EFFECTUATING LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES IN THE PROMOTION OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AMONG LIBERIANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY AND BEYOND

Leeway Dave Karngbeae[1*], Gabriel M. Kennedy[2]

[1]*Department of Secondary Education William V.S. Tubman College of Education University of Liberia, Monrovia, and Liberia E-mail:-leewaydavekarngbeae@gmail.com/karngbeaeld@ul.edu.lr Tel: +231776346355/886955234*

[2]*Department of Secondary Education William V.S. Tubman College of Education University of Liberia, Monrovia, Liberia Email: - kennedygabrielm.23@gmail.com/kennedygm@ul.edu.lr Tel. +231775677384/886955234*

[*]*Corresponding Author:-*
E-mail:- leewaydavekarngbeae@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, and even to date, disenchanted local politicians and inhabitants in rural Liberia are advocating the partitioning of their counties into two separate and autonomous entities to ensure equitable distribution of political, economic, and social benefits. It follows that such discontent usually stems from the "neglect" by senior county officials and politicians to let the affinity of national government impact the local inhabitants adequately. Consequently, there are public outcries among local politicians and their constituents. History presents on numerous instances that power-seeking individuals or leaders pursue their agenda and goals by engaging the support of organizations other than political parties (Tremblay et al., 004).

To this effect, the Johari Window Model – a reflection of four cells of interactions between the local inhabitants and county administration plays a major role to alleviate the disequilibrium. In effect, this work presents a "sine quq non" involving political, administrative, economic, and systemic governance structures exponentiated by transparency, accountability, and decentralization. The fact remains: In the Liberian political space, the major concerns of these interplays between local politicians and their constituents on the one hand, and the county officials on the other, is why Guannue (1982) and Tremblay et al. (2004) postulate politics as "who gets what, when, and how."

Overview of Local Governance

As students of Social Science, we view Local Governance as a process of providing political, administrative, and economic governance in a systemic relationship to ensure that citizens and residents who constitute the local population benefit from their resources. In effect, local governance brings together government actors and the civil society organizations for the promotion of the general welfare of society in all spheres of civilization.

Wilson (2000) propounds that local governance encompasses formal and informal relationships; the former he says constitutes the protection of human rights, rule of law, election systems and accountability. The latter he asserts, includes political culture, political parties, openness in government operations, venues for discussion of issues, and formation of informal opinions. However, Dahl (1989) contends that the existence of the two types of the formal mechanisms (taxation and accountability) may guarantee the existence of procedural democracy but may not effectively incorporate all segments of the population.

In a true sense local government provides services to citizens, but citizens have limited opportunities to influence local government, and consequently, the governance relation is ineffective (Wilson, 2000). Meanwhile, local governance characterizes decentralization or de-concentration of power from central authority to local authority, thereby enhancing fiscal conditions, especially in the light of creating opportunities for generating revenues locally. This goes without saying that relationship between citizens and government be one of trust so that improvement in the lives of the locals is felt.

As we are aware, citizenship defines the relationship between the individual and the state and the relationship among members of a community, whose rights, obligations, and identities are shaped likewise. Thus, understanding citizenship as a person's membership in an organized political community, being challenged by several different forces including globalization, nationalism, international migration, and multiculturalism require recognition by governments (Trembly et al., 2000).

As earlier mentioned, governance defines the interplay between government and the civil society at all levels aimed at improving the living standards of the people. By civil society is meant those organized segments of society outside the public sector including civil associations, community organizations, social movements, trade unions, religious organizations, whereas governmental action is broadly construed to include public sector investments, implementation of social and economic development programs, operations of governmental institutions and Judicial Systems (McCarney, Halfani and Rodriguez, 1995).

The Quest for Adequate Representation

In recognition of the foregoing discourse, experience has shown in recent decades the urgent desires of some Liberian population groups to cut off their ties with political units or sub-divisions to which they originally belong. When we listen to Radio Talk Shows or read the Print Media, some citizens and politicians are usually on record expressing desires to quit their original political ties and become independent or autonomous units. For instance, there are talks about dividing Nimba and Bong Counties into separate countries respectively due to reasons best known to citizens and politicians alike. Similarly, Gbi-Doru Chiefdom in Tappita District, Lower Nimba County is said to be deciding to join River Cess County. All the same, there might be similar desires in other parts of Liberia. But the question remains: Why—are they happy with the governance structures that run them?

Optimistic about human nature, John Locke thought that people were basically reasonable, moral and had certain natural rights which were the right to life, liberty, and property; and that people formed government with limited power to protect them (Ellis and Esler, 2011). Problems arise when these rights are not protected. Though in support of the formation of government, Thomas Hobbes in his work "The Leviathan" argued that people were naturally cruel, greedy, and selfish; and if not strictly controlled, they would fight, rob, and oppress one another. As such, he maintained that life in the state of nature would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short-lived in the absence of law.

Truth holds that the existence of a system depends upon the persistent patterns of human relationships which evolve power, rule, and authority. What are the problems with these relationships that people are aggrieved and want to detach from their current geopolitical units? McEvedy (1989), opined that the first important events in human history are the acquisition of two traits that make them different from apes—toolmaking and speech.

In support of this, an anonymous proponent observes that human is the only specie of animal that fights for something other than food and sex. These assertions in simple terms suggest human capacity to live together as organizations and

govern themselves, utilizing their knowledge, skills, and technology, the sum-total of which improves their environment and enhances communication as a single most unifying force for peaceful coexistence.

For peaceful coexistence to reign, Confucius propounds in his Philia Piety (Ellis and Esler, 2011), that it was the ruler's responsibility to provide good governance and in return the people would be respectful and loyal subjects; and that ruler should lead by example. He furthered that the values of honesty, hard work and concern for others be upheld; noting, "Do not do to others what you do not wish yourself." Another question that arises is: What is government doing to bring the local populations into the mainstream of the local governance structures in the promotion of peaceful coexistence among the diverse and varied ethnicities in Liberia?

In affirmation of Confucius' argument, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian devised a body of laws called "Juris Civilis" known as Justinian Code in which he explained the basis of the law. Reflected in Ellis and Esler (2011), the percepts of the Code were to live honestly, injure no one, and give everyone his due. Justinian elucidated that the study of the law consisted of two branches—Public and Private, the former relating to the state while the latter refers to the advantage of the individual citizens. My last question is: How can we as Liberians allude to the standards set forth in the discourse supra to contribute to the peaceful coexistence among ourselves? While I may not be writing a research paper, I am providing the platform as an academic, for interested persons who might want to conduct studies on pertinent issues that might be raised in this work.

A Framework for Peaceful Coexistence

Thus, the desire of some citizens and politicians to quit their ties with current geopolitical units stands to drive a serious socio-economic and political wedge with the potential of terminating the ties, affinity and unity among Liberians who once held together as a single unit. To this, a song writer wrote: "Blessed be the tie that bounds. Our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship be joined in hearts is like to that above (God)."

To peacefully coexist in the spirit of freedom, justice, love, and brotherhood as a people, a theoretical framework is necessary to explain the importance of our Liberian nationality with a single goal of upholding the independence, sovereignty, democracy, and integrity of Liberia.

It follows that local governance behavior therefore is assumed to be an additional behavior system formally provided by administrative agencies of government for the purpose of interacting with local populations in such a way to maintain and initiate changes that improve peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnicities in each locale (Lovell and Willes, 1983). Therefore, this conceptual framework broadens the possible sources of administrative or supervisory behavior to include not only persons within the employ of government, but also individual citizens, civil society organizations and other groups in society.

The divide in opinions that is impelling citizens and politicians alike to opt for detachment in the light of creating new political units out of the existing ones is a serious recipe for factionalizing society. To address and avert the discontentment, the process which involves cordial interaction between local administrative heads and the inhabitants needs to improve through effective communication service delivery and regular, periodic conferences.

These conferences should be about observation during which local leaders get much acquaintance with the behavior systems of citizens and residents. Similarly, the leaders' administrative behaviors are to be exposed to the inhabitants. Therefore, the behaviors of both the governors and governed can be explained in-depth by the Johari Window Theory.

The Johari Window Model is a simple useful tool for illustrating and improving self-awareness and mutual understanding between and among individual ethnic groupings within society. In working together, the Johari Window is a useful tool for understanding how the known and the unknown platform dimensions fit into administrative supervision (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1993). It depicts the relationship between two parties—local leaders and the locals. The Model, cited in Kandula (2008), is one model that can provide a complete understanding of interpersonal process and communication. The proponents of the model are Joseph Luft and Hari Ingham in 1969 and was named after them.

In the first cell (The Open Self), the inhabitants' knowledge of their practices (economic, cultural, and social) corresponds with the local administrators' knowledge. This is the area of free activity where information about the people behavior, attitudes, feelings, emotions, knowledge, experience, and skills are known to themselves and the local administrators. The administrators need to work with the people to enlarge this cell.

In the second cell (The Hidden or Secret Self), the people know about the aspects of their own behavior and practices that the local administrators do not know. The inhabitants conceal their feelings from the leaders for fear that administrators might use this knowledge to punish, hurt, marginalize, prevent, or exclude them. In good and effective governance, the citizens are encouraged to reduce the size of this cell by disclosing their hidden feelings and information. Such self-disclosure or exposure reduces the potential for confusion, misunderstanding and poor communication which undermine cooperation, teamwork, and unity.

In the third cell (The Blind Self), the local leaders know about the aspects of the inhabitants' behavior and practices which the locals themselves do not know. The Blind Self includes issues that the local leaders deliberately withhold from the inhabitants. By seeking clarification from local leaders, the size of this cell reduces and the chances for self-awareness are enhanced.

In the fourth cell (The Undiscovered Self), one finds aspects of the citizens' behavior not known to either themselves or the administrators. The unknown issues can be feelings, attitudes, abilities, capabilities, priorities, needs, etc. The size of this cell can be reduced through periodic, regular conferences, intensive teamwork, dialogues, collective discovery, etc.

As we have seen, the Johri Window Theory clearly indicates an interactive leader-citizen relationship to improve the standards of living and peaceful coexistence. Hence, in lieu of engendering adversities emanating from neglect, exclusion, prevention, or marginalization culminating into discontent and the desire to detach, our local governance operational

structures need to be effective, efficient, and sensitive to address pressing human rights issues of our time which are social, economic, cultural, and political.

Cognizant of these fundamental human values, United Nations Former Secretary-General U-Thant asserted: "The establishment of human rights provides the foundation upon which rests the political structures of human freedom; the achievement of human freedom generates the will as well as the capacity for economic and social progress; the attainment of economic and social progress forms the basis for true peace" (ABC of Teaching Human Rights, 1999).

True peace means harmonious, interactive, and mutually beneficial coexistence, the attainment of which require uncompromised and effective political, administrative, economic, and systemic governance. Perhaps, a synopsis of these spheres of governance will broaden our horizon on how we should live together as a people bond by fraternity and national unification. Humble and frank, governance is a universal phenomenon which brings the life and lifeless, tangible and intangible under the spheres of control, ensuring that humans realize the full potential of their existence and enjoyment thereof. Merriam Webster Dictionary (Since 1928) defines governance as the utilization of collective power for the management of public affairs or society – cultural, social, political, and economic.

Operational Structures of Governance

Governance is therefore inherent in all human organizations or institutions. It is continuous and dynamic. It entails the employment of knowledge, skills, education, training, expertise, and experience. In addition, traditions, motivations, needs, concerns, interests, aspirations, wishes, visions, and grievances form the propellants to which it should direct its tentacles in enhancing peaceful coexistence among inhabitants. In effect, governance is a process that takes place in a geographical setting, endowed with its own national and human resources, shaped by historical events from within and outside (Promoting Good Governance in Liberia, 2000). Tying the knot that pulls good governance to equilibrium, the key navigable core includes Political Governance, Administrative Governance, Economic Governance and Systemic Governance which are sine qua non to all governments. They are interlinked, interconnected, and intertwined. These domains of governance rely heavily on the relationships between and among three institutions of governance –i.e. The Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary, interfacing with political parties and civil society organizations (Bragdon, McCutchen and Ritchie, 1992).

According to Guannu (1982) and Tremblay et al. (2004), politics is about who gets what, when and how. And of course, my answer is "the people, their just entitlements, at the appropriate time and based on their citizenship or residency in a country. This presupposes the legitimacy of our duties and responsibilities as citizens, and government obligation to protect and safeguard our existence as a people. Henceforth, Political Governance is about the participation of individuals in decision-making processes that affect and are affected by their lives. Any attempt to prevent or exclude people on the basis party, religious, gender or ethnic line engenders discontents, dissatisfaction, disunity and above all hatred.

These political decisions relate to the issues of democracy, representation and inclusion, power-sharing, and the relationships between and among institutions of governance. "Note that when people feel under-represented and dissatisfied with political governance, they will group to discuss their dissatisfaction; and when they do group, you can predict the outcomes of these groupings" (Dwanyen, 1985).

Then, the key driver of Political Governance is Administrative Governance, without which any government is rendered a vacuum; for it is the personnel who run the system! Here comes in Administrative Governance which is concerned with the implementation of decisions and policies. It involves the institutional framework which utilizes the knowledge, skills, expertise, and experiences of the personnel involved and the resources needed to ensure the effective and efficient execution of public policies; the supplies of public services and the way they are delivered.

We are afraid, Guannue (1982) and Tremblay et al. (2004,) definition of politics still haunts the third operational structure of governance which forms the core of all human livelihood—i.e., Economic Governance. Lewinski, M. (2001), observes that economy is a system of building, using, and distributing wealth and resources. In this accord, Economic Governance entails the decision-making processes related to the allocation of resources to promote national growth, the creation of wealth, equity, and sustainable human capacity.

This requires an enabling environment within which such decisions are reached, hoping to promote collaboration and partnership between stakeholders—ie. Government, Private Sector, and relevant organizations in the Civil Society. Thus, contravening these conventions might spill down to the local populations, whose grievances will lead them to cut off ties with existing political sub-units and become autonomous, and in some cases adamant or unresponsive to government calls and regulations. There is a Spanish Colonial Latin American slogan which says, "Obedesco pero no complo—I will obey your authority but will not execute your orders" (Skidmore and Peter, 1992).

Conclusion

Consequently, to promote good governance that supports peaceful coexistence among Liberians, there must be an efficient and effective Systemic Governance System which brings together the government, private sector, and civil society in making meaningful decisions that will positively impact the lives of the people. Beware that the needs, demands, wants, wishes and aspirations of citizens and residents alike are many, varied and diverse. They range from basic needs of security to life and property; food, shelter, and clothing; means of earning a living; fundamental human rights and self-esteem; maintenance of lifestyle, the progressive improvement of the standards of living and the assurance that people will continue to effectively participate in the public or civic decision-making processes (Promoting Good Governance in Liberia, 2000).

The achievement of national unity and peaceful coexistence calls to play two popular governance clichés—i.e. Transparency and Accountability which have been twined owing to personnel's actions or inactions (what they do or fail

to do). Thus, a glance at the term transparency tells us about the availability of information on all matters related to governance processes –i.e., Duties and responsibilities of public officials and the way they are performed or delivered are known or knowable to the public or those interested. This implies that the public officials are themselves aware or should be aware of the rules that describe and prescribe their performance.

In essence, transparency represents the availability of the quality of information. For instance, the way in which they are availed or disseminated and those responsible for certain aspects of governance matter. In this case, openness and predictability characterized by the willingness of officials to engage in debates on public issues is a big score for any administration. This is because there is tolerance for public scrutiny and questioning on economic, social, and political spheres. That transparency facilitates trust, growth and confidence and enhances cooperation cannot be over-emphasized. Accountability, a close accomplice of transparency, represents a reciprocal relationship between those who govern and the governed. Here lies expectations and their executions or fulfillments. Simply put, accountability obliges officials and entrusted individuals to conduct themselves in an open fashion according to laws, rules and regulations or face disciplinary measures for their actions or inactions.

Finally, as we envisage Liberia to evolve into a federal system of government in the future, I will begin by supporting some forms of decentralization as an initial endeavor that will promote good governance. All the same, Merriam Webster (Since 1828), defines decentralization as the dispersion, distribution, devolution and delegation of powers and functions from central authority to regional and local authorities. As Beyan argues, the undemocratic or bad governance such as centralization of power in the presidency, corruption, dictatorship was introduced to Liberia by the American Colonization Society (ACS), the organization that founded Liberia in 1822 (Beyan, A. J., 1989). Any semblance of this may hinder peaceful coexistence in 21st Century Liberia and beyond. Therefore, decentralization should allow people to elicit their own interests, needs and concerns as opposed to prescriptions from central authority or politicians wanting to penetrate for their own gains. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book "The Social Contract" believed that people in their natural state were good, but that societal evils corrupted them. He held that the good of the community should be placed above individual interest; noting, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chain" (McEvedy, 1989).

References

[1].   Ministry of Education (2003) Citizenship Education Manual. Maputo, Swaziland

[2].   Ministry of Education (2004) Human Rights Education Manual for Teachers. Geneva, Switzerland: USAID

[3].   National Civic Education Master Plan for Liberia (2006-2016)

[4].   OSIWA (2017) Liberia Revenue Authority: School Tax Education Program Ambassador Manual

[5].   United Nations (1999) ABC Teaching Human Rights: Practical Activities for Primary and Secondary School. New York, USA

[6].   UNESCO (2006). UNESCO Guidelines on Language and Containing HIV-AIDS Related Materials. France: UNESCO

[7].   UNESCO /UNHCR (2005) Teachers Activities Book: Inter-Agency Panel Education Program: Skill for Constrictive Living UNESCO/UNHCR

[8].   UNDP (2000) Promoting Good Governance in Liberia Toward the Formulation of a National Framework: Monrovia, Liberia: Piccadilly House.

[9].   The Revised Liberian Constitution of 1986

[10]. Bragdom, H.W., McCutchen, S.P. and Ritchie, D.A. (1992) History of a Free World. Chicago, Illinois: Follette Educational Services

[11]. Ellis, E.G., and Esler, A. (2011) Michigan Prentice Hall World History. Glenview, Illinois: Pearson

[12]. Lewinski, M. (2001) A.G.S. World Geography. Minnesota, U.S.A: American Guidance Services

[13]. Skidmore, T.E. and Peter, H.S. (1992) Modern Latin American History (3rd Ed.). Cape Town, South Africa

[14]. Beyan, A.J. (1989) The American Colonization Society and the Origin of Undemocratic Institutions in Libera in Historical Perspectives

[15]. McEvedy (1989) World History

[16]. Dwanyen, D.G. (1985), Member, Interim National Assembly/Liberia

[17]. Guannue, J.S. (1982) Introduction to Liberian Government

[18]. Tremblay, R. C., Lecours, A., Salloukh. B., Nikolenyi, C., Scala, F. (2004) Mapping the Political Landscape: An Introduction to Political Science. U.S.A., Thompson, and Nelson

[19]. Wilson, R. H. (2000) Understanding Local Governance: An International Perspective. Sao Paulo