

## **The African action toward social transformation**

Robert White

**Abstract:** The present article analyses processes of social transformation that African people have promoted since independence fostering the realization of human rights, human creativity and the realization of human aspirations. This research, with the perspective of the critical tradition of analysis of social transformation, discusses eight processes of transformation in Africa authored by African people which potentially create social conditions of human realization: 1) cultural, political and development initiatives of African independence leaders; 2) movements to promote the rule of law defending constitutional rights, 3) developing the organizational capacity of the poor, 4) civil society action defending rights; 5) free participatory public debate; 6) promoting indigenous cultural identity and development initiatives; 7) the informal action of the poor and 8) devolution of governance to the local level.

**Key Words:** social transformation, rule of law, civil society in Africa, popular organization in Africa, devolution of governance.

### **The critical tradition in the analysis of social transformation**

The concept of social transformation is being increasingly used as a general framework for describing the goals and forms of social organization of society. One approach is a central focus on the increased social differentiation of society introducing new specializations and organizational structures as the knowledge of solving human and social problems increases. For example, the health sciences have moved far beyond the knowledge of the general medical practitioner to ever more specialized competencies for dealing with the problems and good functioning of the human organic system. This perspective of social transformation in the tradition of Durkheim and the sociologist Talcott Parsons and developed by theorists such as S.K. Sanderson (1999) can best be described as the functionalist tradition of social transformation (Collins, 1994, pp. 181-241).

A quite different tradition of social transformation thought is the focus on the capacity of social organizations to foster human creativity, aspirations, realization of rights, and social justice. This makes service to the human person the focus in the change in social institutions. The emphasis is on creating the social environment to enable every person to realize his or her human capacities to contribute to the personal growth of others. One highly developed body of theory focusing on the dignity of the human person is the social teaching of the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, 2005). In the tradition of social theory this might be described as the 'critical' tradition of social transformation thought following the social justice perspectives of the churches or the theoretical criticism by Polanyi and others of the neoliberal policies (Richter, 2016; Stiglitz, 2001, pp. xxxv-xxxviii). The critical tradition would examine the same process of more complex evolving social organization that Sanderson traces, but continually asks whether this is contributing to the dignity and freedom of persons. Some typical studies of social transformation in the critical tradition are Allman (1999), *Revolutionary social transformation*; Chathanatt (2004), *Ghandi and Gutierrez: Two paradigms of liberative transformation*; and Hantal (2011), *Social transformation and development in the context of globalization*.

The present article focuses on the ways Africans have invented to protect and develop the dignity and capacity of persons from the time of the independence movements to the present. The analysis uses much of the lenses of European/American theory for seeing emerging respect for human rights in world history but tries to be sensitive to the unique means that Africans have developed to protect and further the freedom and dignity of the person.

This article looks at the history of Africa since independence and asks how the African people have transformed the concentration of political, economic, cultural and other forms of life opportunities in a relatively small elite with the perennial deprivation of the great majority of the people. How have leaders, movements, and organizations attempted to create a social, political and cultural structure in Africa that grants equality of opportunity to all. This analysis assumes as background the eight classical processes of transformation in a postcolonial society: 1) fostering indigenous cultural and development initiatives; 2) developing the Freirian critical perception of elite power; 3) promoting the massive organizational capacity of the poor, 4) mobilizing civil society action to defend rights; 5) bringing all sectors of society into national movements to introduce the rule of law 6) developing capacity for advocacy action; 7) introducing a national governmental policy of educational and other conditions for technological development and 8) devolution of governance to the local level.

At independence, African leaders faced enormous challenges. The favored African people in the colonial period were those who were able to get an education in the government or mission schools and get jobs in the colonial government schools or bureaucracy. When independence came, those holding positions in the colonial government moved to the top of the national governments with privileged access to large land holdings and investments in the expanding economies of independence (Ochieng, 1995. pp. 89-91). These people became the new wealthy elites of Africa, bolstering their financial investments through their influence on government decision making. The emphasis of their activities is on safe investments, not significant entrepreneurial action expanding national productivity. Much of their financial power is in extensive land holdings, buildings, and construction activities. With their financial power they can dictate governmental elections and actions.

What have been some of the significant responses to these conditions of injustice?

### **(1) The social transformation vision of African independence leaders**

The independence movements have undoubtedly been the single most important social transformation experience in the lives of Africans in large part because each movement provided a rich vision of social transformation. These were led by outstanding political thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah or Julius Nyerere who participated in the early pre-independence discussions that were formulating transformative visions but who themselves took initiatives to fashion a new socio-political organization with very specific social-political changes. They gained adherents from many local organizational initiatives of younger, better educated young people looking for a government that would support the economic aspirations of Africans. Some joiners had been leaders in new organizational formations such as the cotton cooperatives in northern Tanzania (Iliffe, 1979, pp. 503-505).

Nyerere, with his background in idealistic Fabian socialism, introduced the ideal of communitarian *ujamaa*. Nyerere's emphasis on the peaceful cooperation of ethnic groups—bringing Zanzibar into the union—was a model of how to prevent religious and regional rivalry. Nyerere and other independence leaders stressed selfless service to national government to counter the culture of individualistic profiteering from government jobs and

political favoritism. Nyerere himself cut his salary in half and lived simply as an example. But this was a transformational ideal that unfortunately only a few Africans imitated in the years after independence (Leonard, 1991).

Nkrumah, with his emphasis on Pan-Africanism, introduced the vision of the supremacy of a common *African* social identity over ethnic, tribal and national identities. Nyerere's close cooperation with South African liberation was inspired by this vision. To this day there is little antagonism or armed action among African nations; but ethnic clashes within countries remain a major challenge for African social transformation. Kaunda's humanistic vision was perhaps less pan-African and less uniting, but his strong idealistic personality contrasted with many other political leaders. The strong dialogical and non-violent ideology of the ANC in South Africa was a powerful factor in uniting South Africa in a rainbow society. In all these ideals there are deep values of social transformation.

The independence movements built on an indigenous African intellectual culture that had already begun in many parts of Africa. This was the foundation of the flowering of brilliant African novelists, playwrights, poets, film producers and journalists. In the Lagos area and in the Gold Coast from early colonial times there was a strong development of newspaper discussion, theatre, literary clubs and local debate on popular films from Europe and Hollywood.

The independence movements also built on the young African intellectuals. The British set up three universities in colonial Africa which established the foundation for a strong intellectual life in Africa: The University of Ghana in Legon, the University in Ibadan and Makerere University in Kampala Uganda. All of these educational institutions were linked with international university and professional life in Europe and America and had little to do with the repressive colonial governance system (Iliffe, 1998). Many young Africans were given scholarships to study abroad, and these came back to introduce transformative conceptions of African society. For instance, Wangari Maathai, during her studies in America, was much inspired by Martin Luther King. She also brought a sense of Ubuntu, togetherness, and interdependency (Maathai, 2020).

Although a few of the independence movements such as that in Kenya unfortunately emphasized which tribe would dominate, most of the independence plans, especially that of Tanzania, stressed that the power of the new nation would come from the unity of all the regional and tribal groups. Each ethnic identity would contribute its capacities to the welfare of the whole. This stressed one of the most important aspects of social transformation: constructing an integral national and pan-African identity.

These principles of action in the independence movements introduced a series of ideals essential to a process of social transformation:

- In response to the colonialist proposal that political participation be based on racial background, European, Asian and African, the new constitutions insisted on the basic human right of participation for everyone.
- The new nations were based on a legal constitution, not the arbitrary orders of an executive. The new constitution placed rulers and ruled under the same law guaranteeing the respect for the basic human rights listed at the beginning of the constitution.
- The new constitutions guaranteed the right to participate in national decision making to everyone regardless of education, race, socio-economic status or other prejudicial criteria.
- The right to participate in the communication processes leading to legislative decisions. This freedom of communication proved to be a difficult point because the urban bureaucratic elite who drew their privileged status from their experience

in the colonial bureaucracy wanted to maintain restrictions on the freedom of the press in the new African governments (Masanja, 2012). In all communities and organizations, the major obstacle to popular participation is the inside control of 'old boy' networks who have superior 'connections' with executives and are able to thwart lower status organizations.

- Given the centralization tendencies of most of the independence governments, making government executives accountable to various parts of the community and to the organization of implementation. The disadvantage which many of the countries of Africa faced at independence was the low level of education and experience in advocacy and civil society action of the populace, especially in the more rural areas.
- The independence movements also emphasized another important aspect of social transformation: making the benefits and resources of the organization or community universally and equally available to all. Before independence, colonial governments generally favored those of the governing race and nation. The principle, at least, guiding independence movements was that the less advantaged, especially the rural and lower-status urban people, would be given special attention to enable them to become equal to those favored in the colonial period. This principle has not been well maintained in many African countries, and the rural populations have been neglected. To block the availability of socio-economic development to a large section of a community eventually hurts the development of the whole community. The refusal to provide good services of education, technical assistance, and other development support to rural areas—a remnant of colonial policy--has been one of the major reason African nations have not developed.

The colonial powers left many challenges for social transformation in Africa: the colonial favoring of the absolute power of leadership rather than participatory governance, promoting rivalry among ethnic groups as a 'divide and conquer' tactic, the emphasis on individualistic upward mobility rather than commitment to community, favoring racial and nationalistic identities, favoring the European models of development over indigenous African development capacities. These remnants of colonial imposition continue to be the challenges to social transformation.

## **2. Movements to promote the rule of law based on constitutional rights**

Another major series of movements to change the socio-political power structure in Africa emerged from African religious, professional, and literary leaders in the early 1990s protesting the series of autocratic presidencies such as Moi in Kenya or the military in Nigeria (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 84-103). These movements generated the 'conferences' in French-speaking Africa and the return to constitutional governments in Kenya, Zambia and other countries. The victory of the ANC in South Africa, with strong international support and a coalition of many groups in South Africa also brought dramatic social changes.

Nearly all the African nations emerged from a colonial past where the basis of rule was some form of military conquest, and the rule was lodged largely in the personal decisions of a governor. The guiding norm of colonial law was the advantage of the mother country, not the rights and welfare of the native people. Virtually all the personalities who led the independence movements aimed to establish a nation with a constitution promoting a legal

governmental system based on human rights usually listed at the beginning of the constitution. But leaders such as Nkrumah also had their personal convictions about what constituted a good African society, and they were convinced that they had to make sure that these personal convictions were implemented—often a source of conflict. In practice, as African nations formed, the personal plan and preference of the presidential figure often became the law. Constitutions might be referred to, but in Kenya, for example, Kenyatta casually modified the constitution to fit his wishes. In 1990 only three countries in Africa were led by democratically elected governments (Diamond, 2010, p. 48).

African countries were governed according to organizational plans but the decisions on who would get jobs, contracts and evaluation was determined largely by friendship and patronage reward for personal loyalty to political bosses. Those who benefited from national development plans often were not those who most needed the services such as the rural small farmers who were the support of the economy, but personal friends and family of the presidential figure. In the process of governance by patronage and loose reward of family and friends, those who benefitted the most were those who had connections with the service bureaucracies with roots in the old colonial societies. Those who were left behind were the more rural, traditional people, including the small, semi-subsistence farmers, the foundation of agriculture. This rule on a personal friendship and kinship basis rather than the rule of law has had a devastating impact on the overall development of the African nations because opportunities for education, jobs, contracts for evaluations and a host of other key rewards were based more on personal ties than competence and just reward for work well done. Those who came from a poorer background, more rural, lower status have had little access to jobs and advancement regardless of their talent, hard work and discipline.

What are some of the major factors advancing the rule of law in the early 1990s in Africa?

- A major factor has been the development of civil society, especially the development of organized action of the churches led by native clergy, the professional associations especially the legal associations, the university students and teachers, in some cases the labor unions, and the journalists. In many situations these coalitions protested the violent repression by the police and military that touched virtually all the families. Often the playwrights, novelists, poets and philosophers articulated the demands of the people to a return to constitutional rule. From the 1990s free and monitored elections have become more general. The judiciary branch also became increasingly independent (Diamond, 2010, p. 48).
- The human rights associations coming into existence with linkages to international rights movements and organizations began a systematic monitoring of the abuses, which had an educative influence. Surprisingly, the human rights NGOs with their dependence on external funding, have relatively little links with the most exploited people in their areas and have not had a direct influence (Mutua, 2009, pp 13-36).
- Throughout Africa the legislative branches of government representing rights and interests have become more influential in governance (Diamond, 2010, p. 48).
- In some countries—Ghana would be a good example—the schools of journalism and journalists' associations influenced public opinion by systematically pointing out the violation of rights and violent repression. In general, the journalists throughout Africa,

supported by the international journalist associations, became major influences attacking the abuses of constitutions and human rights.

- In many African countries the women's associations worked with legislatures, the churches and other groups to forge new legislation defending human rights. In Kenya, women's organizations were a major factor in restoring human rights based on constitutional law (Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, 2012; Murunga, Okello and Sjogren, 2014). In Tanzania the Tanzanian Association of Media Women has been a leader in vindicating not only the rights of women, but many other excluded groups (Duwe and White, 2011).
- The new literary and intellectual groups began to have a very significant critical, cultural influence. This is especially evident in Nigeria where the novelists and playwrights are major public voices.

### **3. Developing the organizational capacity of the poor and marginal**

The power of the poor to transform is in their numbers, but the poor need to be well organized with good leadership and united to speak with one voice. From 1850 to 1950 the poor of Europe, the US and other parts of the world achieved the realization of the rights of the working class largely through their organization in the labor unions and the alliance of the labor unions with dissident elites with skills of organization, communication and nation building vision. One example is the labor union movement in Great Britain (Hinton, 1983). In 1850 the miners in Britain lived in wretched conditions. But over one hundred years the miners formed first individual unions around one mining business, then bringing all the miners together, then bringing the miners together with other trade unions and finally the alliance of the working-class unions with dissident specialists in economics, health, and organization. Finally, in 1945 the labor party was elected to control the British parliament. Within months the labor party passed legislation for universal free and equal health care, generous scholarships to the top schools and universities, equal wages with the middle class, access to middle class housing, and a guaranteed annual monthly holiday to the tourist destinations of the world (Hinton, 1983, pp. 169-170).

In Africa, the organization of the poor living in rural areas and in the vast slums has hardly begun. Although some have argued that elites in Africa have done all they can to prevent the organization of the poor (Wanyama, 2006), there is much evidence that there is a gradual growth in self-help associational groups especially in rural communities (Barrett, Mude and Omiti, 2007). The most valuable asset of these groups is their increasing social capital and an increase of the commitment to mutual assistance. Some organizational efforts are casual and limited to the local community such as the 'merry-go-round' groups while others are linked to vertical support organizations that can provide financial resources, technical instruction, management training, access to marketing, and advocacy orientation. The major factors contributing to the socio-economic improvement of participants is education, land size of agriculturalists, training in associational capacities, and general productive training. The major source of these factors are the higher associational levels of the community groups. (Amudavi. 2007). The challenges these associations face is the ability to coordinate among themselves and the capacity for advocacy action to bring government and other sources to support the community and occupational organizations.

There are now some significant examples of the organization of the poor in Africa to realize their rights to services of education, health, and decent housing. A major movement empowering the small holder farmer has been the development of the dairy industry in Kenya, and much of the incipient improvements for these farmers comes from their organization. Over

600,000 small holder farmers participate in the Kenyan dairy industry accounting for over 80% of national milk production (Njigi et al, 2010, p. 201). On average dairying households own three head of cows with an average landholding of 2.6 hectares. Smaller farmers gain most of their income from sale of calves. Studies shows that dairying is a major source of income for the education of children and for improvement of standard of living (Njigi et al, 2010, p. 238).

The introduction of dairy farming in Kenya was started by the white settlers who, through their organization, were able to influence the support of colonial policy to cross breed high producing stock with disease resistant local cattle. The white settlers, through their coordinating organization, were able to improve milk production by widespread systems of artificial insemination, dips and other means of tick and disease control. The white settlers also introduced the models of marketing through the wide distribution of creameries close to the milk production and then good urban distribution.

In the late 1950s, given the political pressures stemming from the Mau Mau and similar movements of indigenous farmers, with some significant degree of organization, the British colonial government arranged for a collective purchase of the land of white settlers to be farmed by Kenyans in small parcels. Today Kenya's three million smallholder farm families supply an estimated 75% of national agricultural production and 50% of marketed agricultural surplus. The promotion of dairy cattle production among farmers introduced a system of low-cost manure and other compost fertilizer to increase crop production. Since the system of mixed dairy and crop production is so widespread farmers tend to learn new production technology from each other.

At independence the government with technical and financial support from the Swedish government introduced an efficient system of artificial insemination serving smallholders out in the rural neighborhoods. By 1987 the Government of Kenya operated 6,041 dips throughout the country (Njigi et al, 2010, p. 223). Many of the graduates of the agricultural schools could not get employment with the government, so they set up low-cost veterinary services out in the neighborhoods for the dairy and livestock farmers. A major factor in these good services was the political influence of small farmers who shared a similar tangible economic interest. Given the wide availability of technical services and improved breeding, dairy farmers in Kenya have milk yields two to three times those in Uganda and Ethiopia (Njigi et al, 2010, p. 22). Particularly important are the producers' organizations such as the cattle breeders' associations and the livestock research institutions in Kenya.

Much of the success of smallholder dairying is the encouragement of wide distribution of creameries to buy a perishable product such as milk and the good distribution to potential buyers. The creameries in Kenya have developed a wide variety of milk products including export items. The government encouraged the consumption of a high protein food by introducing free milk consumption in the schools. Kenyans have the highest level of milk consumption in Africa. The spread of Dairy Farmer Cooperative Societies has made marketing more reliable and the pricing better (Njigi et al, 2010, p. 230).

The small-holder agriculturalist is, in many ways, the foundation of the social and political development of many African nations, if they are organized and able to influence the technical production support and form their marketing associations.

The major threat and obstacle to the rural small-holder farmer has been the political elites who have been able to get control of the better land and other agricultural services. They tend to control agricultural markets for their own interests, and they seek to amass their properties of land and buildings as a symbol and insurance of their dominance of the economy. It is the urban-

based political elite that has denied investment and services in rural areas of countries such as Kenya and created in rural areas landlessness, inferior services of health and education, lack of technical information to small farmer agriculture and thus caused much of the rural poverty (Kinyanjui, 2010).

Yet, organizational membership is increasing in Africa. For example, in 1999 Kenya had over 9,000 registered cooperatives of which 46% were agricultural and 38% savings and credit. (Nyoro and Ngugi, p. 13). In 2011 there were 14,228 cooperative societies, approximately half being savings and credit, but cooperatives make a significant contribution to the dairy and other rural industries. The key question, however, is whether these organizations are using their power to defend rights and influence national development policy.

#### **4. Civil society protecting rights and equal opportunity**

In all organizations and societies there is a tendency toward the concentration of power with the consequent oppression and denial of rights of others. Almost inevitably the aspirations of some people are thwarted, the misfortunes of some lead toward poverty, and some are left in the backwaters of the nation. In the context of the concentration power in African societies the central question is how effective the defense of rights is. This is of major importance in the process of social transformation.

When African societies were formed in the colonial period some families were given great advantages of education, employment, and favoritism by colonial rulers. The foundations of a structure of power became deeply rooted. Despite the promises of equality and defense of rights in independence movements, the need to form a new state and the institutions for rapid development favored those who had gained education and management skills in the colonial period. Although agriculture was the main source of funding for the new nations, the rural areas and rural leadership had relatively little voice in the new governments. For those moving into the jobs of departing colonialists, gaining the style of life of the colonialists was more important than public service. In Tanzania, for example, those who moved into the colonial offices demanded the salaries and privileges that the departing British enjoyed. In Kenya those who moved into governmental and professional positions occupied by the British were given prime opportunity to buy cheaply great extensions of land, partnerships in business and urban properties (Maxon, 1995, pp 121-122). Thus was formed the ruling economic and political elite not only in Kenya but throughout Africa. Today, in Kenya, 20% of the residents of Nairobi control 80% of the wealth, and 60% of the people of Nairobi control only 2.7% of the wealth (Household Budget Survey, *Daily Nation*, March 27, 2018, p. 31).

In virtually all African countries the central leaders of the independence movements managed to form a loyal following that supported centralized power, 'the big man', making all decisions and marginalizing those who disagreed. Personal decisions manipulated the rule of law. The questionable justification of this concentration of power, wealth, property and information was that nation building demands rapid unilateral action. In the view of African elites, those competent for development action need their rewards. The result of the first two decades of setting up the major structures of development in Africa was the consolidation of dictatorial government protecting an economic elite that was running roughshod over the rights of the majority and pushing the majority of the population, especially the rural people, into hopeless poverty and deprivation. Most African countries abolished elections and were run by



authoritarian personalities or by the military (Diamond, 2010). In the face of this concentration of power, there emerged a series of moves that are typical of processes of social transformation.

During the first twenty years of African independence an indigenous democratic leadership was emerging in the labor unions, the churches, universities and professional groups and developing a rights-based questioning of the practices of government. The people who suffered the most from dictators such as Idi Amin or the military in many countries were those educated to serve in democratic institutions. Then in the 1980s, following the dictates of structural adjustment, the newly-educated professionals were being dismissed from jobs or had their salaries cut. At the same time the ruling elites were wasting national wealth in corruption and profligate spending. The growing middle classes were demanding democratic elections, a strengthening of the honesty of the courts and better public administration. There was a growing organization of interest groups: women demanding more equal opportunity, business associations, and mobilization of university teachers and students (Wanjala Nasong'o, 2007). The challenge for all of these dissident groups was to unite in a planned action.

A first type of social transformation action which demanded a government accepting and promoting human rights is the mass mobilization of all of the aggrieved bodies to virtually paralyse the offending government until a firm concession is made. Typical of this kind of action were the national conferences in Francophone Africa from 1990 to 1993 (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 84-106). The first of these national conferences came together in Benin in early 1990. The military-based regime of Kerekou began with the welcome promise of liberation and development, but without the corrective restraints that a dictatorship needs. By the late 1980s it had become increasingly incompetent and corrupt, unable to deal with the economic crises of the country and unable to pay its employees regularly (Wiseman, 1996, p. 85). In the twenty years since independence organizations representing various sectors of the nation had developed— labor unions, opposition parties, religious leaders, representatives of voluntary associations (especially women's groups) and a variety of respected leaders of different regions and occupational sectors. In 1990 some 500 of these came together, called a conference and elected the archbishop of Cotonou as chairman of the conference. What the conference in Benin demanded (and subsequently in a series of other francophone countries also) was essentially the respect for rights following the constitution which respected the needs and rights of the people equitably (Wiseman, 1996, p. 84-94). The improved communication between African countries was also a factor. A two-hour video of the highlights of the conference in Benin was circulated widely and stimulated similar conferences in Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Mali, Togo and Zaire (Wiseman, 1996, p. 84). Kerekou accepted the sovereignty of the conference, free elections and an elected prime minister. Kerekou was voted out completely in the next election. In most of the countries where conferences or a referendum were held, a new constitution was introduced with much more specific reference to rights and much more detailed guidelines for elections and public participation.

As in Francophone Africa spontaneous mass popular mobilizations in Kenya and Zambia also brought about significant constitutional changes and a more responsive government (Bratton, 1994, pp. 51-81). In Kenya, the Moi government had declared Kenya a single party state and maneuvered his friends into power. The churches again played a significant role in part because they had the largest number of organized adherents and were united in a national association, but the professional associations, especially lawyers' association, university students and other popular organizations were able to mobilize the nation in several major public

major confrontations (Bratton, 1994, pp. 64-75). In the end, Moi agreed to a constitutional change allowing free, multiparty elections.

In Zambia, the labor unions with their base in the copper mines and with the strong leadership of Chiluba were able to mobilize action to remove the Kaunda government and introduce a new constitution. The churches, the legal societies and the university student associations also played an important role (Bratton, 1994, pp. 64-75).

In all the liberation processes of the 1990s in Africa various classical institutions with different identities—the church, the legal societies, the labor unions, the students, and poor in the slums—each demonstrated key dimensions of the social transformation process. The churches, especially in Kenya, protested the political regimes from the perspective of human rights and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the concentration of land ownership and the formation of an enormously wealthy business class exploiting the poor. The legal societies in both Kenya and Zambia focused on another dimension of social transformation highlighting the illegality and repressiveness of much of the government action contravening not only the national constitutions but international legal standards. Many of these civil society movements were supported by governments from around the world. The students' movements demanded changes touching on other aspects of social transformation, especially on the torture of prisoners and other brutalities. The labor unions in Zambia emphasized the injustice of the poverty of workers. The media played a central role in articulating the injustices of the governments at the time and formulated a critical public discourse.

Out of this civil society pressure came a series of improvements touching on better governance, greater direct participation in governance and greater respect for human rights:

- Greater guarantees of justice and honesty in the courts.
- The elimination of arbitrary detention and of any kind of torture while in detention.
- Guarantees of honesty in regular, multiparty elections.
- In some countries such as Kenya there was a move to develop new constitutions with provisions for devolving government to local county level and opportunities for much more citizen participation in local governance.

A second type of movement leading toward the general defense of human rights were movements led by charismatic individuals. In Kenya Wangari Maathi led a movement against Moi's authoritarian government around two attractive themes: the protection of the environment and the rights of women. These were successful in introducing a culture of human rights because of the focus around deeper values: the planting of trees to halt environmental degradation and respect for the role of women in African society.

In virtually all the African countries the increased militancy of civil society groups brought a greater respect for a broad spectrum of human rights (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994). A noteworthy example is the success of Nigerian rights groups in bringing the government of Nigeria to introduce in 2011 the 'right to information' legislation which gives citizens the right to demand of government offices information on activities and use of funds (Ojebode, 2011).

## **5. Developing channels of participatory public debate and communication**

One of the most fundamental aspects of social transformation in a community or nation is the development of institutions of personal or collective communication, whether direct personal participation or through media, to influence the process of decision making in the collectivity. The most basic institution of communication is the opportunity to complain that one is not getting the essentials of a decent life and is not being treated justly in comparison with others in

the group. More complex are processes of communication to participate in the collective decision making of the community or nation. This may include complaints about the basic rights and values of the community not being respected. Also important is the right to communicate one's ideas, talents and inspirations to the broader formation of the culture of the community.

In all these aspects of communication so essential in human society, Africans have had to struggle to establish the right and practice of participatory communication essential for a just society. During the colonial period the native African peoples generally were restricted from having meetings that concerned the governance of their communities. Governance decisions came down from the colonial governor to district commissioners and indirect rule chiefs. The indirect rule chief might sound out the feelings of the people, but he was expected to simply enforce the governor's decisions.

In the colonial period the Africans were only begrudgingly allowed to publish newspapers and what was allowed was carefully scrutinized with any criticisms of the colonial government or independent ideas being eliminated (Omu, 1978). There were no African consulting bodies regarding governance until much later in the colonial period when it was evident that independence was demanded by international opinion and the mobilization of the people. There were stringent laws of 'sedition' against any public criticism of colonial governance.

As the independence movements developed in the African countries, most of the movements had print newspapers, and these took up the independence cause and were the mouthpiece of the central leadership candidates (Hyden and Okigbo, 2007). Most of the native media were the major publicizing instruments of the plans of government of the candidates for governance positions and opened a forum for public discussion of the forms of governance taking shape.

However, in most emerging African countries the freedom of expression of the public media was short lived as very autocratic figures, many of them from the military, made themselves 'presidents for life' and made their personal whims the 'law', often in direct violation of the rights of the people. In many new African countries, the 'big man' took over the property of people at will, looted the national treasury, jailed or killed those who stood in his way. Who was to defend the rights of the people? Many of the journalists who had criticized the colonial governors now turned their protests this blatant violation of rights, often with great suffering. The new universities began to train journalists, and the international journalism organizations supported this commitment to freedom of the press. In Nigeria the journalists carried on a relentless revelation of the imprisonments without trial, the use of political office for personal gain (Ogbondah, 1994). During this time virtually all editors and senior journalists in Nigeria suffered interrogations and even torture. But relentless education of the public regarding the illegitimacy of this kind of governance eventually led to improvements.

In Ghana in the face of the continual violations of the constitution and political freedoms by Gerry Rawlings, the young journalists under the leadership of Paul Ansah, head of the school of journalism at the University of Ghana, led a campaign of denunciation each time Rawlings perpetrated an outrageous violation. Ansah, also the head of the national Catholic newspaper and with the backing of the Catholic bishops, made a major contribution to the education of the public regarding respect for rule of law and constitutional governance (Diedong, 2008).

Journalists in Africa also led another effort of communication for social transformation protecting the needs and interests of the poor. When the autocratic president Obasanjo led a

move to raise the prices of petrol that would enrich him and his friends enormously but affected the cost of public transportation for the working-class people of Nigeria, the news magazines were able to expose the falsity of his reasons for increasing petrol prices. This also developed in the people of Nigeria the capacity for a much more critical analysis of government actions (Torwel, 2008, pp. 357-384).

The powerful people in a community, a nation or even in an organization inevitably try to stifle communication because it may be critical of their violation of the rights and aspirations of the poorer, less powerful people. Most societies have developed ways to ensure that critical debate with the participation of those who will be willing to continually speak out will always be present. In Africa the university training in truthful and critical journalism has been important (Berger, 2011). There has been a continual emphasis on avoiding any form of bribes in journalism and to keep paid public relations and journalism separate. Most countries in Africa have established media councils which have as a major goal to support and defend critical voices in the media (Rioba, 2012).

In communities and organizations one of the most important defenses of free expression to check abuses of power and to bring in the views of the poor and marginalized is the way meetings are conducted. The chair must always encourage the minority groups to speak out. Less powerful groups should be represented on committees and in the officers of the organization. Different cultural identities or points of view should be brought into the board of officers.

## **6. The development of indigenous cultural identity and development initiative**

African societies and the communities and social organizations of Africa are made up of a great variety of different cultural groups, different occupational identities, different social traditions. Unfortunately, the cultural identities are often not respected, and these groups do not benefit from the resources of African societies. Several of the most obvious examples are the rural people who make up the majority of the population, the women who are more than half and the youth who make up a large percentage. The great number of ethnic and language identities have a rich cultural background that is hardly known. Most rural people live in poverty and destitution. It is essential in the social transformation process that these social and cultural groups can project their socio-cultural identity in the social life of communities, organizations or across the nation.

The colonial period in Africa was full of negativity regarding everything indigenous: the culture of the native African people, negative perceptions of ethnic groups among themselves, negative perceptions of women, negative perception of youth, and negative perceptions of people of other African nations. Social transformation seeks to promote a positive perception of one's own social and cultural identity and a positive perception of the cultural values and capacities of other socio-cultural identities. Especially important are the cultural revitalization movements which regain the appreciation of the value of one's own unique cultural history and identity as a 'gift' to the other groups in the nation and continent. The cultivation of an appreciation of one's geographical, historical, and cultural identity among the youth is particularly important. This needs to be accompanied with a rigorous training in the technical, literary, and other skills rooted in the unique values and culture of the group. This is cultivated not with the purpose of domination and exclusion of other groups but with the desire to learn the capacities of other groups and contribute from one's own identity to the success of other groups in their special

capacities. The interaction with other ethnic groups can be a celebration and appreciation of what other identities can contribute to the society as a whole.

It is important for each socio-cultural identity to know, recognize and celebrate the contribution of one's group to the national, regional and continental development of Africa but also recognize and celebrate the unique contribution of other groups. This process of a group recognizing its cultural and contributive identity often requires a unique sort of socio-cultural—and political—leadership to mobilize a people and enable them to project their socio-economic identity to a national level. There is a certain limit of space and competitiveness among cultural identity groups at a national level and all groups face the state with its monopoly of force in the nation but also its monopoly of national socio-cultural identity and development thrust. All groups make their unique contribution to the national welfare, but the national welfare is the common good of all the people, both in a contributive and a distributive sense.

Local community organizations are, first, associations of people who enjoy the use of their talents to provide services in innovative ways and enjoy the company and ideas of others in improving what they do. They may come from all social statuses—peasant farmers, skilled artisans, middle class professionals—but their focus in life is a culture of enjoyment of their creativity and service (Ibrahim, 2015, 4-49).

It may be useful to distinguish local community organizations from the typical NGOs which are often appendages of the government or large international aid agencies. These NGOs may not be an integral part of African society and do not emerge from the shared cultural activities of African people (Ibrahim, 2015, pp. 49-50).

Local people are much aware of their creativity and contribution and have a strong sense of their human right to carry on their collective activities (Ibrahim, 2015, pp 50-52; Mutua, 2008, pp. 13-31). One example is the rise of radio and newspapers in local languages.

Local organizations are likely to engage in political activities when they find that inefficient or corrupt government is blocking their legitimate activities, for example, demanding bribes for their activities (Bratton, 1994, pp. 71-77). At this point they begin to enter alliances and become part of a coalition that demands a fundamental change in governmental structures as happened in Kenya and Zambia in 1991 and in the movement to form the conferences. The local organizations were a major factor in the regularization of political elections and honest government in Ghana from the early 1990s to the present (Ibrahim, 2015, pp.78-92).

## **7. The power of informal aggressiveness**

The poor seem powerless in the face of the urban bureaucratic classes and even the working class, but the poor have their own sources of power in their informality (Obadare and Willems, 2014). They may be ejected from erecting makeshift housing on a back street but the masses flow into other empty spaces in or near the cities and form the great informal settlements of 500,000 such as Kibera in Nairobi that are now the most striking characteristic of the cities of Africa. The poor become the power of the political parties guaranteeing votes, the churches with their swelling congregations, the community organizers for those they can serve, the clientele of the poverty programs for hundreds of NGOs, the market for the drug dealers and the feeders of dozens of macabre illicit activities of human trafficking. The mobs of hawkers, burden carriers and sellers of human favors may be chased off one street or section of the city only to reappear in another section.

Indeed the poor gain power by their closeness to the corruption of the police, the political leaders and other 'protectors' of freedoms.

This great mass of destitute people are the masters of informality, concocting small businesses, for example, that help keep them alive. The poor may be the central subjects of social transformation, but, since they are outside most formal organizations in civil society, they will probably never be the major protagonists of social transformation.

### **8. Devolution of public services to local government**

Governance in Africa originated with the Africanization of the colonial governments which were controlled by political elites and tended to provide the best services to the urban middle classes. The masses of the rural poor and their extension into the informal settlements in the city have very limited access to services of education, health, technical training, and police protection. Access to services still depends very much on the system of political patronage controlled at the center of political power and demanding personal support of that power in return for favors. Virtually all analyses of improvement of governance in Africa have recommended some form of devolution of services to the local level (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004).

Yash Pal Ghai (2011, p. 119), one of the major authors of the new constitution of Kenya, states a series of the main objectives of devolution which represent major objectives of social transformation.

- To promote democratic and accountable exercise of power.
- To ensure equitable sharing of national and local resources.
- To protect and promote the interests and rights of minorities and marginalized communities.
- To promote easily accessible services throughout the country.
- Promote the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development.

The actual implementation of devolved government will depend very much on how local communities organize to demand the services that the county governments are established to provide.

### **What are the forces promoting these forms of social transformation?**

In this review of African history certain factors or influences stand out as important in the move toward social transformation. The list could, perhaps, be much longer and, although they are listed in order, it is difficult to argue that what is first in the list is the most important. Each has its importance and interacts with other factors: (1) outstanding political leaders with a vision of institutional organization that produces the common good, the widespread realization of human rights and societal productivity; (2) the dominance and society-wide influence of a culture of justice; (3) the leaders and trainers for organizational capacity; (4) The courage and skills for advocacy; (5) the willingness to work for justice and public welfare; and (6) the visionary leadership of great thinkers, poets, novelists, philosophers.

How these 'forces' have actually worked in social transformation is the subject of further articles.

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