The Factor of Knowledge Implementation and the Development Status of Sub-Saharan African Countries

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Abstract

Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries have generally remained relatively poor for many decades, despite various internal and external measures. Every year, African governments conceive and implement poverty reduction and eradication policies, and multi-lateral agencies and developed countries provide development assistance to enable SSA countries achieve their development goals. This article utilises systems theory to advance the thesis that sub-Saharan countries' failure to develop is, to a significant extent, a consequence of poor knowledge utilisation. The significance of knowledge utilisation arises from the fact that in modern society, differentiation is pronounced and each sphere requires special knowledge for optimal outcomes. However, in sub-Saharan countries, knowledge is largely utilised to secure the vulgar goals of the political elite. When knowledge is perceived to require policies that are in disharmony with those goals, it is not utilised. This paper demonstrates that the selective under-utilisation of knowledge accounts for the failure of sub-Saharan countries to realise their development goals. The analysis concludes that while in his *Social Systems* Niklas Luhmann conceived society to be a constituent of systems and sub-systems that work to enable it to maintain and renew itself, in SSA countries dysfunctional political systems impede the process of self-maintenance and self-renewal. As such, Sub-Saharan states must re-orient to utilise knowledge correctly.

Keywords

Knowledge, modern society, differentiation, political elite, development

Introduction

Since the time when they were drawn into modernity, Sub-Saharan African countries have initiated socio-economic and institutional processes to reduce poverty and realise sustainable development. Several studies have concluded that some of these countries have scored better than others in this respect. Thus, Belay Begashaw (2019) observes that there are "countries that are on track and those that lag behind" in the process of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Andreassen *et al*. (2016) found that "although global poverty has declined significantly over the past two decades and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has not been achieved in Africa, in particular sub-Sahara did not meet the target." Indeed, after considering the prevalence of undernourishment and malnutrition in children leading to stunted growth, Otekunrin *et al*. (2020) concluded that Africa cannot meet the Sustainable Development Goal 2 by 2030. It is worth noting that Sen (2000, 2) conceives development to include "being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity, and premature death." Otekunrin *et al*. (2021) observe that African countries are bedevilled by a myriad of challenges which have been aggravated by the ravages occasioned by COVID-19. Witon (2015) concluded that there is no significant socio-economic difference between various sub-regions of the continent. Quite clearly, most researchers find that sub-Saharan African countries have continually failed to meet their development targets.

Research on the root cause of the failure of SSA countries to meet their development targets points to various factors. Sachs and Warner (1997) concluded that SSA's stagnation and, in some cases, retrogression, is a result of poor macro-economic policies, low openness to international trade, and various geographical factors. On the other hand, Kraay and Raddatz (2007) attribute SSA's failure to develop to low levels of savings and low technological development. In a nutshell, the factors that are identified as causal to SSA's inability to achieve national development goals, MDGs and SDGs are multiple: low levels of human capital (Collier and Gunning 1998; Boccanfuso, Savard and Savy 2009); political

instability (Fosu 1992; Gyimah-Brempong and Traynor 1999); heavy national debts (Elbadawi, Ndulu and Ndung'u 1997); social norms (Platteau 2009); and inadequate foreign direct investment (Lumbila 2005; Adams 2009; Baita and Suleiman 2021). While fully aware of studies that question the significance of these factors, our analysis presumes that in various ways and to various degrees these factors are causal to the failure of SSA countries to achieve significant and sustainable development. However, these and other studies do not adequately consider the significance of the knowledge factor.

Each of the cited causal factors above is open to various solutions effected through relevant expertise. Indeed, at every level of existence, human beings need expertise to navigate straits, surmount obstacles, and generate values that are essential to their existence. Necessity for expertise is most acute in modern society because of secularisation (Sartre 1956). Secular people have no fixed notions and patterns of lives, because the patterns of conduct, consumption and livelihoods that they choose require diverse expertise, unlike in the pre-modern world where notions and patterns of life were decreed and fixed. These are the consequences of what Sartre (1956) conceives as "his [God's] absence". Moreover, the necessity of expertise arises from the complexity of modern realities such as capital, Foreign Direct Investment, international markets, and requisite human and social capital (Hynes 2017), hence the assertion of Ramos (2017) that "reconciling the economy with nature and society" requires constant improvement of "analytical frameworks, policy tools and models." In the same vein, Madavo (2004, p. xii) asserts: "Getting the macroeconomic context right remains the essential first step in focusing on skills development." These assertions apply with respect to each of the many spheres that modernisation bifurcates - law, health, environment, education, technology, among others. Within this bifurcated world, when human beings make improper use of knowledge, and when societies operate with distorted valuations of expertise, the consequences are dire.

Our analysis uses systems theory to examine sub-Saharan African countries' knowledge-systems and functions. Talcott Parsons (1951) conceives societies as being akin to biological organisms in manifesting four functions: adaptation, goal attainment, pattern maintenance, and integration. As functional prerequisites,

these subsystems are essential to a society functioning as a whole. On the other hand, Niklas Luhmann conceives the modern society as a system characterised by functional differentiation and elements, each of which is "an action in action system" (Luhmann 1984, 22). The specificity of actions that systems require entails expertise: the sphere of knowledge entails the teacher, the sphere of inquiry entails the researcher, the sphere of law entails the jurist, the sphere of society entails the sociologist, the sphere of economics entails the economist, and the sphere of health entails the doctor, just to name a few. Each sphere is further differentiated into various specialisations. However, systems theory conceives the subsystems as functioning auto-catalytically to ensure the maintenance and renewal of the system as a whole.

It is productive to conceive the challenges of sub-Saharan African countries in the 21st century in terms of the spheres into which human beings enter under particular circumstances (Schwanitz 1995, 145), to identify the requisite knowledge for ensuring the optimal operation of and in each sphere, and to evaluate how knowledge ought to and is actually deployed. Since knowledge use, whether at system or at subsystem level (i.e. state or organisational) is goal-driven, we utilise Francis Bacon's distinctions among three species and degrees of ambition. Bacon (2000, 100) asserts that there are human beings who preoccupy themselves with increasing their power, and these he argued are "vulgar and degenerate". The second category consists of those who pursue the expansion of their country's power over others. In his view, this calibre of human ambition is dignified but tainted by cupidity. The third category of ambition describes human beings who invest in increasing humanity's control over nature. Bacon conceives of this ambition as more sound and more noble than the other two.

Bacon's delineation of human ambitions provides a basis for considering the goals, strategies and attitudes of the political elite in modern society. While the modern state is defined by democratic processes of state formation and operation, and by fundamental freedoms and human rights, whereby the latter aspects entail the rule of law and the autonomy of the various spheres, "vulgar and degenerate" ambition is not excluded or precluded. Nor does the apparent triumph of liberal

democracy over other modes of socio-political dispensation exclude or preclude this ambition from our globe.

We have divided this paper into four main sections. In the next section, we evaluate the normative output of experts in human civilisation. Thereafter, we present various instances of experts' role in education, socio-economic and political spheres in sub-Saharan states. That is followed by a section in which we advance the thesis that in these states, expert output is either utilised as a source of manipulation or is scarcely valued, and, as a consequence of this unique valuation, SSA countries fail to achieve their development goals. Finally, we present our conclusions and recommendations. Our key conclusion is that the distorted valuation of expertise is a crucial factor that accounts for the failure of sub-Saharan states to realise their development goals, including meeting the MDGs and SDGs. Our primary recommendation is that Sub-Saharan countries be re-oriented to properly value expertise in order to achieve their development goals.

The normative output of experts in human civilisation

Expert output ought to be evidence-based, as objective as possible, and justifiable. Thus, even though experts are inevitably encumbered by specific values and goals, they ought to faithfully adhere to the dictates of their science or discipline in order to minimise bias. In focusing on the normative output of experts, we are cognizant of the fact that in reality there are many instances in which experts do not observe the norm or, even worse, when they serve immoral projects (Bacon 2000) or appear to do so on a grand scale (Habermas 1971; Foucault 1977). Nevertheless, the development of every discipline involves striving to minimise bias by refining research instruments and developing precise concepts.

Therefore, the normative output of the experts is not jeopardised by the "complexity of the issue nor by lack of consensus by the experts" (Spruijt *et al.* 2014, 16). Rather, the normativity of experts' output is largely a factor of their fidelity to their methods of inquiry and the instrumental value of the solutions that they propose to policy-makers. The normative output of experts is evident in policies that enable states to realise economic development and equity, socio-

political stability, cleaner environment, holistic education programs, affordable housing and healthcare, safer working environments, and fair disparities in incomes.

Thus, the capability approach of Amartya Sen (1999) enabled the UNDP and most of humanity to shift from using GDP to calculate development to using a number of human capabilities; Jeremy Hurst and Luigi Siciliani (2006) offered recommendations to shorten the waiting period for elective surgery; Eleanor Roosevelt, Peng chun Chang, Rene Cassin, Alexander Bogomolov, Charles Habib Maliki and many others started off humanity on the journey of self-discovery through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and, today, Joseph Stiglitz and Hamid Rashid (2020, 1) warn developing countries and their creditors that a debt catastrophe could unravel if extraordinary measures are not put in place. These and other similar expert global initiatives will enable humanity to be more secure and to flourish better in the future.

At national, community and individual levels, expertise has secured important aspects and provided remedies to maladies. Indeed, the nature of modern societies is such that every sphere is managed by respective experts who liaise with their counterparts from academia and non-governmental research institutions. At the level of institutions, expertise is a crucial component for enabling an entity to be functional and to avoid crises — which could lead to the death of an institution or organisation.

Governments ought to rely on experts to function, deliver on their mandates to the electorate, and fulfil their international obligations. The normative output of experts is their best interpretation of reality, and, when the reality is inconsistent with the national good, to prescribe remedial measures. However, in some situations, the crux of the matter is so complex that it is difficult for experts to define it and achieve consensus on the solutions. Churchman (1967) and Rittel and Webber (1973) refer to these kinds of problems as “wicked problems”. Included among problems that fall in this category are justice, public policy, constitution-making, epidemics, and environmental management. How wicked problems, and other calibres of problems, are ultimately solved *ought* to be

determined by the output of experts. In the next section, we present some problems and experts' outputs towards resolving them in sub-Saharan Africa.

Experts' output in sub-Saharan Africa

Like everywhere else in the world, in sub-Saharan Africa, experts contribute to progress through research institutions and organisations, commissions of inquiry, international-funded research initiatives, and individual-driven initiatives. Below we sample some of these contributions.

Some of the research institutions and organisations that have been active in SSA include the Africa Growth Initiative, African Economic Research Consortium, and Africa Policy Institute, among others. Besides these, universities in SSA are made of research units, variously referred to as institutes and departments. These various outfits undertake research funded by universities, government, and international institutions such as IMF, World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP, and foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Swedish International development Cooperation Agency, Japan International Cooperation Agency, and many others.

On the other hand, commissions of inquiry are constituted, mandated and funded by governments to inquire into issues that stand out as indeterminate with respect to their genesis, nature or ramifications, and to present findings, and, where necessary, make recommendations. Where recommendations are made, a government has an obligation to ensure their implementation. Even when there are no recommendations, by virtue of the fact that such commissions involve expenditure of public resources, governments ought to utilise their findings.

There is no doubt that experts' outputs are critical to the formulation of policies and strategies that are sound, adequate, and relevant to tackling various challenges that bedevil human beings. Thus, processes of reforming institutions and systems of education, justice and correction, transportation, healthcare, legislation, finance, property ownership and transfer, and the economy broadly construed, have at various moments been carried out on the basis of recommendations of researchers

and commissions of inquiry. Irrespective of whether the problems or issues are wicked (Rittel and Webber 1973), ill-structured (Dunn 1988) or intractable (Eeten 2001), experts have over the years provided insights and recommendations that have enabled some governments and institutions to deal with problems more effectively and efficiently than others (Weaver 1953, 11-15).

At the regional level, annual research and reports by the Africa Growth Initiative offer plenty of valuable insights and recommendations. For example, Brahima Coulibaly asserts that despite "the continent's vast endowment of natural resources, inefficient management of those resources has prevented Africa from capitalising on them, and addressing issues of weak governance in the sector will raise additional domestic resources" (Coulibaly 2019, 19). Belay Begashaw observes that "While progress in some areas and countries is encouraging, overall, the region will need to redouble efforts if it is to achieve SDGs by 2030" (Begashaw 2019, 9). Begashaw draws the attention of the continent's policymakers to the SDG Index and Dashboard, and highlights countries that are on track and those that lag behind, as well as crucial insights that leaders and policymakers can draw from, for example, Rwanda's success. One year into the pandemic, experts from the Africa Growth Initiative focused on diagnosing the challenges that sub-Saharan countries faced from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the obstacles that they had to overcome in the resultant economic downturn. Leke (2020) argues that "Africa's revival depends on sufficient economic policy response, access to sufficient and affordable financing to recover from estimated 3 to 5.4 percent contraction of GDP, and strengthened policies for creating jobs." He concludes that in view of the likelihood that SSA countries will "face a financing gap of about $290 billion", governments need to review their budgets, reallocate finances "to high-priority areas, deliver more cost-effective procurement, and reduce fraud" (Leke 2020, 4).

There is no doubt that the problems triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic are wicked. Yet , no matter how wicked a problem may be, it is necessary to evaluate the responses that various actors deploy to address it. Ideally, in the formulation of their responses, governments ought to consider the recommendations of experts.

Aside from studies such as those coming out of the AGI, governments occasionally constitute commissions of inquiry. For example, over the years, the government of Kenya has constituted commissions of inquiry to investigate various matters. Among the notable commissions in Kenya's post-independence era are the Ndung'u Commission, the Akiwumi Commission, the Gicheru Commission and the Goldenberg Commission. Besides, in the aftermath of the 2007 post-election crisis, the government, through the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Act (Republic of Kenya 2008), established the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) to provide redress for socio-economic violations in the post-independence era, to establish an accurate, complete and historical record of human rights violations, and to recommend prosecutions of perpetrators of human rights violations. In other words, the TJRC was mandated to provide a roadmap for delivering justice to the citizens of Kenya. The work of the Commission was also intended to culminate in healing and reconciliation of the nation through truth-telling in public fora by perpetrators of violence and their victims. Moreover, the commission was charged with the task of investigating grand corruption.

In its final submission, the TJRC recommended that the ministry responsible for land and the National Land Commission formulate and implement a ceiling on land acreage; design means of recovering illegally acquired land; restitution to communities in the Rift Valley and Coast regions that had lost land; reparations for victims of human rights violations such as citizens who had suffered detention and torture (Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission 2013).

Pertinent to the thesis of this paper is the fact that the TJRC, like other commissions, consisted of experts from various disciplines and with diverse experience - a professor of law, a judge, advocates, former envoys, and peace and conflict experts. These experts traversed the length and breadth of Kenya holding public hearings. The commission submitted its findings and recommendations in 2014, just as the various experts in the AGI project submitted their findings and recommendations for the African continent as a whole, as well as for specific regions and countries.

How have sub-Saharan countries utilised the findings and recommendations of the AGI experts and other experts domiciled in outfits such as African Economic Research Consortium and Institute of Policy Analysis and Research? For example, did the government of Kenya implement the findings and recommendations of the TJRC? If so, to what extent and why? More importantly, is the uptake of the findings and recommendations of the TJRC by the Government of Kenya typical or atypical of SSA governments' uptake of commissions' findings and recommendations? What are the implications of determining the latter question one way or the other? We next focus on these questions.

Knowledge utilisation and human ambition in sub-Saharan African countries

How the findings of scholarly research and public inquiries are utilised is not a new question. In his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Karl Marx posed it thus: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx 1976, 65). In contemporary times, it can be posed as follows: "whether fiscal policy works in practice … depends on the implementation capacity in the public service; a project with a potentially high social rate of return may not deliver the expected benefits if the public management system is weak" (Canagarajah 2013, n.p.).

In considering knowledge utilisation using Bacon's typologies of human ambitions, it is reasonable to assert that Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach stops short of asserting the critical point, namely, how to change the world. It is probable that the knowledge generated through scholarly research and/or public inquiry is utilised selectively to advance personal power, or to increase a country's power over other countries or, better, to improve the wellbeing of humanity in a country and beyond. Consequently, Canagarajah's conditional, namely, the strength of a public management system, is only one of the conditionals.

It would appear that in sub-Saharan countries, the output of research institutions and commissions of inquiry are largely utilised to advance the interests of the political elite. To that end, the findings are locked away, or are implemented only

in line with the interests of the elite that could be in harmony with the interests of the country as a whole, one sector of the country, or totally in discord with the interests of the country. Moreover, a critical consideration of the possible alignment of elite interests with regional or ethnic interests could show that in the long-run, the interests of the nation as a whole are undermined. Thus, despite research showing that states that are on course to attaining SDGs have demonstrated commitment to good governance, accountability and zero-tolerance to corruption (Begashaw 2020), most African political leaders engage in lackluster and obstructive implementation of measures that would enable their countries to realise the SDGs (Alemazung 2011; Dartey-Baah 2014).

For example, while the mandate and recommendations of Kenya's TJRC included restorative, commutative, retributive and distributive justice, the government has not implemented its recommendations, nor has it put in place measures to prevent recurrence of widespread human rights violations. It is also worth noting that the TJRC's mandate to investigate grand corruption did not yield any tangible results, partly because the commission was constituted to fail. Once again, the phenomenon of political elites' vulgar ambitions manifested itself in the reluctance of some of those culpable to appear before the commission, and of others threatening harm to commissioners. The lackluster implementation of their report is, therefore, not surprising. The government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Justice, ensured that the Commission did not promptly access financial resources, and when it did, the supplied financial resources were far below its budgetary needs (Slye 2018). Moreover, government institutions bluntly refused to avail to the Commission crucial documents for reconstructing accurate accounts of violations of rights (Slye 2018, p.xv). The fact that the TJRC did not realise national reconciliation and healing, and neither did it secure justice for victims of historical injustices is a clear case of a nation undertaking an inquiry which disaffirms the conclusion of Jones and Williams (1998) that research and knowledge should be utilised for long-term growth. It is a case of a national project derailed by vulgar ambitions of political elites.

A more or less similar fate befell Uganda's Commission of Inquiry into Violation of Human Rights in 1986, as well as the DRC's *Commission de Verité et de la*

Réconciliation in 2003. With respect to Uganda's Commission, "it was endowed with neither proper funding nor political support" (Quinn 2004, 414). Similarly, though indirectly, political support for the transitional justice process was wanting in the constituting of the DRC's *Commission de Verité et de la Réconciliation*. A government signals its commitment to a process of inquiry through the calibre of experts that it appoints. In the case of Kenya's TJRC and DRC's *Commission de Verité et de la Réconciliation*, the signal was unclear from the start. The bottomline in these and other cases in SSA is that governments have a propensity to assemble experts only in order to navigate political straits, as they use such constituted bodies of experts to feign commitment to aspirations espoused by the citizenry. In South Africa, Jacob Zuma's government was acting this role when it set up the Farlam Commission of Inquiry and the Serite Commission of Inquiry. That being said, it is not the case that in sub-Saharan countries knowledge utilisation is invariably undermined by the vulgar ambition of the political elite: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Zondo Commission, and, with some qualification, Rwanda's "five process transitional justice" (United Nations 2010) indicate the contrary.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission took its mandate seriously, and, to a large extent, fulfilled its mandate. Under the leadership of Desmond Tutu, the Commission summoned both violators of human rights and their victims to public hearings, and facilitated processes of truth-telling to memorialise the traumatic experiences of South Africans under the many decades of apartheid rule (Garkawe 2003). The South African TRC stands out as a case of ambition that served to advance the well-being of humanity through steadfast impartiality. The Commission achieved a commendable degree of truth-telling, public expression of remorse, and cathartic remembering of painful pasts. While it is difficult to measure reconciliation, and taking into account the long history of deep and widespread divisions in South Africa, it is fair to say that the South African government under the leadership of Nelson Mandela neither turned the commissioners into chasers of their own tails, nor used them to serve vulgar ambitions.

The South African Zondo Commission of Inquiry was established following expressions of grave national concern and investigations into the conduct of members of the Gupta family and their enterprises with relations to Jacob Zuma, the then President of the Republic, his family, members of his cabinet, and other members of the government (Zondo 2022; February 2019, 2). Pertinent to the thesis of this paper is that in stark contrast to Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the Zondo Commission of Inquiry started off properly by listening to a presentation on the meaning of state capture and its various manifestations and consequences (Hellman and Kaufmann 2018; Zondo 2022).

Hellman and Kaufmann developed the concept of state capture from Stigler (1971), who conceived of the idea of regulatory capture, and used it in studying states in transition. Their presentation gave the Zondo Commission of Inquiry both a strong theoretical grounding and a sense of urgency. Moreover, in contradistinction to the practice of most political parties in power in sub-Saharan countries, neither the African National Congress (ANC) nor Cyril Ramaphosa's government intimidated or covertly harmed witnesses.

Furthermore, when South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, defied summons to appear before the Zondo Commission of Inquiry in early 2021, he was charged for contempt in the South African Supreme Court. Nevertheless, while the conduct of the Zondo commission counters our thesis that sub-Saharan countries underutilise or selectively use knowledge, Mr. Zumas' response that his imprisonment could lead to a crisis in the judiciary (Ferreira 2021) confirms it.

On the other hand, the conduct of the Rwandan government in managing the post-conflict era has elicited varied assessments. Loyle (2017, 665) argues that "Rwanda offers broader lessons about the political use of transitional justice following armed conflict and political transitions." Clark (2010) passes judgment on the specific usage of transitional justice in Rwanda. She argues that "the premise on which both the commission (National Unity and Reconciliation Commission) and the government's broader national unity and reconciliation are based is critically flawed" (Clark 2010, 138), because it glosses over ethnicity,

whereas reconciliation must recognise the ethnicities of both the perpetrators and victims of the genocide. Clark argues that this flaw is compounded by the fact that the Rwandan Patriotic Front government does not countenance indictment of any of its members. Besides, it has been argued that the scholars and international donors who endorse Rwanda's *gacaca* institutional processes as alternative mechanisms to international human rights law and institutions fail to perceive the traditional power dynamics that structure and constrain the conduct of victims and alleged perpetrators of human rights violations when they appear before the *gacaca* courts (Thomson 2022, 373).

However, while acknowledging the shortcomings in Rwanda's use of traditional justice mechanisms alongside international legal mechanisms, Beswick (2017, 238) argues that Rwanda is a good example of a country that has successfully managed its transition from conflict. She backs up her claim by pointing to Rwanda's socio-economic stability and gains, its attractiveness to donors and foreign direct investments, and its political stability and regularisation of competitive politics through periodic elections.

In any case, by virtue of the fact that Rwanda's political leadership is meticulously and consistently committed to the policy of creating a strong national identity and promoting social reconstruction, and granted Begashaw's finding that Rwanda is among the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa that are on course to realising the SDGs, it follows — despite the flaws and lingering questions, and the reality of constricted democratic space (which nearly makes nonsense of any claim of Rwanda being a democracy) — that Rwanda has fairly utilised the output of experts. Indeed, considering the magnitude of the Rwandan genocide, simultaneously ensuring positive rather than negative peace and providing for sustainable socio-economic progress is a complex problem.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates the conjunction of countries' development with their governments' use and/or abuse of knowledge. This affirms the thesis of Dunn (2017, 1) that "Analysts seem to fail more often because they solve the wrong problem than because they get the wrong solution to the right problem." Given that in many SSA countries the problems to be solved by experts are

identified and in some instances are defined by political leaders, it is no wonder that analysts appear to fail, and SSA countries rarely achieve their development goals. Not only do political leaders define the scope of the experts' undertaking, but also determine what is implemented and how far it is implemented. For example, the Kenyan government exerted "overt political pressure to amend the Commission's [Kenya's TJRC's] conclusions (Schaack 2019, 673). The experts' diagnosis and prescriptions on the land question were circumscribed by the vulgar ambitions of the political elite.

Furthermore, as Slye (2017, 6) observes, while political leaders and some analysts might be tempted to take the position that justice and national cohesion and unity are mutually exclusive, in the long-term they are more than mutually inclusive. Indeed, if a country is to go beyond negative peace and to achieve positive peace, it must address the root causes of conflict (Galtung 1990), and in SSA the root cause of most conflicts is injustice. Barkenbus (1998, 2) argues that in order to understand how the rational options are shirked for irrational options, it is important to pay attention to the various phases of decision-making and the fact that the political players in processes of decision-making mostly keep their sights on elections and their individual survival, rather than on the long term and broad interests of their nations. This is all the more so in sub-Saharan countries where conceptions of long term and broad interests of nations are merely expedient.

The potentially fruitful conjunction of knowledge utilisation with human ambition is also demonstrated by the fact that political leadership that authentically and consistently prioritises the common good is mostly guided by the output of experts, and their policies can have significant impact — if the policy implementation is not undermined by the vagaries of politics (Hudson *et al*. 2019, 4). Unfortunately, in sub-Saharan countries, developmental, educational, and even constitutional projects are most of the time tied to the tenure of specific regimes. For this reason, at almost every instance of regime change, SSA countries are subjected to plebiscites and policy transitions. The worst instances of the conjunction between knowledge utilisation and social well-being arise in instances when governments employ experts to provide them with the rationale for borrowing billions of dollars under the guise of undertaking development projects

such as the amelioration of the plight of the poor, farmers, victims of catastrophes, or access to health care and education, while the political elites' true motive is to augment their own private accounts (Coulibaly *et al*. 2019). While the failure to exercise fiscal discipline in implementation of projects is rarely absolute (McConnel 2015; Hudson *et al*. 2019), significant failure sets up countries for stagnation. A typical example of this kind of misuse of knowledge is the Kenyan government's borrowing from the international financial markets through sovereign bonds, its subsequent failure to account for a huge fraction of those funds, and the unabashed return of the government to those markets for more funding.

Moreover, the establishment and operation of commissions of inquiries involves use of public resources, even when those resources are grudgingly dispensed. Therefore, a government ought to implement, or at least set "out how it [government] plans to take the recommendations forward" (Norris and Shepheard 2017, 23). Each commission of inquiry that does not yield a significant outcome is a violation of the rights of citizens, because public finances are used to no purpose. There are many instances of such wastage in sub-Saharan countries. The fact that commissioners are invariably rewarded with higher appointments strengthens the thesis that in some SSA countries, experts and governments are engaged in wasteful motions, or that experts are mere instruments that political elites deploy for their vulgar ambitions.

Conclusion

Instances of vulgar ambition among the political elite undermines the proper utilisation of knowledge. In sub-Saharan countries, the topsy-turvy political terrain contributes to the untrammelled pursuit of vulgar ambitions rather than the noble ambition of ensuring the successful implementation of projects for the national good. Since the political elite uses knowledge selectively, ignores research findings and recommendations, critical aspects of development such as health, justice, the economy, education and security are poorly developed and haphazardly managed. This explains sub-Saharan countries' failure to attain national development goals, MDGs and SDGs.

In this paper, we have demonstrated that sub-Saharan countries fail to attain their goals due to the non-utilisation, underutilisation or selective utilisation of knowledge, arising from the vulgar ambitions of the political elite and government bureaucrats. We have also argued that sub-Saharan countries that utilise knowledge normatively and pragmatically achieve development goals. This has been the case, to some extent, with Rwanda under the leadership of Paul Kagame, and with South Africa under the leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa. If sub-Saharan countries are to attain their development goals, MDGs and SDGs, they must shift from deploying knowledge to serve vulgar ambitions to the normative utilisation of knowledge. Furthermore, sub-Saharan countries' development partners should emphasise the full utilisation of research and inquiry findings.

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