

Chapter 36

Elections, Politics, Democracy, and the Challenge of Sustainable Development in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The chapter conceptualized elections, politics, and democracy; showed the nexus among these variables; and established the link between them and sustainable development. Elections as key components of democracy are examined as a factor to engendering sustainable development. The chapter also appraises the concept of sustainable development as a construct of Western powers and its promotion as a liberal ideology as an appraisal of a cross section of countries within the African continent. Furthermore, the chapter discusses elections, politics, and the trend of the emerging democracy in Africa towards sustainable development with facts and figures. The chapter in conclusion examines factors that have shaped and is shaping elections, politics, democracy, and sustainable development in Africa and thereafter recommends policy options that would engender credible elections, inclusive politics, and participation and development that is home grown and sustainable across the African continent.

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on development in Africa has often been mired in controversies. This is more so given the colonial past, present struggles and exclusion of Africa from the dominant international structures shaping world's development. From the colonial era to contemporary times, Africa as a continent, has been afflicted with long and intermittent wars for number of years and suffered much instability. More worrisome is the increased relationship between violence, politics and democracy. All these have a deleterious effect on sustainable development. Efforts at democratization has been influenced by local

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and regional realities, wealthy class and peoples demand for incorporation into governance structures as well as the overbearing influence of Western world powers with often policy prescriptions on the way African countries should structure their economies and politics. A full discussion of these issues later in the body of the work will shed light on Africa's past and future projections in relation to sustainable development.

In a 'normal' democratic setting, voting and the determination of elected officials rest on individuals who exercise their franchise to choose who they want in an enabling environment of equality of vote, liberty of choice and freedom from coercion, as well as the ability of voters choose from variety candidates and programmes (Afolabi, 2015b). Thus, it is impossible to talk of elections without choice. Choice is usually made by individual voters on the basis of alternatives of candidates. It is assumed, particularly in an ideal situation, that the best candidate would win and ensure development. But given the spate of political violence and democratic convulsions from across the continent, the poser is: how reliable are elections as determinants of the agents of development in Africa?

While election is a part of politics, and key ingredient of democracy, politics in Africa needs a re-examination for proper understanding and as an explanatory tool on why politics in Africa is a zero-sum game. As the 'only game in town', politics as closely linked to democracy has often maintained a disadvantageous relationship with sustainable development in Africa. In this wise, politics and political activities has often alienated a large segment of the African demos such that their place and role in sustainable development is limited. Frequent and high incidence of political and electoral violence, killings and de-enfranchisement of many groups and ethnic nations in each African state has disarticulated issues and programmes surrounding sustainable development. Full discussion of the how and why politics have influenced negatively sustainable development would be undertaken in the body of the work. It is important to note that sustainable development is not antithetical to credible elections and democracy; rather sustainable development should be the end product of credible elections, politics of service and good governance.

Therefore, this chapter is divided into different sections. Section one will be the introduction, and section two will attempt a background and conceptual clarification of key concepts. Section three will discuss the nature and character of politics in Africa, including its colonial and contemporary forms. Elections as key component of democracy would be examined with data figures and analysis done in section four. Section five will examined the concept of sustainable development as a construct of Western powers and its promotion as a liberal ideology in Africa, while section six will be devoted to an appraisal of a cross section of countries from the African continent to demonstrate and ground our evaluation in practicalities. Section seven, which is the conclusion, will discuss factors from the work that has shaped and is shaping elections, politics, democracy and sustainable development in Africa as a way of recommending viable policy options that would engender credible elections, inclusive politics and participation and development that is home grown and sustainable across the African continent.

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