

Ecowas and the Fight against Sit-Tightism in West Africa: A Case Study of the Gambia-2016-2017

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Abstract

Sit-tightism is like a natural trait that runs through the blood of Africans such that once they get into political power they would not want to leave until they die in office. This paper examines the Gambian case in which the former president Yahya Jammeh refused to relinquish power after completing his tenure of office even when he was trounced in the Gambian 2016 presidential election by Adama Barrow. Gambia would have been thrown into a bloody civil war if not for the timely intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which remained resolute to prevent him from perpetuating himself in office. Employing political realism as a framework for analysis, the paper examines sit-tightism in Gambia and the strategies and tactics employed by the Economic Community of West African States to prevent it. The paper also examines the effect of this phenomenon on the development of the country. The study reveals that ECOWAS has shown the world and also sent signal to over ambitious presidents in the sub region that it is prepared to fight sit-tight leaders in the sub region. The paper recommends among other things democratic consciousness and political vigilantism among the people and an entrenched interest by non-state actors like the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) to fight sit-tight leaders in all African countries as a way of salvaging African democracy from over ambitious African presidents.

Keywords: Gambia, Sit-tightism, ECOWAS, Term limit, Yahya Jammeh

Introduction

In mid 1990s, the global wave of democratization inspired a momentum for competitive party politics in Africa and this offered a viable alternative to the seemingly troubled autocratic regimes, (Nwamakula, 2016). Thus, Africa's agenda transformed to include promotion of democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance, (AU, 2000). One of the ways of promoting democratic principles is by peaceful transition of power from one regime to the other through the constitutional instrumentality of limiting the period within which a leadership is in power before the enthronement of another leadership. The conduct of periodic election at the expiration of each regime remains a major mark of representative democracy. In view of this, every democratic dispensation is characterized by periodic succession of government and the tenure of any government is often entrenched in the provisions of the constitution usually a period of four (4) years.

Accordingly, Nwakaluma (2016) observes that limiting the tenures of the top leadership of a nation is unarguably one of the most fundamentals of democratic

principles and due to the challenge of streamlining the transition of power, the measure quickly gained prominence among African countries. In this regard, Dulani (2015) notes that forty-nine (49) of the sixty-four (64) constitutions adopted or amended between 1990 and 2010 incorporated term limits which represents three (3) quarters of the enactments. This position is further supported by a study conducted by Afro barometer between 2011-2013 among thirty-four (34) African countries which also revealed strong support for presidential term limits among three (3) quarters of the citizens of the countries surveyed, including those where term limits had been scrapped, such as Togo and Uganda, (Dulani, 2016). Yet, this constitutional provision is respected more in breach than practice.

Hence, since attainment of political independence, most countries in Africa had witnessed turbulent succession or change in government as many African presidents had tried and some had succeeded to perpetuate themselves in office at the expiration of their tenures. It is like a political culture of most African States that as soon as a president assumes office, he starts plotting and strategizing from the first day on how to perpetuate himself or sit-tight in office through unconstitutional means after his tenure of office had elapsed (John and Adriana, 2015).

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To achieve their aim, they employ such undemocratic strategies as rigging of elections, intimidation of oppositions and suppression of the press, manipulation of the constitution to suit their personal ambitions etc. This has continued to generate a lot of problems in the continent. Many Africa presidents both current and past, such as Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe; Eduardo Dos Santo of Angola, Paul Biya of Cameroon, the list can go on and on are sit-tight presidents. According to Kunuji (2016) sit-tightism in Africa has a long and troubling history which has in a very large extent faltered the concept of democracy in Africa as a continent.

It is against this backdrop that the current paper takes a critical look at sit-tightism in West Africa and the role of ECOWAS in fighting for the enthronement of sustainable democratic culture with special reference to Gambia. It tries to establish the fact that ECOWAS as a sub regional body is out to enthrone democracy and guarantee peace and stability in the entire sub region. This it did by condemning and removing Yahya Jammeh's led government when he tried to elongate his tenure of office in Gambia in 2016.

Conceptual Framework

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), was established on May 28, 1975 through the treaty of Lagos. It is a 15-member regional group with a mandate of promoting economic integration in all fields of activity of the constituting countries namely, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo. ECOWAS was set up to foster the ideal of collective self-sufficiency for its member states in areas such as industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial issues, social as well as cultural matters.

The founding fathers of ECOWAS envisioned the creation of a borderless region where the citizens of the 15 member States have the opportunity to enjoy the benefit of comparative advantage in the abundant resources available to the different States and are able to exploit same through the creation of opportunities under a sustainable environment. However, in spite of its initial objective of purely economic integration, the realities on ground convinced leaders of the member states that ECOWAS cannot but meddle into political integration as well. Seeing the need for the sub region to be governed in accordance with the principles of democracy, rule of law and good governance, strategies for achieving same were put in place.

Corroborating this fact, Hartmann, (2017), notes that ECOWAS which was initially formed to promote economic cooperation and integration in West Africa, started from

the 1990s to assume a more political role following the wave of political reforms and the growing number of protracted domestic violent conflicts in the region. Hartman (2017) equally notes that the revised ECOWAS treaty (1993) and especially the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention (1999) and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) formally enshrined the commitment of the organization to promote democracy and good governance and to adopt what was later to be called the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

To achieve this, ECOWAS created certain mechanisms and operates through protocols. Two of such protocols which are essential to the realization of this objective include the protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, peacekeeping and security as well as the Supplementary Protocol which refers to protocol A/SP1//12/01 on democracy and good governance. The Supplementary Protocol was signed in 2001 in Dakar by the Heads of State and Government of 14 of the 15 ECOWAS member States. The essence of the Supplementary Protocol is the development of a constitutional State based on rule of law, strengthening of democracy and adopting common principles of good governance within ECOWAS' 15-member States.

According to Massaër Diallo (2005), the Supplementary Protocol was developed in 2001 as an expression of a new, collective political resolve of ECOWAS' member States to take the process of preventing and resolving crises and violent conflicts forward, and to achieve peace and security through the development of democracy and good governance. The Protocol marks an important stage in the sub-region's political development which was characterized for long periods by the armed forces' deep involvement in political decision-making. As of 2001, it provides an emphatic statement of the incompatibility of democracy and good governance with military-run government and the military's involvement in politics.

The Protocol marks a turning point in ECOWAS' political construction. This regional Institution saw itself mainly in economic terms when it was founded in 1975. It complements a chapter specifically devoted to governance - the 1999 protocol which created an ECOWAS-level mechanism along with bodies responsible for dealing with issues of conflict prevention, maintaining and building peace and developing a regional security system. The Supplementary Protocol represents both a defining point and an important dimension in the regional process of building a democratic political governance framework for supporting economic and social development in West Africa, Diallo (2005).

It can be said that since its formation in 1975, ECOWAS has achieved much and going by current assessments, the regional body has exceeded the expectations of its founding fathers. Today, the organization is being acknowledged globally as a

successful regional body, a toast to a workable integration and regional co-existence, (ECOWAS, 2017). Indeed, today, ECOWAS has achieved the regional integration of States in West Africa and thus fashioned a region where the population enjoys free movement, have access to efficient education and health systems and engage in economic and commercial activities while living in dignity in an atmosphere of peace and security. Some troubled countries in the sub-region have also been assisted to come out of the woods by ECOWAS.

Sit-tightism

The term, sit-tightism like many others in social and management sciences has been bedeviled by lack of universally accepted definition. Consequently, divergent views as portrayed by scholars on its meaning are ubiquitous. However, the Oxford Advanced learners' dictionary conceptualizes it first, as the act of staying in the same situation without changing one's mind or taking any action. It further views it as the act of staying where one is rather than moving away or changing position. However, Uhara's (2013) definition is apt to our discussion in this paper. He defines sit-tightism as the willful reluctance on the part of a political leader to relinquish power. Sit-tightism occurs when an elected president refuses covertly or overtly to relinquish power at the expiration of his tenure of office. According to Wole Kunuji (2017), Sit-tightism in Africa has a long and troubling history. It is characterized by a willful reluctance on the part of political leaders to relinquish power. It is facilitated by dictatorship and oiled by brutal repression of dissent and fundamental freedoms. Such was the case in Libya under Muammar Gaddafi from 1968 to 2011. It was also the case under Mobutu Seseseko of the DRC from 1965 to 1997; Mathieu Kerekou of Benin Republic from 1972 to 2006; Felix Houphouet Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire from 1960 to 1993; and Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo from 1967 to 2005. Theodoro Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Paul Biya of Cameroon are still sitting presidents having been in power since 1979, 1980 and 1982 respectively. In all the cases mentioned above, power has been retained against the will of the citizenry, (Kunuji, 2017).

In the context of this paper, sit-tightism means a practice whereby the term limit is stated in the constitution of the affected country but the president uses some deliberate machinations to prolong or elongate his tenure of office as against constitutional provisions and popular choices. Due to the dynamic of power equation in a system of government, it is only a president who has the possibility of sit-tighting; a governor of a state or chairman of a Local Government cannot sit-tight in office for obvious reasons. The governor of a state or the chairman of a Local Government Council does not have such powers. With a projected growth rate of 7.4 percent in 2014, West Africa is the fastest growing economic region in the continent. Yet over the past five years, West Africa has

also seen armed conflicts, leaders seizing power through unconstitutional means (John and Adriana 2015). The endemic problem of sit-tight syndrome on the continent of Africa especially in West Africa as perpetuated by some of her leaders, is by no means novel. The seed was sown by her leaders of yester years and the days of yore, before the coming of the Europeans. In pre-colonial Africa for example, leaders emerged by succession of their fathers or other relatives; hence, the prevalent practice of absolute monarchy whereby the leaders had unlimited powers over the affairs of their territories.

Thus, between the 15th and 19th centuries when the Europeans came into Africa, the African leaders became what one might call accidental nationalists. These traditional nationalists opposed and fought the Europeans mainly for the lust of power, control and domination of their local domains. They never wanted to relinquish power and control or to even play a second fiddle to the Europeans in any form or manner. This trend prevailed even down to the 20th century when modern nationalists emerged, fighting the Europeans and demanding right to self determination.

Again, one might be tempted to say that most of the modern nationalists fought relentlessly for their independence because they discovered that they were the next in line to take over the reins of power should independence be granted to their various countries. By the 1980s, most of the countries in Africa got their independence from the Europeans, some through armed struggle while some like Nigeria got theirs through dialogue and constitutional means. Stepping into the administrative shoes of the Europeans and also occupying their political positions after the attainment of political independence, most of the African nationalists were not really concerned with building sound and strong institutions of democracy and good governance. Rather they preferred to bask in the euphoria of being in power and thus schemed on how to remain in office until they die. It is on this basis that we are discussing the concept of sit-tightism in Africa today.

The concept has been given diverse meanings by different scholars but in all, sit-tightism is a term which commonly refers to the elongation of tenure by a leader. Sit-tightism - a virulent antithesis of constitutionalism is still very much a significant feature of the continent's political culture. The sanctity of the ballot box is yet to be fully embraced by political actors. In short, democracy as an important element of constitutionalism is perhaps still a mirage in Africa, Wole Kunuji (2017). This phenomenon is very undemocratic and is not peculiar to Africa alone as it could be seen in some countries in Asia and Latin America.

Theoretical framework

This work is anchored on the postulations of political realism as a framework of analysis. Political realism is one of the major theories of International relations which emphasize the constraints imposed on politics by the nature of human beings, whom they consider egoistic, and by the absence of an international government to

control all members of the international community. Together, the egoistic nature of man and the absence of a world government contribute to a conflict-based paradigm of international relations, in which the key actors are states, in which power and security become the main issues, and in which there is little place for morality.

Realists make the following assumptions about the world:

Human nature is a starting point for classical political realism. Realists view human beings as inherently egoistic and self-interested to the extent that self-interest overcomes moral principles. Human beings don't do things to be nice; they do things because it serves some sort of selfish need.

- The international system is one of anarchy. It's a dog-eat-dog world where might makes right.
- The most important actors in the world are states and conflict is the natural state of relations among states.
- States act in rational ways for the purpose of serving their self-interest.
- The only check to a state's power is another state or group of states. In the anarchy of international relations, anything goes unless someone is powerful enough to stop you.
- Morality in the international system is to be treated skeptically and can be counterproductive to successful political action. The overriding goal is survival by any means, and the ends justify the means.

Political realism attempts to explain the relations among and between states in terms of power. Power is defined in various ways but in the context of international relations, **power** is basically the capability of one state or a non state actor to make another state do something it would not otherwise do or to stop it from doing something it wants to do. Distinctions are made between such Power terms as power, influence, control, coercion, force, persuasion, deterrence, inducement and so on, but it is possible to identify common elements underlying all such terms. Robert A. Dahl (1957) has suggested that underlying most such terms is the basic intuitive notion of

A causing (or having the ability to cause) B to do something that B otherwise would not do.

International politics has been defined in terms of influencing major groups in the world so as to advance the purposes of some against the opposition of others (Wright, 1955). What makes a state or non-state actor powerful in international relations is based on its ability to have both tangible and intangible characteristics. Tangible characteristics include such things as a state's or non state actor's size, geography, natural resources, economy, military, technological development and population. Intangible characteristics include things like

national will, popular support of the government and ideology.

In discussing sit-tightism and ECOWAS intervention in Gambia, 'A' refers to ECOWAS, the actor having or exercising influence; while 'B' refers to Gambia represented by Yahya Jammeh, the actor being, or potentially being, influenced.

The theory of political realism is apt in discussing ECOWAS and the fight against sit-tightism in West Africa: A case study of Gambia because what transpired in the Gambian scenario depicts *realpolitik* in action. The theory analyzes the influence of power in resolving the political debacle in the Gambia in 2016 involving the former president, Yahya Jammeh who refused to relinquish power after the expiration of his tenure of office even when all the processes had been concluded and the Gambian people whose constitution is being trampled upon. If not for the timely and resolute intervention of ECOWAS, a non-state actor in international politics, who had power occasioned by both its tangible and intangible characteristics, Jammeh would have continued in office because of his own power as the contentious president of Gambia then.

ECOWAS and Sub Regional Integration of West Africa

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional economic union of fifteen countries in West Africa formed in May 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos. It was formed for economic integration of West African countries to foster socio-economic development within the sub region by eliminating trade barriers among the member countries. The integration of West African states into the ECOWAS was largely influenced by the processes of integration in Western-Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere in Africa. The rationale was both political and economic: to promote the unity of states and foster their economic development. The process of economic integration is also a political process because of two main reasons: first, it requires the surrender of major national economic instruments to a supranational authority and second, it calls for governments of member states to implement sub-regional policies. At the same time, many West African countries wanted to ensure their political independence, Arushi Gupta (2015). States integrate for various reasons notably, socio-economic, political, cultural considerations etc. This implies that ECOWAS as a regional economic organization had been concerned with its traditional objectives of promoting the economic advancement of the West African region to accelerate economic growth, increase trade among its members by eliminating trade barriers between member states etc.

The importance of regional integration in international relations cannot be overemphasized and the 15-member countries in the West African sub region understand the implication hence, the formation of ECOWAS. The body is an eloquent testimony of their

understanding of the import of the principles of comparative advantage to socioeconomic development of nations within a region. The formation represents their determination to achieve the economic integration of the sub region and turn it into a common market through progressive elimination of all forms of restrictions and discrimination against one another of the movement of manpower, goods and services throughout the-sub region. Since the inception of ECOWAS, the regional community has been making giant strides in the area of community integrative schemes to enhance the integration of West African states. Current integration schemes includes Liberalization of regional trade, Liberalization of movement of persons, goods and services, harmonization of monetary and fiscal policies, harmonization of business law, development of transport, communications and energy networks and involvement of private sectors in the regional integration process. Factors put into consideration in all of these integration initiatives include their relevance to national economic interests of member states and contribution to the ultimate economic union goals, (Kouyate, 2013).

Opanike (2015) is of the view that when compared to other regional arrangements on the African continents, ECOWAS is arguably the most advanced, although still miles far from the achievements of its European Union counterpart. He considers the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement as very germane to the overall objective of the ECOWAS integration policies; this is so because, there cannot be any genuine integration if free movement of the community citizens who are considered as agents of integration is hampered. Thus, the Protocol is at the heart of the organizations' objective. Realizing that conflict and insecurity are major obstacles to economic development, ECOWAS developed its main conflict prevention and management frameworks and tools, namely 'the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention; Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). Together these formed the basis for the ECOWAS Conflict and Prevention Framework (John and Adriana, 2015).

Consequently, as a body interested in the promotion of economic and social development of its member states, members deemed it necessary to sign the Protocol on Non- Aggression in 1978. This was simply because of the need for peace and harmonious understanding among the states for the achievement of its main objectives. However in 1981, the Protocol relating to Mutual Assistance on Defense was signed to tackle the issues omitted by the Protocol on Non-Aggression. The Protocol on Non- Aggression specifically boards on aggression between member states while the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance goes beyond to address the internal armed conflict within its member states. It is important to note that members are collectively involved in the settlement of both external and internal conflict perceived as a threat to peace and security in the sub region. The Protocol thereby empowers the Authority

(Heads of ECOWAS) to initiate armed or collective intervention in view of their belief that threat or aggression to a fellow member constitutes a threat or aggression against the entire community (ECOWAS).

Moreover, in 1999 ECOWAS adopted another protocol relating to the mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and security which strengthens its momentum to ensure good governance, prevent and settle disputes between and within its member states.

In 2001, ECOWAS also signed a Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy. This is an additional protocol to the ECOWAS Mechanism on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Security signed in 1999. The core objective of the Mechanism is to maintain peace and security in internal and interstate conflict. The former Vice President of Gambia, Isatou Njie Saidy signed the Mechanism on behalf of Gambia. The protocol on Good Governance and Democracy aims at promoting democracy, free and fair elections, good governance etc. This protocol was signed by Yahya Jammeh in 2001 after its adoption. Article 9 of the protocol expressly states that a candidate in an election who lost same shall concede defeat to the winner of the election within the stipulated deadline as provided by law. Following this provision, it is evident that Jammeh who initially conceded defeat backtracked by saying that he no longer accepted the election results. Also, article 19 provides that the armed force of the nation shall only be loyal to the nation first and defend her against any form of aggression. This must be the reason why even the pro-Jammeh forces refused to move a muscle when ECOWAS troops came into the country.

Sit-Tightism in Gambia

In February 1965, another new state, the Gambia, was born in the black continent of Africa, thus joining the league of new independent African states. Dawda Jawara became its first Prime Minister who began laying the foundation for the economic prosperity of the nation. Abdoulaye (2000), the author of *Gambia's Deepening Governance and Economic Crises: 1994-2015*, noted that many newly independent African states are predisposed to investing in massive white elephant project, but in the case of Dawda Jawara, he implemented modest development goals which gave the people basic health, good infrastructure and other social necessities, and as well education.

Jawara continued to preside over the country's affairs under the Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP) for five terms in national elections until 1992 which was the last time he would be voted into power. Thus, he ruled for close to 30 years. In view of the fact that he ruled the country that long, several disgruntled elements would not have him stay any more as the president of the country. However, prior to 1992, there were some political skirmishes involving the ruling class and opposition leaders which led

to the 1981 foiled coup that claimed the lives of about 800 people in the country. The coup incidence led Jawara to hastily go into a confederation with Senegal as they formed the Sen-Gambia Confederation. This, however, did not last as it came to an abrupt end in 1989. Moreover, other issues such as malfeasance and institutional collapse coupled with unpaid/shortage of salaries of military personnel, low prospect for promotion eventually led to the 1994 coup.

Yahya Jammeh, the mastermind of the bloodless coup became the new leader of the country. When he came on board, he promised to institutionalize some democratic tenets such as accountability, transparency and integrity but all these promises were short-lived as he turned around to rule with an iron fist. At a time, he faced mounting pressures both domestically and internationally to return the country to democratic civilian rule and he immediately put up a new constitution that merely and solely served his interest. Provisions such as unlimited terms of office, opposition party leaders to gather up to 5000 signatures and a payment of \$1000 before they can contest in an election were inserted into the constitution. These draconian constitutional provisions were meant to stifle opposition in the country. Consequently, Jammeh conducted four elections and subsequently won all.

Following his high handedness in leadership, there were several protests against his administration both at home and abroad all calling for electoral reforms and for him also to step down. There were also series of attempted coups and attacks on government installations. On 30th December, 2015, there were fresh attacks on the state house which were largely indications of the discontent of the masses towards his administration.

In a democracy, sovereignty belongs to the people and Gambians demonstrated that on 1st December, 2016 in a nationwide election in which they peacefully and democratically revolted against Jammeh by voting him out of power in favour of Adams Barrow, the real estate businessman. When election results were announced, Jammeh conceded defeat by placing a phone call to the president-elect but unfortunately, one week later, in a sudden twist of event, Jammeh declared that he would not accept the results of the election. This statement engineered apprehension and also threw the whole country and the entire West African sub region into serious political tension as it indicated that a bloody civil war was looming.

There was global condemnation of his action but in spite of that, Jammeh refused to step down but rather filed a case against the election result at the Supreme Court and also co-opted the gullible National Assembly members who extended his tenure by 90 days pending when the Supreme Court would decide on the matter. With all these, the polity was surely heated up and about 26-40 thousand people fled the country into the neighboring country, Senegal for fear of possible outbreak of a civil war.

ECOWAS and the Gambian Political Logjam of 2016/17

With the powers conferred on it by virtue of the various protocols, ECOWAS had to step into the Gambian political logjam during the transition of government in December 2016 after much entreaties for Yahaya Jammeh to step down for the president elect, Adama Barrow to take over power failed. To make him leave office honourably, ECOWAS sent a delegation that included its Chairman and the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari but he bluntly told the visiting emissaries that he would not leave (Gbenga, 2017).

In order to forestall the incidence of a civil war should the opposition try to reclaim its mandate after Jammeh had refused to step down having called the bluff of ECOWAS member states like Nigeria, Guinea, Senegal, etc who prevailed on him to step down, ECOWAS sent troops to Senegal, Gambia's neighbour suggesting it was ready to forcefully eject Jammeh from office (Gbenga, 2017). Because of the recalcitrant and despotic attitude of Jammeh, the coalition of military forces of ECOWAS resolved to oust Jammeh militarily. The countries that contributed military personnel were Nigeria which sent between 500-1000 soldiers and some Fighter Jets, Senegal sent 7000 soldiers and Ghana contributed about 205 soldiers. The pro-Barrow forces were about 125 soldiers. By 18th of January, the coalition force had surrounded the Gambian borders and given Jammeh an ultimatum to step down by 12 noon on 19th January, the following day. They also deployed soldiers to Senegal where Adama Barrow would be sworn in. Adama Barrow had fled Gambia on the 15th of January due to the tensed situation in the country as his swearing-in and inauguration drew nearer. Amidst heavy security presence in the Gambian Embassy, Adama Barrow was sworn-in as the president of Gambia on 19th January 2017.

On the swearing-in day, ECOWAS Mediation Group came and made some last minute appeal to Jammeh demanding his stepping down and offered him an asylum. The presidents of Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau led the negotiation. However, at the morning negotiation, the Mediation Group finally prevailed on Jammeh and he eventually agreed to step down but demanded an extra four hours grace to round off a few things and then leave Gambia. At the expiration of the time, Jammeh left Gambia for Guinea with his wife and children temporarily and later went into exile in Alfa Conde's Equatorial Guinea. ECOWAS was able to achieve this feat without military actions.

Sit-Tightism and Gambia Development

According to Mohan and Power (2009) leaders who go into power and decide to sit-tight do so with the intention to enrich themselves with the resources and wealth of the country, leaving the economic and general development of the country to her fate. This was the case

with Gambia under the leadership of former presidents Dawda Jawara, who ruled the country after independence from 1965 to 1994 and Yahaya Jammeh who came to power in a bloodless military coup in 1994 and was forced to relinquish power in 2016.

During those years, corruption was pervasive throughout all levels of government in the Gambia. Bribes were rife as Gambians paid bribes for water, electricity hook-ups, and other services. The government-owned energy company, the National Water and Electric Company (NAWEC), as well as the Customs and Port Authorities and the Lands Office, were generally deemed most corrupt. Years into President Jammeh's tenure, corruption was more rampant than it ever was under the First Republic. As was noted by Abdou Karim, (2009) as one of the wealthiest heads of state in Africa, he owns homes in the U.S., Guinea, Morocco, and Gambia. Jammeh controlled the regulatory roles of the state. He disbursed financial allotments to ministries, controlled the sale and privatization of state-owned enterprises from which he was reported to receive a 15 to 20 percent payoff. He used the state legal apparatus to extort bribes, take over businesses, and entered into unsavory business deals with 'legal' backing. Thus, the state remained insolvent and borrowed heavily, as taxes collected were never enough to provide services.

As a small and open economy relying on agriculture and tourism, Gambia remains highly vulnerable to climate change and external shocks. Policy inconsistencies and high spending by the governments of sit-tight presidents coupled with unfavourable weather conditions in recent years negatively affected economic potential and fiscal performance of the country. In addition, Gambia is characterized by high debt and high interest rates. Growth for 2016 was estimated at 2.1%, down from 4.4% in 2015. This is mainly explained by policy slippage on reforms, the crowding out of private investment, an average agricultural season and a year-end political scenario that tamed the tourism season. The outlook for 2017 and 2018 looks positive, with growth rates projected at 3.5% and 4.8% on the back of a peaceful political transition (African Arguments, 2017).

Although Gambia witnessed a degree of structural transformation over the past ten years, the country has not significantly increased the industrial sector's share in the economy (15% in 2013, up from 12% in 2004), nor has it increased manufacturing value added. Hurdles to industrialization include poor regional integration, the absence of reliable and cheap energy, and sub-optimal infrastructure and training. Similarly, entrepreneurship has yet to take off (African Arguments, 2017).

The mainstay of Gambian economy is international tourism, primarily from the UK, Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden. This provides close to 20% of its GDP and is a major source of foreign currency. During the political crisis occasioned by Jammeh's desire to sit-tight, tourism nosedived and tourists were evacuated, thereby affecting

the economy of the nation. In addition, due to Jammeh government's human rights abuses, the European Union cut development aid and the US government removed the Gambia from the trade deal AGOA (the benefits of which to the Gambia were unclear and future of which is uncertain under President Trump anyway). Presumably, the EU will resume its aid to the Gambia, though the future of aid to Africa in general appears uncertain in an age of Brexit (Abdoulaye, 2000).

Sight-tightism brings about despotic leadership and, abuse of human rights is always the case. Gambia under Jammeh was not different and the effect was that the Gambians left the country in their droves, heading to Europe thereby losing serious manpower. The issue was so serious that several opposition figures, including Barrow, made stopping migration a central theme in their campaigns. No doubt, this affected the economic development of Gambia adversely. However, Barrow has said that he wants to overhaul the economic system and create jobs to prevent further out migration of Gambians.

Conclusion

The election of President Adama Barrow in December 2016 led to Gambia's first democratic executive change of government since independence. After the incumbent initially declined to leave power, mediation and military pressure from fellow West African countries led to his peaceful departure. The outlook for the country is thus greatly dependent upon the ability of the new administration to carry out a smooth and fast transition, shore up finances, regain the confidence of partners, stabilize the country to bring back tourists and set the basis for economic transformation. On the fiscal side, rebuilding fiscal buffers should become a top priority, notably through improved wage bill management, tightened control of spending, review and restructuring of public-sector enterprises and control of domestic borrowing (African Arguments, 2017).

It must be said that ECOWAS has shown the world that it is a resolute organization which can stamp its feet down against sit-tightism in the sub region. The case of Gambia served as a warning to other sit tight leaders in West Africa and those who are still harboring such ugly intentions as ECOWAS is now all out to protect democracy as well as ensure peace and security in the West African sub region. Again, it must be said that ECOWAS has taken giant strides in not only resolving conflicts but also preventing same within its sub region, with special regard to the Gambia.

Recommendations

In order to avert the phenomenon of tenure elongation and sit-tightism in the West African Sub region, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Ensuring that all member states entrench term limits in their constitution.
- 2) A close observation and monitoring of elections in its member states to reduce the incidence of rigging and

intimidation of voters during elections. The ECOWAS monitoring team, Human rights activists and other supranational bodies both within the sub region and beyond should actively participate as observers during elections.

- 3) The use of sanctions such as cutting off trade and diplomatic relations with any country whose president refuses to relinquish power at the expiration of his tenure of office.
- 4) The use of military option after persuasion fails as in the case of Gambia is also recommended as sit-tightism has become a dangerous disease to African democracy.
- 5) The Economic Community of West African States Court of Justice should be able to look into such cases and bring defaulters to book.
- 6) Other sub regional organizations in Africa should borrow a leaf from ECOWAS example in the Gambia so as to eradicate this disease (sit tightism) in the African continent.
- 7) Democratic consciousness and political vigilantism is recommended for all citizens of the West African sub region, nay, Africa in general so as to prevent their presidents from ever nursing the ambition not to talk of sit-tighting in office.
- 8) The African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) should take interest in salvaging democracy in African by sanctioning any president who refuses to relinquish power at the expiration of his tenure of office and should that fail in the long run, use the military option as would have been used in Gambia. This will serve as a deterrent to ambitious African presidents who want to sit-tight in office.

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