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**Topic: Stabilizing Democracy In The Commonwealth of Nations.**

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“ Let me teach you how to eat my fufu, wear my fugu and dance my agbadza, while you teach me, how to skate your ice, wear your kilt and drink your beer” ~ **Paa Kwesi Inkumsah.**

There cannot be a better time and place to discuss this all important topic than now and here, for indeed, the commonwealth has come of age since it was established.

History and geography are key to understanding difficulties in dealing with the factors of stabilizing democracy in anywhere around the world.

The commonwealth as a collective institution has relationships that have numerous bilateral links and related priorities that each member has inherited. Great Britain, for example, has links with their former colonies and mandates.

**What's Common In The Commonwealth of Nations?**

First and foremost, the commonality of the commonwealth, that it's a worldwide association of nations and their dependencies, whose members share a common commitment to promoting human rights, democracy, and economic development with member nations accepting the British monarch as the symbolic head of the Commonwealth, is not debatable. The commonwealth was formerly

known as the British Commonwealth of Nations, but today is referred to simply as the Commonwealth.

There are 54 independent nations and more than 20 dependencies that make up the commonwealth.

Commonwealth members share many customs and traditions as a result of their association with Britain.

Many have parliamentary systems of government on the British model, and their judicial and educational institutions are often similar to those in Britain.

English is an official language of many members of the commonwealth. Since 1977 the second Monday in March has been celebrated as commonwealth day; on that day the British monarch, as the head of the commonwealth, presents an annual message to all member countries<sup>1</sup>.

Nations and societies are embracing free and equal representation in the affairs of governance and leadership. More importantly many member nations of the commonwealth are fully practicing democracy in its experimental learning process.

Scientifically, since democracy is about humans and the human behavior is both dynamic and unpredictable characterized by changes in thoughts and actions dependent on geographical

location, historical antecedent, and resourcefulness, hence the need to stabilize the system upon which free and equal representation of the people is built upon cannot be underestimated.

In the words of former American President Jimmy Carter, *"Democracy is like the experience of life itself - always changing, infinite in its variety, sometimes turbulent and all the more valuable for having been tested for adversity."*<sup>2</sup>.

Hence, as member nations of the commonwealth become stronger and more democratic as seen in the 21st Century, this process could be tagged as a **"four-legged stool"** where government is one leg; a free market economy is the other, civil society is the third, and globalization it's fourth. To put it more succinctly, you can't make progress and have stability of democracy unless all four are working together, sharing equal responsibility for success.

Government and the governance structure are common in the commonwealth nations. Government as political organization comprising the individuals and institutions authorized to formulate public policies and conduct affairs of state.

Governments of the commonwealth member nations are sovereign and independent empowered to establish and regulate the interrelationships of the people within their territorial confines, the relations of the people with the community as a whole, and the

dealings of the community with other political entities. In the theory of political science, the function of government is to secure the common welfare of the members of the social aggregate over which it exercises control.

Among more civilized peoples, governments assumed institutional forms; they rested on defined legal bases, imposing penalties on violators of the law and using force to establish themselves and discharge their functions. Government and good governance are inseparable twins for stabilizing democracy.

More fundamentally is the issue of human rights, since the human is the central focus of government, good governance and democracy. In the lights of the above, human rights are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being. These entitlements are to be protected and promoted by government for its people.

Human rights were henceforth seen as elementary preconditions for an existence worthy of human dignity. These protection and promotion of human rights should be the cornerstone of every member nations of the commonwealth if really the ultimate is to stabilize democracy. The moment fundamental human rights in any democracy is trampled be assured that such a democracy cannot enjoy democratic stability.

“The main duties deriving from human rights fall on states (governments) and their authorities or agents, not on individuals. One important implication of these characteristics is that human rights must themselves be protected by law (‘the rule of law’). Again, its government(s) responsibility to ensure all of these, any disputes about these rights should be submitted for adjudication through a competent, impartial and independent tribunal, applying procedures which ensure full equality and fairness to all the parties, and determining the question in accordance with clear, specific and pre-existing laws, known to the public and openly declared”<sup>3</sup>.

Free market economy that is all inclusive in the commonwealth should and must be seen to be complimented by the governments of member nations. “Free-Market Economy, economic system in which individuals, rather than government, make the majority of decisions regarding economic activities and transactions. Individuals are free to make economic decisions concerning their employment, how to use or accumulate capital, what expenditures to make, and whether to use their resources now or to save them for later consumption.

The principles underlying free-market economies are based on laissez-faire (non-intervention by government) economics and can be traced to the 18th-century Scottish economist Adam Smith. According to Smith, individuals acting in their own economic self-

interest will maximize the economic situation of society as a whole, as if guided by an “invisible hand.”<sup>4</sup>.

More critically, civil society as the third of the four legged stool in ensuring stability of democracy we concentrate mainly on the non-governmental dimension that is so crucial to creating and consolidating strong and prosperous democratic states especially at a time when ethnic strife and turmoil looked as if they would delay and derail political process that would usher in democracy and by extension be a force for stabilizing democracy.

There are many reasons for civil society in the commonwealth member nations to stand, be the voice of the voiceless majority, and be counted when it matters most...stabilizing democracy particularly at the times of upheavals and turmoil.

- First and foremost, civil society groups must ensure unity amongst its ranks and not be divided along selfish lines to reflect different interests – but be seen to be working together to uphold the broader universal values of freedom and democracy.
- Secondly, civil society groups must played a crucial role in helping the society to move forward, their ability to work well during demanding times when democratic principles are threatened; to seize opportunities and perform well despite many obstacles.

- Thirdly, in the member nations of the commonwealth, civil society stood for the values of pluralism and tolerance, for the rule of law and democratic elections. Playing important roles in stabilizing the society for democracy, and making sure that the election process are free, fair, and credible.
- Fourthly, helping the governments in their respective countries to govern, providing input into budgeting and budgetary systems, and most importantly as non-state actors playing the role of checks and balance to government actions and inactions.

What about globalization and the commonwealth? “Globalization has come to stay and the commonwealth nations cannot afford to be left behind. Globalization is often used to refer to economic globalization that is, integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology. In other words, globalization is also about connectivity”<sup>4</sup>.

### **Impact of globalization on Commonwealth nations:**

Globalization is the accelerating interdependence of nations in a world system linked economically through the mass media and modern information systems. Globalization refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single society.

This process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces. The forces of globalization which the commonwealth nations can take advantage of include international commerce, travel and tourism, transnational migration, the media and various high-tech information flows.

Therefore the impact of globalization are increased foreign investment, creates employment, and repatriates profits back to the commonwealth nations. Others are innovativeness in solving global problems, and emergency of democratic forms of political governance, Industrial technology has spread from the core nations of the commonwealth to developing countries especially in Africa.

Also, ICT technology is contributing to space compression, and has revolutionized communication (internet, email, teleconferencing).

### **Ingredients for stabilizing democracy in the Commonwealth**

If democratic stability must be attained and sustained in the Commonwealth of Nations, then common ingredients for stabilizing democracy must be enshrined, observed, practiced and maintained. This is not far-fetched as democracy begins with the concept that government exists to serve the people and that as the source of governmental authority; the people have the right to change the government if it does not serve them justly. The people

are sovereign. From that pivotal idea flow a number of complementary common ingredients:

- Commitment to majority rule,
- Protection of the rights of the minority,
- Acceptance of a rule of law, and
- Equality of all citizens before the law.
- Safeguarding liberties such as the free exchange of ideas and opinions,
- Freedom of religion,
- Freedom to assemble, and
- The right to be tried by a competent judicial system.

**Finally,**

Africa as a continent has the highest concentration of commonwealth member nations when compared to the other continents of the world. Over the past 20 years numerous studies have investigated the effects of economic interdependence and democracy on the likelihood of interstate conflict particularly in Africa.

This trend of economic interdependency built around consumption and not production if not checked serves as threat to stabilizing democracy in commonwealth member African nations and by extension the whole of Africa.

Using a variety of samples, measures and statistical procedures, scores of researchers report that democracies of developing nations particularly in Africa and Latin America are unstable due to weak governance structures characterized by long period of militarization of the people's psyche resulting in interference and interruption of democracy. As such, anything negative effect anywhere affects everything everywhere. More recently, evidence has mounted that economically important trade also significantly increases the prospects for peace. Recent studies, however, have challenged the presence of these direct, unconditional effects of interdependence and democracy.

Our experience as Africans in our experimentation of democracy in the last three decades clearly shows that the strength of the democratic peace, too, is conditional on economic development. Stabilizing democracy in Africa with priority attention on education, economic development and social justice is a sure way to ensuring democratic stability in the Commonwealth of Nations.

Reasons not farfetched are that Africa's progressiveness politically or socially should be anchored on favoring gradual reform, especially political reforms that extend democracy, distribute wealth more evenly, and protect the personal freedom of the individual has

interconnectivity with the rest of the commonwealth member nations and the world in general.

As Africans, our assessment of the independent and conditional influences of democracy, interdependence and economic development on the likelihood of stable democracy in commonwealth nations may not be unconditional but contingent upon the wealth of member nations.

### **What The Commonwealth MUST Do To Stabilize Democracy:**

Over the past decade the liberal peace and democratic stability of nations especially the commonwealth could be adduced to the findings that democracy and economic interdependence contribute to peace among nations has emerged as one of the strongest and most important results in the scientific study of international relations.

Observations indicate that the vast majority of past research on democratic stability in the commonwealth nations is imperfectly specified because the character of states' political institutions alone does not account for the likelihood of people's conflict. To advance further the cause of democratic stability in the commonwealth nations, there is the urgent need to:

- Encourage increased global trade (fair and equitable trade liberalization amongst member nations) and development;

- Eliminate inequality; ensure social justice along with democratic institutions.
- Every member country (nation) of the commonwealth is independent and sovereign. Hence, the need to strongly uphold certain fundamental factors built around sovereignty of member nations, strength of independence, supremacy of the law (rule of law), people as the center of governance, wealth creation for sustenance and development, justice and equity, and the spirit of shared responsibility individually and collectively could guarantee the strength and stability of democracy in and among commonwealth member nations.

In stabilizing democracy in the commonwealth nations, there is the need for all member nations to adhere to certain fundamentals as is well captured in **Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddima: an Introduction to History of the Rise and Fall of Nations**) as articulated by chapra (2006)<sup>5</sup>:

"The strength of the sovereign does not materialize except through the implementation of the Laws (observing the rule of law) and The Laws cannot be implemented except by the sovereign.

Additionally, The sovereign cannot gain strength except through the people, The people cannot be sustained except by wealth, wealth cannot be acquired except through development, and

Development cannot be attained except through justice.

Justice is the criterion by which God will evaluate mankind“, for which The sovereign is charged with the responsibility of actualizing:”.

Interpreting this advice as fundamentals of ensuring the stabilization of democracy in commonwealth nations in a multidisciplinary socio-economic and political variables, which include ***the sovereign or political authority, beliefs and rules of behaviour or the laws), people, wealth or stock of resources, development and justice, in a circular and interdependent manner, each influencing the others and in turn being influenced by them.***

The interplay of characters and characteristics, the refinement of manners and mannerism, as well and the operation of this cycle of fundamentals may take place through a chain reaction within which *political, moral, institutional, social, demographic and economic factors may interact with each other over time, which may lead to an all round development which in turn stabilize democracy.*

The Commonwealth of Nations must take into cognizance the question “**what wealth is common in the commonwealth**”?

Therefore, if democratic peace and stability in the commonwealth depends upon some member nations having developed economies, simply encouraging democracy in poor countries will fail to secure the peace and stability; instead, efforts must also be made to promote equity and economic development between and amongst member nations of the commonwealth.

### **In Conclusion:**

The idea of stability is often invoked in all parts of the world. You often hear political leaders speak about stability as well as peace, justice and all those good things .... Of course, it is a good thing to have stability, but often, it is counter-posed as the opposite to democracy, as if stability and democracy are two incompatible states.

This is an area which I hope this symposium will explore to determine that stability and democracy are not mutually exclusive, but that in fact they reinforce one another and are both needed equally if a society like the commonwealth is to make progress.

There is false stability, which is based on the idea that leaders must control any part of the society that looks as if it may be independent or where they see potential opposition.

And then there is true stability, which is much stronger since it comes out of a recognition that a state is stronger if its various constituencies

are represented and there is a consensus of many different forces working together for the good of everyone.

False stability comes out of a lack of trust of the citizens, when political leaders believe they know best what is good for the people and try to impose it by controlling the media, controlling the outcome of elections, and controlling the judicial system. But this kind of rigid control cannot ensure the stability of democracy of a country if the people's will is not represented and if that huge resource of civic activism is being undermined and restricted. The more rigid a political system gets, the weaker it will eventually become and more subject to sudden cracks and splintering.

True stability is based on a sense of trust between the various parts of a political system and society. The government trusts civil society and the citizens to support its executive decisions which are in turn informed by, carried out on behalf of, and expressed as the will of civil society and the people.

There is a partnership that lies at the base of democratic development that is the foundation of a healthy and prosperous state. And there are no short cuts to stabilization. This relationship between free market economy, civil society, government, and globalization needs time to mature and become effective.

You might hear political leaders say that they need to “impose” stability, for example, to attract foreign investment. Well this also is a false understanding of stability.

No foreign investors will feel their investments are safe in a country where there is no protection of property and assets under the rule of law, and where citizens cannot gain a fair trial under a corrupt judicial system. Corruption is more likely to thrive where there is no free press and no investigative journalists to shine the light of truth on shady deals.

Stability is based on openness and engagement with the outside world, where not only the government has relationships with other governments but civil society also engages through public diplomacy with other nongovernmental actors in the international community. This openness when explored by the commonwealth will strengthen democracy and by extension bringing factors for stabilizing democracy in the Commonwealth of Nations.

Thank You

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