

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

I consider this topic as not only contemporary, but very relevant and timely, particularly when viewed against the incessant ethno-religious, social, and political disharmony in many parts of Africa.

Africa, in my own judgment, should not be allowed to disintegrate through bad government and epileptic governance. Africa should wake up from its slumber. It should continue to make itself relevant as our forefathers and mothers did so well. Africa, the centre of civilization, should continue to remain the last hope of humanity and a fountain of knowledge and culture for mankind.

GOOD GOVERNMENT AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good government is a propeller for good governance; in the same way that good governance is a catalyst for good government. Without good governance we cannot have good government and without good government, good governance remains elusive. But we, the people, remain the determinants for the achievement, actualization and sustainability of both good government and good governance in Africa.

WHAT IS GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good governance, in my opinion, is the totality of activities, responsibilities, relationships and accountability of the government to the governed at all times. It seeks to eliminate secrecy, corruption in government while protecting and guaranteeing the security of life and property within the society.



A government is seen to exhibit good governance when there is transparency and accountability in government. Where nobody is above the law, where there is respect mankind, where there is respect for fundamental human rights of every citizen of the society and where people are allowed to enjoy the good things of life while actively participating in planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation of societal responsibilities.

Good governance involves openness, participation, education, information, communication and effective public relations. A great philosopher and founder of the Inter-religious and International Federation for World Peace, the Rev. Sun M. Moon outlined what he called the four mandates of global good governance in the following ways:

- To live for the sake of others;
- To dissolve man-made boundaries and barriers, and in particular to promote inter-religious cooperation;
- To integrate vertical, spiritual values, on the one hand, and their horizontal application in human affairs carried out through institutions of governance, on the other hand; and
- To lead with the heart of a true parent, a true teacher, and a true politician, etc.

The above imperatives of global good governance underscore the parameter of our discussion of good governance in Africa. This leads me to my famous question which has remained undigested in Africa, i.e., who will provide this good governance in Africa?

Should they be politicians, traditional rulers, religious leaders, mass media or public relations practitioners? My answer to this question is to say that joint-venture arrangement by all the above will and should bring about good governance and good government in Africa.

PEACE AS A PANACEA FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

For the attainment of good government and, by extension, good governance, in Africa, there must be peace. In this sense, African peace has to do with the quality of lives and the quality of relationships within and among countries. The assumption here is that peace obtains when relationships are harmonious, even-tempered and co-operative, according to Dr. Chang H. Kwak, an executive of Associated Press (AP) of America.



He adds that harmony is obtained in the natural order as objects follow the laws of the universe. Harmony and peace, he continues, can be obtained in the human order when we follow the spiritual and moral laws of the land. He further states that when we think of peace for good governance, we must think of it on many levels. He continues by saying that we often associate peace with the administration of political power. That peace can be brought into being by an external force or by some external law. He concludes that peace does not specifically emerge from the realm of politics or government, but peace and good governance begin with the individual and that individual is the foundation of peace and good governance.

Kwak notes further that the first challenge for peace is the individual. If I cannot establish peace within myself, by establishing harmony and cooperation between my mind and body, then I cannot expect to create a world of peace. For example, if I am troubled and convicted within my own mind, I will not be at peace, regardless of the situation in the external political world. Thus, the basis of peace is to solve the problem of my individual character, which is primarily a matter of spiritual and political development.

In discussing good governance for Africa, we must note that good governance relates to good government and refers to the way we manage, take care of, or govern people. In the same way that we have argued, that peace begins with individual, so also good governance begins with the individual. It focuses on the way an individual manages his or her own desires, interests, passions, duties, obligations and societal moral responsibilities and values.

For example, political philosophers have argued that if a person allows selfish desires to dominate him or her, or if he/she becomes enslaved by physical appetites or passions, we may say that such a person is not capable of good self-governance. Therefore, such a person or persons may not be able to practice good governance.

Governance of household or family, they say is the joint responsibility of the husband and the wife, i.e., the parents. If both or any of them has not or cannot successfully practice good self-governance, they are likely not to be fit and proper persons to practice good governance in the



political, social and religious realms.

Governance, we are told, applies to a wide range of social and political context. They include political organization, political parties, businesses, civic associations, traditions and religious organizations, even schools, clans and many more. But good governance is associated with qualities such as transparency, accountability, honesty, mutual understanding, respect, social responsibility, tolerance, respect for rule of law, due process of law, respect for human rights, humility and many more. It must be noted also that good governance itself is often rooted in good character.

Africa is indeed in crises – crises of poverty, crime, violence, ethno-religious disturbances, crises of development, corruption, drugs, education, good health, HIV/AIDS, insecurity of life and property, terrorism, leadership crises, intolerant government and dislocated and un-coordinated governance, and so on.

African political leaders should now focus more on inter-African achievement rather than their individual material wealth because government and governance is not the same thing. There are crises in Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Guinea and many more. The full details of these crises are certainly beyond the scope of this presentation.

Political power continues to wield a dangerous influence in Africa. This is because those who have it in Africa have continued to misuse it. But, in my opinion, political power in Africa should be used by the African leaders for positive attainment and for good governance. A healthy society, it is said, is based on a healthy family in the same way that healthy government is based on healthy governance.

It would appear that wholesale mis-governance is the order of the day in most African countries. But if they must be counted as part of the progressive comity of nations, it is now



time for them to fashion out a new and sustainable agenda for crises prevention rather than crises management which in many instances have been mismanaged. The cases of Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, etc., are instructive here.

The circle of reconciliation does not erase the past, but it encourages trust building, according to political philosophers. Therefore, African leaders should move from their concurrent circle of conflicts, tension, and crises to a circle of understanding, peace building, peace making, and peace keeping. As the president of African Refugee Foundation, Ambassador Olusegun Olusola had advised African leaders, the winning approach should be: “*Fight to Talk* and Not *Fight to Finish*”.

WHAT ROLES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

In the first section of this paper, I have discussed what I have termed the history, geography and the science of good governance and the incessant crises in Africa. Now let me discuss what I consider the role of the public relations in bringing about, and sustaining good governance in Africa.

Enhancing Good Governance through Reputation

Former US President Bill Clinton and former South African President Nelson Mandela are regarded as part of the few national leaders/politicians that have been credited with solid establishment of good government and good governance while in power. The duo were able to achieve both vertical and horizontal good governance, not only because they were tolerant, or because they were and/or are smart and intelligent politicians, but because they invested in appropriate reputation building. They were honest, dynamic, open-minded and ran participatory democracy instead of exclusive and highly secretive democracy, now common in many parts of Africa.

Appropriate and sustainable reputation building is often rooted in good governance and even in business, commerce and diplomacy. No wonder then that Warren Buffet, one of the famous communication/public relations experts of his time once said:



“If at the end of a day's work, you as my public relations manager lose Ten Million dollars (10 million) of the company's money, I will understand. But if on the other hand, you lose an INCH of the company's reputation, I will be furious, I will be mad at you, I will be ruthless and I will fire you.”

This statement underscores the need for corporate reputation building for the achievement of good government and good governance in Africa.

But it appears that many African political leaders are unaware of this need for good governance. Perhaps they believe that they can attain good governance through force, or by coercion, or bribery or manipulation or brutalization of the psyche of the people they govern. The truth is that every government is a reflection of the socio-political ideology in place at any given time. Therefore, there should be a symbiotic relationship between the government and the governed in order to have and maintain good governance.

The political and institutional structures and conceptual framework would be reflective of what type of government is in place. Therefore, in a dynamic continent such as Africa, which must be seeking for changes, positive transformation and relevance at all times, a dynamic and people-oriented public relations becomes imperative for good governance.

Effective public relations in reputation building becomes a panacea for good governance. The public relations I am talking about here goes beyond political and/or government publicity, marketing, advertising, salesmanship, or sales promotion, or even propaganda. But it is a *deliberate, planned and sustained* action to create, maintain and sustain cordial relationship, good rapport, mutual understanding and harmony, concord, within and outside government in order to achieve good governance.

To achieve good government and, by extension, good governance, effective public relations tools, strategies and tactics should be used to constantly evaluate public opinion, attitude, and perception of government by the governed and also by the international community. Therefore, African political leaders should invest in reputation building so as to achieve good



governance.

At the moment, it appears that many African political leaders or rulers view public relations as intangible activities. Therefore, they are often reluctant to allocate sufficient funds for corporate reputation building for good governance. To them, corporate reputation building is an intangible activity – a waste of idea, a waste of money and other resources. They, therefore, divert such funds to protocol and other very intangible activities of the chief executives or some of the stakeholders and to some other evil agenda of government. In this age of globalization, African political leaders must understand that we use money to make money. In discussing the role of public relations in governance, Frank Jefkins et al assert:

“Public relations is a powerful communication tool (for the achievement of good governance) (emphasis mine)... but if it is to work successfully, it must be credible”.

But whether the government needs to be understood or misunderstood by the people depends on the direction and intensity of vertical, horizontal or horizovertical patterns of the public relations strategies and tactics adopted by the experts.

WHAT RESEARCH STUDIES SAY ABOUT EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

For effective public relations management to be fully understood, it is important to outline what PR research studies have said about communicative messages in public relations management.

It is summarized thus:

. . . 90 per cent of our time is spent daily on one aspect of public relations or the other. That is to say, on intra-, inter-, bilateral and even multilateral politics, negotiations, reputation building many more.

It is also said that of this 90 per cent, we, as human beings, politicians, leaders, and the governed, etc., are able to remember:



- 30 per cent of what we **hear** (i.e., referring to the radio etc.);
- 40 per cent of what we **read** (i.e., from newspapers, magazines, PR House organs, newsletters etc.);
- 50 per cent of what we **read and see** (i.e., use of pictures, graphics, maps, infographics etc.) in our corporate public relations campaign, enlightenment for good governance, etc.);
- 60 per cent of what we see and **hear** (i.e., video, television, film, advertisement, PR promotions, etc.); and
- 70 per cent of what we **do** (i.e., communicating to the governed, public relations with the people, etc.).

It follows logically that we, as public relations practitioners, must do our work professionally well because 70 per cent of our public relations activities depend on it.

Packaging is essential and often remembered by our potential audience – the public, government and so on. I have tried in this section to briefly review the major research findings in PR management for good governance in any democratic society. Now let me quickly summarize what I consider the five imperatives of public relations management for good governance.

- i. Maintenance of null position: (This is not recommended because it will be counter productive to good governance);
- ii. Maintenances of PR enthusiastic position: (Highly recommended because it will add to the full meaning and full understanding of corporate reputation building in good governance);
- iii. Maintenance of cautious position: (This is ideal particularly when dealing with political leaders that have very weak internal control mechanisms);
- iv. Maintenance of tangible public relations: (This is strongly recommended as earlier discussed in the first part of this paper), and, finally;
- v. Maintenance of pragmatic position: (This should be encouraged because of the nature



and ethics of PR practice coupled with the theory of individual differences, behavioural change or behavioural attitude modification.)

The basic deductions from the above typologies are better summarized in this way:

- That maintenance of effective (tangible) public relations network in government is essential for good governance;
- That effective public relations strategies and tactics can amplify functions in good governance which African leaders desperately need; and
- That tangible public relations can be used as stimulant or tranquillizer for good governance.

It is pertinent here to note that different people have different images of Africa reflecting the type of government and kind of governance in place at different times. For example, the image of country “A”, as perceived by country “B” or by the people of country “C”, is certainly not the same. But whichever is the right image, effective public relations management of the image should constantly be used to sustain good corporate image of the country. But I wish to make it clear here that the corporate image I am talking about is and should not be the image of the government as perceived by different publics or the image of services rendered by the government in place, but the totality and the degree of participation, fairness, justice, accountability, transparency, etc., operating simultaneously with other variables in government and governance.

Grining (1984), Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985), and Kruchabern and Starck (1988) conclude that optimal public relations is that PR whose models and concepts are most ethical and socially responsible and, therefore, should be recommended for the promotion of good governance. Also, Bell and Bell (1976) recommend the open-system approach in government to achieve good governance.

The open-system approach, according to Seun and McBride et al, stresses the importance of interaction between the government and the governed for the attainment of good governance. Katz and Kahn (1978) also note that each individual in any society has a particular position which is associated with a set of activities or expected behaviours to encourage good governance.



From the above, we can submit that for the achievement of good governance in Africa, African public relations practitioners must:

- Be an expert prescriber by sending in early warning signals to African leaders when they (PR experts) see what could be termed “clear and present dangers” in governance;
- African PR practitioners should continue to serve as communication technicians. They can do this through proper networking.
- African PR practitioners should serve as problem-solving process facilitators, i.e., they should not just sit down and look. They must get themselves involved at any level of government, and, finally;
- African public relations practitioners must use the system-theory approach as relevant tools for the promotion of good governance in Africa.

MANAGEMENT OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Before we go any further into this discourse, our assumption in this paper is that public relations is a management function. Then how do we manage public relations in a government that is experiencing conscious change and relevance for good governance? Let us consider first what we understand about public relations in its ramifications. Many African leaders think public relations is synonymous with bribery, corruption, protocol, “kola nut” giving and receiving, etc. They often allocate money to their so-called “facilitators”. In my humble opinion, this is not public relations. At the best this action should be termed, according to the FAPRA General Secretary Kabir Dangogo, “business relations”. It is not public relations. The wrong use of term is a deliberate attempt to put a fine coat of paint on corrupt tendencies.

Simply put, therefore, public relations is a tool for management and prevention of crisis in government, in politics, in religion, in commerce and industries and even in family self-government and many more areas of life. Our argument here, therefore, is that effective public relations for the attainment of good governance should be an essential component of the so-called “kitchen cabinet” of all governments.



It is not surprising that the Mexicans define public relations in (good governance) as “ the art and social science of analyzing (political) trends, predicting their consequences, counseling political and/or organizational leaders and implementing planned programmes which will serve both the government and the public interest”.

Cutlip and Center seem to agree with this view when they too defined public relations as the art and science of developing reciprocal understanding and goodwill among the government and the governed. This section of the paper will be incomplete if we fail to add the conclusion of the International Public Relations (IPRA) on the definition of PR:

...public relations is [the] management function of a continuing and planned character, through which public and private organizations and institutions *seek* to win and retain understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned – by evaluating public opinion about themselves, in order to correlate, as far as possible, their own politics, policies, and procedure, to achieve by planned and wide-spread information more productive cooperation and more efficient fulfilment of their common interests (Emphasis mine).

HOW PUBLIC RELATIONS CAN ENHANCE GOOD GOVERNANCE

The various ways in which public relations can enhance good governance in Africa include the following:

- That tangible public relations is a must for attaining good governance in Africa, therefore, practitioners should oil their machinery;
- That African political leaders should invest on corporate reputation building for the achievement of good governance;
- That political reputation building needs money. Therefore, to enthrone good governance in Africa requires frequent public relations research and studies to feel the pulse of the governed for the sustenance of good government and good governance;
- That African political leaders should create an enabling and conducive environment for



popular political participation by the people;

- That African leaders should be more open and transparent in governance;
- That African public relations experts should be involved in governance and, in fact, be made a part of the continent's think-tank committee or board for African rebirth;
- That African public relations experts should always give early warning signals to the government for the sustainability of good governance;
- That African political leaders should engage the services of African public relations consultants more than those foreign-based “parachute” PR experts in monitoring and evaluating the public activities and pronouncements of government on burning issues, including policy, planning, discipline, welfare programmes of the government;
- That Africans, in my opinion, are better placed to understand African cultural particularities and cultural peculiarities for good governance than foreign PR experts. This should come with the self-reassurance that what the foreign PR experts can do, African PR experts can do better and even cheaper too. This should be focal point of African PR experts;
- That African political leaders should involve public relations experts in the socio-organizational performance analysis, planning, programming, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of activities within and outside government;
- That both internal (i.e.) intra-, and inter-African government linkages should involve the public relations experts;
- That if Africa must begin to cope with the challenges of globalization during this phase of the millennium. It is now time for African political leaders to fashion out a new political framework for African openness, accountability, transparency, respectability and participatory democracy in order to achieve and sustain good governance.

Finally, I wish to end this paper with a modification of the famous public relations typology of Carl Byoir which is simplified thus:

That letter x =should represent government activities or its deed



While letter

Y = Represents the perception of public on government activities

X = the government's deed

+ Plus Y (the public perception of government deeds and activities)

$X + Y = PP = \text{Public Participation}$

Therefore, $X + Y + PP = \text{Good Governance}$ (i.e., Government activities on Government Deed (Plus + Public perception of Government Deeds (Y) + Public participation. All equal to Good Governance.

(QED.)

The public relations lesson in this typology is that good governance would, among other things, be dependent on the positive use of the mass media because mass media are agents of social change and political transformation. They can make or mar good governance.

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