



Review Paper

Government and the state of public infrastructure in Africa; Ontology of failing state and the social contract covenant (Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau)

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Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 30th June 2020, revised 15th November 2021, accepted 8th February 2022

Abstract

Population in Africa keeps growing with time. This equally implies that infrastructures are been outnumbered by the increase in number of people. Available infrastructures are decaying without new ones replacing them. Minimal effort in the area of infrastructural development appeared to be part of bad governance states in Africa are suffering from. The state, government and people are bonded by covenant in which citizens pay tax to the state through the government on the condition that income generated through such payment is utilized in the development of public infrastructures to improve the living standard of people and promote the socio-economic growth of the state. The general direction of argument adopted by this study is that, government in African states has failed in fulfilling its own part of the covenant bonding it with the citizen and state. This study examined government and the state of public infrastructural development in Africa. It offered an ontological analysis on government insufficient attention to public infrastructural development in states on the continent. The study used explorative method of secondary method of inquiry. It found out that government in African states is reluctant in the area of public infrastructural development. The study recommended that government in African states must pay more attention to public infrastructural development so as to improve the living standard of the citizens as a fulfilment of its obligation to the people as bonded in the social contract covenant establishing state and government by and for the people.

Keywords: Africa, Development, Government, Infrastructure, State.

Introduction

State is a product of social contract agreement entered into by man. This is contained in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J.J. Rousseau. The social contract theory drew from the works of these great personalities offers the most stimulating analysis on the origin of state¹. It has been argued that modern state in Africa is a colonial establishment aimed at perpetuating socio-economic and political domination of the African people by the elsewhere colonialists and their comprador elites. This argument has basis considering the economic status and role African states play in the international economic system. States in Africa are only consumers who never play the role of producers in the actual sense. Raw materials needed for the functionalization of western industries are produced mostly in Africa, transformed into finished goods, exported back and consumed in Africa. This pattern of economic relations actually calls for the need to revisit the Lord Lugard's "Dual Mandate". In the comity of nations at the international political system, African states till date, continue to serve as bench warmers and general assembly members. Though, colonialism by alien has since ended in Africa, but states on the continent are suffering a new form of internal colonialism promoted by leaders and class to which power was transferred by the elsewhere colonial

masters. Democracy has taken over from monarchy which was the popular form of leadership on the continent before alien rule started. But even with this political development, leaders of African states have failed in delivering the dividends of self-rule and democratic form of government to their people.

The post-colonial state in Africa is a political organization. Citizens are its members. And as members, they are expected as part of their contribution to, obey laws made by the state, pay taxes to it, defend its territory against external aggression, owe total allegiance to it and to among others be loyal to its leaders to make government legitimate in its territory. Making laws, formulation and implementation of public policies, punishment of law breakers, providing security, maintaining law and order, protection of lives as well as the utilization of taxes paid by the citizens and other revenue generated through other sources in the development of infrastructure necessary for uplifting citizens welfare and state of existence are part of the major roles of government². Citizens are expected to render their contributions to the state directly while those of the state are rendered to the people through few individuals elected as leaders³. The fact that such roles are rendered by leaders does not mean that public services are provided by leaders for they are only custodians of power but not its owners. Therefore,

public services rendered under their leaderships are rendered by the state to the people indirectly through leaders.

The provision of infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, roads, electricity, water, housing among others, are part of the infrastructural provision role of the state. These infrastructures, a more committed democratic government is expected to deliver to the people⁴. In Africa, states seem to be failing in the area of infrastructural development to improve the living condition of people. Instead of investing public fund in the area of infrastructural development, leaders are busy spending state money on fruitless trips overseas, inviting foreign investors to come and invest in Africa and seek foreign aids in the area of infrastructural development. Most of these trips are yet to yield fruitful results on the continent. It equally implies that government of state in Africa has accepted its failure in the area of infrastructural development which are significant in the assurance of people standard of living. Though, government has not been able to improve satisfactorily, citizens welfare in Africa, but people still pay tax and obey laws made by the state. This shows that government in African states has broken its own part of the covenant bonding it with the people.

State in Africa is failing, especially in the area of infrastructural development. State of infrastructure on the continent is discouraging and the life of people pathetic. Available number of hospitals no longer accommodate the growing cases of epidemic and diseases braking up on daily basis. Facilities in public hospitals are rusting away with time and health workers are leaving to abroad due to poor condition of service. Public schools are nothing to write home about. Inadequate facilities accompanied with repeated strike actions by teachers have left several students and parents disappointed due to unspecific date of completing studies. Rehabilitation, reconstruction or construction of new roads to replace existing ones tormented by potholes, chopping and pillage is not much considering the rising number of population. Darkness due to erratic power supply has continued to threaten economic activities. Destitution and homelessness incubated and hatched by state poor housing policy is on the rise. Ageing environmental hazards due to ineffective state environmental policy also threaten the life and residential stability of the people. And government attention to ameliorating these problems is minimal thus, providing one of the bases for this study.

Government and the state of public infrastructure in Africa

Government's inability to improve people's living standard in African states through the development of adequate infrastructures implies that state leadership on the continent is marred by corruption, indiscipline and lack of patriotism to national service. Nigeria boasts a government incapable of meeting citizens demand for basic amenities and services. Leadership at the national level is characterized by embezzlement and mismanagement of public fund thus making

looting of state treasury difficultly inseparable from government policy. On top of it, state ability to adopt disciplinary measures toward corruption is minimal. Public safety as well as national integrity are at the risk of collapsing and government legitimacy to the citizen fluctuates on daily basis⁵. The failure of Nigeria's central government to develop adequate infrastructure necessary for improving living condition in the country culminated in youth restiveness and unending demand targeting self-determination and control of oil resources in the country's oil rich Niger Delta region. Oil facilities have been attacked at different times, expatriates working with oil companies have been abducted and taken for hostages on several occasions⁶. And military operations like "Operation Crocodile Smile" and others before it adopted by the government to calm down tension in the communities and resistant stand taken by several militant groups in the area made security situation in the area hectic. In the event of confrontation by the government forces with militant groups in the area, Nigeria's economy bears the consequence as daily production target of over two million barrels dropped and foreign earning reduced. Crude oil accounts for the greatest percent of Nigeria's foreign earning and still, the community where the commodity is produced suffers acute shortage of basic amenities and infrastructure.

As infrastructures in Southern Sudan suffers serious state of dilapidation due to age long war which has tormented the region. The autonomous government of the region has squandered billions in oil revenue with scarcely a road, school or hospital to show for it⁷. Instead of investing oil earning on infrastructural development to combat destructions and hardship brought about by age long war, authority at Juba is busy spending public money on projects with minimal positive effect on the life of the people in the country. Investing lavishly on defense for fear of possible attack from Khartoum and to contain internal rebellion has left government with little attention and care for infrastructural development in South Sudan. The health, education and other social sectors are in a state of abandonment with peoples' life looking seriously miserable and pathetic.

The public health care system in South Africa suffered underfunding between 1996 and 2006. Spending on the system drastically declined in real per-capita basis making state allocation to health sector incapable of catching up with growing rates of inflation and population as well as HIV/Aids pandemic which was recording increase in number of victims. Although, state allocation and funding to the health sector later improved towards the end of the year 2006 but by then, several of the workers underpaid, overworked and discouraged due to ill funded health sector have already joined the bandwagon of occupational mobility and relocated overseas and to higher stimulating private sector⁸. This exodus of health workers has culminated in the grounding of the country's health sector. In some local communities, public hospitals have been neglected by the government due to shortage of workers. Structures have collapsed in others and some are left with inadequate medical

facilities to handle growing emergency cases rising across the country on daily basis. And medical trips from the country increases than before.

In Ethiopia, the Ogaden region is quite inhospitable and can only boast of an impressive array of thorn trees and bushes. Water is scarce in this region. Rainy season starts in April but still, available water for both human and animal consumption is still muddy even as the season continues. Means of mobility are scanty and scarce in the region due to the dilapidated nature of roads in the area. Trekking along available foot paths is the common way of travelling in the region. Just as there are no schools existing in the region, hospitals are not also to be found there⁹. This negligence from the authority at Addis Ababa which has also resulted in lack of infrastructures in the region has putting the lives of approximately 5 million locals mostly ethnic Somalis at risk and severe hardship. Instead of developing infrastructures to better the living condition of the locals, Ethiopian government claim for neglecting the area in terms of infrastructural development is that the region is infiltrated by cross-border Somali rebels sponsored to destabilize peace in Ethiopia.

The younger generation in Namibia are hungry for jobs, houses, access to health facilities, education for their children and security when they retire. The Swapo (South West Peoples Organization) government at Windhoek promises education and health for all but the number of children entering school has not been met with necessary increase in facilities and qualified teachers, despite annual increases in the education budget. It has not also managed to train enough doctors, nurses and other personnel to provide the necessary services for both urban and rural citizens. In fact, a recent study says that ten years ago more people had at their disposal, adequate basic amenities and infrastructures in addition to good sanitation than today¹⁰. Decaying nature of the few existing infrastructures and government's inability to tackle acute shortage of same by developing more amidst rapid population growth in Namibia have put together, contributed to increase in the country's rate of crime and degradation in the moral fabric of the society.

Zimbabwe, a fertile country that has been ruined by a repressive and corrupt government recently celebrated the end of an age long government without paying much attention to the legacy left behind in the country by the man who headed the regime¹¹. State of public infrastructure in Zimbabwe is poor and the living standard of its citizens stands among the lowest in Africa. And today, several Zimbabweans are dying from water borne related illness and several others migrating to other countries to escaped hardship manufactured by government inattentiveness to infrastructural development required to improve the living condition of people.

The inability of central authority at Mogadishu to arrest the decaying nature of public infrastructure and to contained rising ethnic militia demanding for the disunity of the country

catapulted Somalia into a failed state and region of anarchy swallowed by repeated insurgencies and pirate activities on the waters of the country especially along the Gulf of Aden. Minimal attention to infrastructural development and maintenance of existing ones is a sign of state failure promoted by incompetency and bad leadership on the part of government in African states. Instead of adopting necessary measures aimed at developing infrastructures, government in African states cry loud to affluent nations begging for their intervention and support to be capable of providing adequate infrastructures and services. It is a shame for government in African states to admit openly before the world that it has failed and cannot provides its people with adequate infrastructures and conducive security situation needed to live a decent life. And today, several states in Africa are flourished with foreign military bases rendering security services in Africa. Social services and infrastructural development sectors in other African states are dominated with foreign expatriates and fund working to improve the living standard of African people. This is not only an admittance of incompetency, it also shows that the state in Africa is failing gradually and foreign supports are needed to resuscitate it.

State of public infrastructure in Africa

The state of infrastructure in African states is very pathetic and discouraging. State in Africa from all aspects and ramification is heading towards failure. As several citizens suffered the outbreak of cholera in Zimbabwe in early 2009 due to poor societal sanitation, poor water supply system and decaying health facility among others, Zimbabwean government affirmed that close to 1 billion dollars is needed to repair the country's broken health system and this amount, the government openly confessed must come from abroad¹². The then coalition government of Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai revealed that Zimbabwe government is broke and cannot afford to revived its health sector talk less of improving social services and infrastructural development in the country¹². Government that cannot guarantee its citizens good health care system left less education, water, road, electricity, housing and good jobs is as good as no government. And such state is on its way to failure.

Millions of Congolese displaced by wars are still homeless on their own soil¹³. Series of repeated conflicts across the major cities of Kinshasa, Kisangani, Lubumbashi and Goma down to the country's area of the Great Lakes Region have left several citizens surviving on handouts and skeletal services rendered by the United Nations and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The country's government idea of remaining silent at Kinshasa watching its people suffering from shortages of food, water, electricity, housing and other social services is an indication that it has admitted that the state has failed in delivering social services to the people as well as improving infrastructures to improve their living conditions.

African states are dominated with acute shortage of infrastructure. The news is same in all regions of the continent.

Physical features of failure are visible in states on the continent. The features portrayed pictures of people in high need of infrastructure to live a decent and comfortable life under a secure and conducive atmosphere with government admitting it has failed in the area of infrastructural development to enable people achieve this need and desire. Several industries both local and foreign have stopped production due to epileptic power supply, leading to loss of jobs and state economy hit by reduction in revenue to state. Africa due to poor power supply system has been branded as the "Dark Continent". Power sector in some African states has been privatized, government in others has gone into partnership with foreign cartels especially Chinese to boast supply but to no avail, these efforts have failed in resulting to stable power supply in states on the continent. Africa's infrastructure problem which is also leading state to failure on the continent is poor governance or bad leadership. Leaders on the continent lack the political willingness and philosophy of satisfying the people. Personal interest has replaced the need for public satisfaction and the result has been rustication of existing infrastructures with minimal state effort to renew them and develop new ones. Until and unless, leadership is conceived as an instrument of delivering services required to improved peoples living condition but not for personal enrichment, African states will not perceive the smell of growth and will obviously continue heading toward failure.

Ontological analysis

Government in African states is a betrayal and disappointment to the people it governs. State power rested in the hands of leaders but does not actually means that they own it. Government in a democratic society belongs to the people and must be willing and ready to serve them in the best interest of the state¹⁴. Government enhances the development of men and their general wellbeing¹⁵. The common wealth of the state in Lord Plato's view is meant for the development of infrastructure necessary to enable men realize their potentials and how to utilize them for the development of self and the state in general¹⁶. Aristotle believes that man is the most active member of the state without whom, there would be no state in itself¹⁷. Therefore, the state is an infinitive entity without man. The existence of man determines the functionality of government and state itself. Therefore, government formed to govern state must rule in line with delivering good governance anticipated by the electorates who contributed in voting it into power.

Hobbes affirmed that man's submission of natural right under the social contract theory bounding him and the state does not actually mean that he surrendered such right to a single man. The submission of right is to enable state and government exist with full power to adopt policies on behalf of man believing that if implemented, such policies are expected to translate in improve living condition on the part of man¹⁸. Between man and government, there is a covenant. The promise to obey the common law of the land, its government and to pay necessary taxes to keep state moving and government functional is man's

part of the covenant. Government side of the covenant include; the promise to defend the state in which man exist by providing security against internal and external aggressions, to judiciously utilize taxes paid by man in the development of infrastructures on the soil of the state in which man exists so as to improve his life and living condition among others. Any shift away from these promises either by man or government is a violation of the agreement binding man and government in the state. Disobeying state laws, revolting against government and dodging tax payment as commonly seen in African states are the peoples' ways of reacting to government and state failure in delivering the common public good to the people as it promised under the covenant.

Leadership in the observation of Locke is a trust bestowed on selected or elected few by the majority to head a government in which they like the people who formed it are also members¹⁹. And, the acceptance of this trust under oath of the state in Rosseau analysis simply implies that leaders have themselves vowed to fulfil all functions allocated to state on behalf of the state to their people²⁰. Refusal to deliver these functions is a violation of the oath guiding the position of state leadership. The poor state of infrastructure in Africa is getting worst daily instead of improving and with people's lives seriously in risk. Government admittance of inability to develop infrastructure to meet the demand of its people while its leaders parade affluences acquired at the expense of the state shows that both the state and government are failing on the continent.

Conclusion

The welfare status of state keeps dying away with time in Africa. Instead of useful, government is becoming useless. And hope on the minds of people has given way to hopelessness. Public revenue and foreign earnings are growing but still, public infrastructural development is not encouraging. Government complains frequently that it cannot alone shouldered the responsibility of developing adequate infrastructure to meet up citizens demand thus, leading to its gradual withdrawal from this aspect. In countries where this aspect has been commercialized, it has created avenue for more revenue accruing to the government with no development of infrastructure actually been witnessed. Taxes from the people keep flowing to government coffer, foreign aids and debts follows in the same manner but still, complains of insufficient fund by government to develop adequate infrastructure are high on the continent. Poor state of public infrastructure in Africa and government inability to arrest the situation do not only implies that the state in Africa is failing. The need for neo-nationalism which is an internal kind of struggle against poor governance and bad leadership is eminent in Africa. Internal colonialism has taken over from alien one and thus, a new march against internal slavery promoted by the activities of bad leadership is necessary on the continent against government that has not only failed in delivering the common public good to the people but has also accepted its failure without redirecting state

public policies along channels necessary to ameliorating the problem. The panacea to poor state of infrastructural development in Africa lies greatly on the people owing to the fact that democracy has since replaced monarchy on the continent. And with democratic institutions and principles on ground, people through franchise can adopt a popular means especially through voting in election to throw out bad leaders from power in Africa. Voting in visionary leaders with public and state interests at heart against personal interest will result in proper investment of public fund in the area of infrastructural development. At least, African people can have a second chance of living a decent life again.

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