the population as a whole. Demirkaya (2017) states that, the function of political opposition is more than just alternative for discontented voters; it provides information about the government's policies, point to their weaknesses, express the demands and interests of their constituency and contributes to the translation of these demands and interests into policy. Therefore the perception created by those in power that the opposition's role is 'to oppose everything and propose nothing', is false. The opposition serves both to monitor the government passionately and when need be, criticize what the government does and present alternatives. Carolyn (2005) quoting Laver and Shepsle (1996) asserts that, the opposition has the ability to seek dismissal of an administration by proposing a motion of no confidence in democratic states.

Randall and Svasand (2002) argues that, opposition political parties are central especially in circumstances of democratic transition; when authoritarian precedents and habits may still significantly shape the behaviour of the ruling party. Despite the important function attributed to the opposition political parties, there is a perception that they have very little, if any, chance of directly influencing policy decisions (Demirkaya, 2017).In Africa since the advent of multiparty politics in 1990's, opposition leaders are portrayed as despicable in most states. Lise & Nicolas (2007) avers that opposition political parties and their position in the national

legislature is central component of any strategy of democratization and in enhancing good governance.

II. OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of this study was to make an extensive review on the role of opposition political parties in enhancing good governance in Africa. Political parties have the authorization to select and train candidates for parliamentary positions, to formulate alternative government policies and programmes, gather and implement demands from a society, to supervise and check the government in place. However, being in opposition in most African countries is a dangerous pursuit due to the harassment, imprisonment, press censorship and the murder of opposition politicians. This has curtailed opposition political parties' performance of its ideal functions. This study seeks to demonstrate the role of opposition political parties in enhancing good governance by looking critically on areas it has excelled in enhancing good governance in Africa.

III. STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study used desk review by collecting, organizing and synthesizing available information on opposition political parties in enhancing good governance. Materials for the study mainly include secondary resources consisting of books, newspapers, periodical articles and journals. The study used the latest information whenever it was available. The findings of this study are written in a more qualitative manner rather than in quantitative terms.

IV. DISCUSSION

According Miraj & Kazi, (2011), the concept of governance is not new but it is as old as human civilization which involves exercising political power to manage a nation's affairs. Governance is defined as the process of decision making and implementation (UNESCAP, 2007).Governance encompasses various actors and players; more importantly the relationships between them in terms of who has power, who makes decisions, how the other players make their voices heard and how accountability is brought (Institute of Governance, 2011).World Bank (1989) defines good governance as the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. Hence good governance is regarded as synonymous with sound material and human development. Joseph, (1998)quoting World Bank, (1992) avers that good governance can be understood in terms of three major components: First is the form of political authority that exists in a country(parliamentarian or presidential, civilian or military and autocratic or democratic);Secondly is the means through which authority is exercised in the management of economic and social resources and lastly the ability of governments to discharge government functions effectively, efficiently and equitably through the design, formulation and implementation of sound policies.

Omar (2015) quoting Gebril (2004) argues that, there is no single definition of what good governanceis, since there are differences of opinion as to the norms and criteria for its measurement. However values such as political accountability and transparency, freedom of association and participation, a fair and reliable judicial system, bureaucratic accountability, freedom of information and expression, an effective and efficient public sector management etc. are values of good governance (World Bank 1992). Thus, good governance can be viewed as a value based model made up of component values such as; rule of law, consensus oriented, accountability &transparency, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, equitable distribution of resources and inclusivity(UNDP, 1997).To realize this, democracy (multiparty politics) becomes key ingredient to good governance because the later has the ingredients, features, the functional and institutional prerequisites as well as the building blocks of the former. Indeed, democracy reinforces good governance since the opposition is always keen to take to task the ruling political party. In Africa a look at democratic governance reveals two political fronts. Firstly, democracy is slowly becoming the only form of governance in most countries across the continent leading to political freedom, inter and intra party competition, press freedom, civil liberties and the growth of civil society. However it is worth observing that democratic governance would be impossible in the absence of competitive political parties since modern democratic state do not exist without political parties (Wole, 2004).

According to Giovanni (2007) multiparty system of governance penetrated Africa in the early 1990's and quickly the process sparked a number of new political parties that challenged the ruling parties. Huntington (1991) avers that multiparty politics meant the demise of one party rule and dictatorships in many African states. This heralded the beginning of a complete political renewal. This is because electoral democracy provides strong institutional incentives for political players to be accountable to their citizens. Randall & Svasand (2002) argue that, parties play a key role in competitive elections since they help articulate and express differing interests in addition to voicing the concerns of the people. However in Africa from Egypt to South Africa, the opposition agonizes from acceptability crisis as its place remains fundamentally undefined since it is largely regarded merely to be a struggle for power. The ruling parties employ every rule in book to delegitimize it by using the media and state machinery to paint it as a bunch of power hungry lot. Demirkaya (2017) asserts that the opposition parties obviously serve as alternatives for discontented voters; however, their function is more than just providing another emblem on the ballot in general elections. For instance the opposition in Kenya has provided information about the government's policies, pointed out their weaknesses, expressed the demands and interests of their constituency in the floor of national assembly, and contribute to the translation of these demands and interests into policy. Hout W. (2003) posits that the opposition has the responsibility of providing criticism and posing useful alternatives to government policies. This helps

to shape governance since the ruling party as to set goals that are best qualified to satisfy public needs.

The opposition political parties' usually appeal to the interests of the electorate thus gaining public trust that propels them to winning elections (Joseph, 1998). In democratic states, periodic elections offers citizens of a state with a chance to elect political parties that appeal to their interests. In such situation, the electorate has a powerful instrument in their hands to reward or punish a government for its performance. It is important to note that, all governments whether democratic or authoritarian have to deliver a minimum of public good in order to avoid wide spread social unrest (Global Trends, 2018). Since elections are the main mechanism to allocate power in democratic systems, ruling parties have to act in the interest of the population. Vernon (1966) opines that, the fear of loss of popular support powerfully disciplines the actions of governments thus translating to proper governance. This is due to multiparty elections that subjects ruling parties and other public officials to periodic tests of their acceptability to the people through elections and limiting periods of office. Staffan (2006) observers that the periodic general elections has offered an opportunity for the opposition to press authoritarian rulers for concessions and also stage boycotts to discredit ruling regime when elections stand no chance of being free and fair or legitimate. For instance in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe are governed by parties that emerged from liberation movements and have been in power for decades since independence. However there are cases where the opposition has won power through the ballot, for instance Somalia was the first African country to vote out the ruling party in 1967. The opposition political party led by Abdirashid Ali Shermake defeated incumbent Aden Abdullah Daar, whose popularity had suffered a beating due to the defeat of the Shifta rebels in neighbouring Kenya. In 2000, Cote d'Ivoire's, Robert Guei was defeated by Laurent Gbagbo, although he made an attempt to cling on, he vacated the seat. Ten years later, Gbagbo did the same and tried to hang on, but was eventually careered out by Alassane Ouattara. In Senegal, the incumbent has been removed from power, twice. Dahl (1989) argues that without political opposition, there is no choice and when there is no choice the people cannot exercise their right to be ruled by those that appeal to their interests.

The most important condition for the existence of a democratic society is respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. Among these freedoms; freedom of expression is considered the most precious and indeed, the very foundation of a democratic society (Bonaventure 2001). Freedom of association and participation involves the freedom to establish religious groups, professional associations and other voluntary organizations with social, political or economic purposes (Joseph, 1998). This is not possible in single party state as the ruling party chooses what to allow and what not to. The exercise of democratic self-government, both in direct and representative forms, requires the citizen of a state are provided the capacity to make informed judgments about the manner in which they are to be governed. Bonaventure(2001) quoting Kabudi (1995) posits that opposition political parties' offers to the governed people a voice to judgment the government thus ensure that they are properly and democratically governed. The rights to freedom of assembly and association have been formally enshrined in the constitutions of almost all sub-Saharan countries. According to Peter (2008), concerted efforts by the opposition parties have shaped human rights culture in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa & Kenya among others long before the adoption of constitution that secures legal recognition of human rights. However, despite such entrenchment, these freedoms have not been enjoyed in most African countries not because of the inadequacy of the laws that are supposed to give effect to these constitutional rights but due to oppressive practices by ruling parties against opposition political groups and legal regimes relating to public order. The opposition ensure a democratic political culture which is referred as 'civic culture.'

History has time and again shown that, unlimited power in the hands of one person or group in most cases means that others are suppressed or their powers curtailed. In a democratic society, there is separation of powers to prevent abuse of power and to safeguard freedom for all. Gicheru (2007) posits that, in democratic states, the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers calls for a separation of the functions of government under the three institutions; the executive, legislature, and judiciary. According to Elizabeth (2015) institutionalized political opposition works toward justice by ensuring that there is transparency in the use of conferred state power in the three arms of governance; judiciary, legislature and the executive. A fair and reliable judicial system is necessary to create a predictable and secure living and working environment for ordinary citizens and a conducive environment for entrepreneurs, farmers and other economic actors (Joseph, 1998). Since the re-establishment of multiparty politics in Africa, the judiciary in most counties, has taken advantage of the changed political legal environment to take a bold stance in protection of human rights (Bonaventure, 2001).

Charles (2016) argues that lack of political opposition can encourage violations of the constitution and consequently render the document a dead letter. A particular important aspect is the uniform application of the law, meaning everyone regardless of their socio-economic and political status are subject to it. Thus, violations by the rich or powerful are dealt within the same way as other ordinary citizens. Joseph (1998) contends that a fair and effective legal framework requires that there exists a set of rules which is known in advance; the rules be put in force; that means exist to ensure the application of the rules; that conflict resolution is a function of binding decision made by an independent and credible judiciary; and that procedures are in place for

changing the rules when they cease to serve the purposes for which they were intended. This may not be possible in the absence of political opposition since in undemocratic state, the judiciary is subject to manipulation by the executive. Strategic Future Group (2018) avers that, since the return of multiparty politics in the 1990's, judiciary in African countries has displayed signs of growing assertiveness due to political scrutiny by the opposition. Today the courts across Africa are frequently deciding core political questions, including presidential election disputes; Kenya's 2013 & 2017 general elections, Malawi repeat election in June 2020, corruption trials of former president Jacob Zuma of South Africa, third-term disputes and the constitutionality of antiterrorism statutes in Burundi & Uganda respectively.

Dele (1993) quoted by Mbai (2003) argues that public accountability and transparency requires that those who hold public trust should account for the use of the trust to citizen or their representatives. It signifies the superiority of the public will over private interests. Joseph (1998) avers that accountability requires a system to monitor and control the performance of government officers and organizations, particularly in relation to quality, inefficiencies and the abuse of resources. He further observes that, open systems of financial management and procurement, accounting and auditing, and of revenue collection together with enforced penalties are necessary. In democratic systems of governance, opposition political parties holds the government accountable; it serve as watchdog ensuring government functions within the confines of the law, exposing iniquities such as corruption, nepotism, and the abuse of power. Moncrieffe (2001) quoted by Peter (2008) posits that political accountability has been called "the most vexing problem within contemporary democracies". Peter (2008) avers that accountability and transparency makes the abuse of political power less likely, while at the same time helping to empower governments to serve the ends that democratically elected to. This may not be possible without the political opposition as Rugambwa (2010) argues that democracy means government of the people, by the people, for the people.

According to Friedman (1999), political opposition is the credible and legitimate voice in a state, whose views are listened to and holds the government to account. Joseph (1998) posits that in modern democracies, transparency is a key element of bureaucratic accountability which entails, among other things, making available for public scrutiny all public accounts and audit reports thus protection against government error, misallocation of resources and corruption. Rapoo (2004) affirms that since the advent of multiparty in the 1990's the opposition has positioned itself as a major contender to the ruling party in most African countries by raising 'uncomfortable issues and questions' about government decisions, issues of government accountability and corruption. Mbai (2003) observed that, since independence, Kenya has formulated various legal instruments and established a number of watchdog institutions including the opposition political parties which serve to monitor and regulate the ethical behaviour of its public officials. Democratization guarantees accountability and hence good governance to the extent that the process empowers institutions instead of personalities to govern. The process also empowers the citizens on the other hand to demand accountability from their governors on how they manage public institutions. Mbai (2003) argues that public accountability deteriorated and subsequently led to the decline of African economies during the second decade of independence in the early 1970'sdue to consolidation of one-party autocratic regimes and widespread military dictatorship in Kenya, Zambia, Cameroon, Algeria, São Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique etc. It should be noted that, there was absence of opposition political parties to check the ruling party leading poor governance. Global Trends (2018) contends that, democracies are generally more likely than autocracies to have predictable economic policies and produce steady economic growth since political liberalization is associated with higher quality of life. Democratic states are more accountable to the public rather than to parochial elite interests and their respect for the rule of law creates conditions necessary for economic growth.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the role of opposition political parties in enhancing good governance. It observes that good governance involves far more than the power of the state or the strength of political will but a partnership between the ruling party and the opposition. This paper suggests that good governance, the rule of law, transparency, and accountability embody partnerships between the governing party and the opposition who enjoys the good will of the general citizenry. The paper contends that the opposition political parties play integral role in governance debate going by the Barrington Moore's maxim 'No opposition no democracy.' In Africa, from Egypt in the north to South Africa at the south end of the continent; Guinea Bissau in the West and Somali to the East, opposition political parties agonizes from acceptability crisis as its place remains fundamentally undefined since it is largely regarded merely to be a struggle for power. The ruling parties employ every rule in book to delegitimize it by using the media and state machinery to paint them as a bunch of power hungry lot. However the opposition parties are standing tall against dictatorial regimes in many state like Uganda, Burundi, and Zimbabwe to mention a few. In some countries, opposition parties have dethroned the ruling party through the ballot. For instance the opposition defeated the ruling party in Somalia in 1967, Kenya in 2002, Zambia in 1991 &2011 and Malawiin 2020 to mention a few. This is a giant step towards strengthening institutions and upholding democratic principles on the continent. Finally, this paper concludes that, the continent can thrive if democratic principles are taught and opposition political parties' are not stifled by governing regime.

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