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Ghana: A Beacon of Hope in Africa

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Located in West Africa, a generally tumultuous region characterised by political instability of varying magnitude, ranging from coups, political turmoil, violent sectarian conflicts, to simmering political tension even in some seemingly 'stable' countries, Ghana stands out as an encouraging success story. Besides being the first nation in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence from a colonial power, the country has become the epitome of democracy and good governance in Africa following years of political upheavals.



Former presidents of the Republic of Ghana (Fourth Republic) (from left to right), Jerry John Rawlings, John Agyekum Kufuor, John Evans Atta Mills and incumbent President John Dramani Mahama

Introduction

A well-administered country compared to other African countries, Ghana is on record for its good governance and respect for human rights, which are key pillars of democracy. This makes it a model for political, and to a great extent, economic reform – not just in West Africa, but across the African continent at large. Besides being the first nation in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence from a colonial power, the country has become a torch-bearer in terms of consolidating democracy and good governance following years of political upheavals. It is now ranked highly in Africa based on most of the fundamental measures of democracy and good governance.²

Democracy and good governance are not absolute concepts, because they refer to ideal

situations, which many nations are aspiring to achieve. The terms are defined in various ways, depending on the context. Among other variants of democracy, the conceptual framework for this paper defines democracy as a system of governance which is based on majority rule and the consent of the governed, the constitutional protection of and respect for human rights and civil liberties, the existence of free and fair elections, and political pluralism.³ Focusing on relative internal peace, this brief starts by analysing key aspects of the Ghanaian constitution, which is the anchor of the country's democracy. This is followed by an examination of the country's electoral processes, which have been characterised by peaceful power transfers since the 1990s. In addition to these variables, this brief also scrutinises how the numerous Ghanaian ethnic groups have managed to coexist without

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much antagonism and tension along ethnic lines, a situation which has threatened and continues to threaten national unity not just in several West African states, but across Africa. The nexus between good governance and economic development is also explored. The paper also provides recommendations for Ghana as well as other African countries.

Ghana, after coming a long way, has been the portal of African progress in terms of democracy and good governance. In March 1957, Ghana became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to emerge from the subjugation of colonial rule.⁴ Under the tutelage of the ambitious Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana championed national development for the emancipation of the African people. As a result of visionary projects by such luminaries as Kwame Nkrumah, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) came into being in 1963. However, the progressive approach in Ghana was short-lived. The year 1966 marked the reversal of achievements made after the country was plunged into chaos when civilian rule was toppled repeatedly by a series of military coups.⁵ First was the overthrow of Nkrumah's government by the National Liberation Council – a group composed of the military and police. In 1969, Ghana returned to a constitutional government under executive Prime Minister Dr Kofi Abrefa Busia and the ceremonial presidency of Edward Akufo Addo, a Supreme Court judge. This government was toppled in yet another coup in 1972, by Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, under the Supreme Military Council. In 1978, there was a palace coup, which brought in General Fredrick W.K. Akuffo and ushered in the Supreme Military Council again. This rule was truncated by yet another coup in June 1979 by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, who returned power to constitutional rule in September 1979 to the Peoples National Convention Party of Dr Hilla Limn, who Rawlings toppled again in 1981.⁶

The subsequent period from 1981 to 1991 – the era of the National Defence Council under the stewardship of Jerry Rawlings – was characterised by appalling human rights abuses, including arbitrary killings of suspected criminals and political opponents by security forces, detention without trial and at times imprisonment after unfair trials, especially for political opponents of the military governments.⁷ People's freedoms and human rights were trampled upon and the country was subsequently viewed badly in terms of democracy and governance. However, the cycle of military rule as a result of the military takeovers of power eventually came to an end in 1992 when former military ruler Jerry Rawlings transformed the country from military dictatorship and adopted civilian democratic rule. This period marked the genesis of good governance and the entrenchment of democratic values in Ghana. Ever since then, Ghana has made remarkable progress towards achieving sustainable peace, democracy and good governance in West Africa – a volatile region that has experienced a number of armed conflicts.

Institutional framework: The anchor of Ghana's democracy

The normative framework embedded in Ghana from the 1990s allowed constitutionalism to function, a situation which has, in turn, enabled democracy and good governance to thrive. Generally, the basic framework for promoting democracy and good governance in a country is laid down in a sound supreme law of the land – the constitution. Most of the democracy and governance problems affecting some African countries emanate either from failure to respect the country's constitution, or from weak institutions that do not provide adequate safeguards for the core tenets of democracy and good governance. The Fourth Republic Constitution that Ghana adopted in 1992 was quite noble and democratic, although some aspects could be improved. The constitution had some important provisions which were meant to cater for a modern liberal democracy. Some of the constitution's highlights include the protection of fundamental human rights – civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Unlike in other African countries where these fundamental aspects exist only 'on paper', Ghana has actually been observing these important constitutional provisions. It also prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.⁸ To buttress the notion, Chapter 18 of the constitution established a Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, whose mandate is to investigate complaints about violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, injustice, corruption and the abuse of power, among other issues.⁹

Another key aspect of the Ghanaian constitution is the respect for freedom of expression. Freedom of speech and the press are some of the core variables for the respect of human rights. These provisions are commendable, as they allow for vibrancy of political debate and free press. Chapter 12 of the Ghanaian constitution clearly guarantees the freedom and independence of the media, underscoring that there shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media. The constitutional provision stipulates that 'there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information'.¹⁰ To reinforce implementation of the constitutional provision, there is a National Media Commission which, besides promoting and ensuring the freedom and independence of the media, insulates the state-owned media from government control. With 144 radio stations and 52 print publications, the country's press is vibrant and unfettered in the conduct of its work.¹¹ It is also important to note that Ghana has always responded to the need to change some constitutional provisions in line with the dictates of liberal democracies. For example, in 2002, Ghana revised the Freedom of Information Act which,

amongst other issues, repealed the law of libel. This was a very important step towards consolidating democracy in the country.

In pursuit of the desire to consolidate democracy in Ghana, the country's late president, John Atta Mills, initiated a process of reviewing the current constitution. After realising a number of issues which needed to be changed, and in fulfilment of his party manifesto for the 2008 elections, a Constitutional Review Commission was set up in 2010 and mandated to consult and recommend the way forward in terms of processes to address the constitutional deficiencies. In June 2012 the government published its White Paper on the Report of the Constitutional Review Commission and announced a five-member implementation committee which came into operation soon after.¹² Among some of the contentious issues to be discussed was the legality or otherwise of homosexuality, which was not an expressly recognised human right in Ghana. The other issue involved the removal of the Indemnity Clause, a legal provision that indemnifies persons who participated in the military regimes which ruled the country from 1966 onwards, from the 1992 Constitution. The proposed removal would mean that all four military regimes which ruled Ghana, starting with the overthrow of Nkrumah, would be deemed illegal, a situation which would threaten the success of the national reconciliation exercise undertaken recently.¹³ However, it is hoped that the envisaged amendments to the constitution will consolidate and deepen the gains registered so far and align the Ghanaian constitution with international best practices. Such commitment to the review process demonstrates the government's dedication to keep the constitution, the anchor of Ghana's democracy and good governance, responsive to the people's needs.

Electoral processes: The hallmark of Ghana's democracy

Elections constitute one of the key components of a vibrant democracy. Ideally, leaders assume power following transparent and competitive elections, which should be fair substantially and procedurally. Electoral democracy, therefore, refers to a competitive process by which leaders gain public office. In many African countries, these processes are fraught with irregularities and have been the cause of numerous armed conflicts. However, Ghana's electoral experiences since the 1990s are different and encouraging. Since the ushering in of a democratic dispensation in 1992, the country has largely been experiencing very peaceful electoral processes. Besides being characterised by relative peace and tranquillity, the country has also had timely elections. As provided for in the constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections are always held every four years. Consistent with the virtues of sound democracy, the period for holding elections is

predictable and regular. In the event of failure to get an outright winner for the presidency, the constitution clearly stipulates that a run-off must be held within three weeks of the first election. To date, Ghana has had five consecutive democratic elections which were all held in a timely manner. Of these five consecutive elections, the country experienced two peaceful transitions of power – a rare feat in Africa, one which has earned Ghana pride and the envy of many other African countries.

Peaceful transitions in Ghana

A number of countries in Africa have been experiencing challenges when it comes to democratic transition. Recent examples include the upheavals which started towards the end of 2010 in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, where Laurent Gbagbo refused to cede power to Alassane Ouattara after being defeated in an election – a situation which degenerated into post-election violence, leaving many people dead. In Ghana, cases of election-related violence have also been witnessed. The post-2000 election violence, the 2007 violence in Bawku, the Upper East regional capital, and the 2004 incidents of violence in Tamale, the northern capital, were caused by contention and challenges to the emerging democracy. The arrest and subsequent death in military custody of a regional chairperson of the Convention People's Party during the 2004 election was one of the incidents which seriously dented Ghana's good record.¹⁴ This indicates that there are still some electoral challenges that Ghana has to grapple with.

Generally, democratic societies, which adhere to universal suffrage, respect the outcomes of elections, regardless of which party wins. In this regard, Ghana stands out as a trailblazer of peaceful transitions of power. Senegal is another country in West Africa which has experienced smooth transition – in 2000¹⁵ and 2012, when Abdoulaye Wade peacefully conceded power to Macky Sall after losing the March election.

Ghana's electoral experiences since the 1990s are different and encouraging. Since the ushering in of a democratic dispensation in 1992, the country has largely been experiencing very peaceful electoral processes

Ghana's path to electoral democracy started during the early 1990s when Jerry Rawlings abandoned coup tendencies and military rule and decided to embrace genuine civilian democracy. This was as a result of increased internal demands for democracy, coupled with international pressure – especially from the Bretton Woods institutions, which pressurised the political leadership at the time to heed the citizens' call for

reforms. The transition to multiparty democracy was approved by a national referendum which saw 93% of voters approving the new constitution on 28 April 1992, thus ushering in a new period of democracy.¹⁶ The first democratic elections in Ghana were subsequently held that same year (1992) and won by Rawlings, heralding the beginning of a new era which was to be characterised by entrenchment of democratic values and commendable systems of governance. Initially, some opposition political parties did not agree with the electoral outcome and showed their discontent by threatening to pull out of the parliamentary elections that were to follow. Instead of mobilising the electorate to engage in violent protests, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) – which had lost the 1992 presidential elections – expressed its grievances by writing a book titled *The stolen verdict*. This was an exceptional way used by the elite in Ghana to protest against the election results. As a result, all key stakeholders entered into dialogue under the supervision of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee. The parties managed to bury their differences and agreed to abide by the country's constitutional provisions. Since then, Ghana has made substantial democratic progress. Subsequent elections were held as per the constitution and Rawlings managed to enjoy two full terms of four years each at the helm of government. For the virtually two decades that Rawlings was in power, with half the period under military dictatorship and the second half as a civilian democracy, the 'coup mentality' was successfully destroyed in Ghana.

By 2001, Rawlings had handpicked a successor, John Atta Mills, to lead the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party to contest the presidential election. The first contest for the 2001 election produced no outright winner for the presidency. After a presidential election run-off John Atta Mills, who was Rawlings' preferred successor, lost to John Agyekum Kufuor of the NPP by a margin of 57% to 43%. During that election, many people expected that Rawlings would take advantage of incumbency to manipulate the election in favour of his party, the NDC. It was also projected that although Rawlings had promised to respect the will of the people by respecting the outcome of the election, it was highly likely that he was bound to resist any outcome that was short of a win for the NDC. Interestingly, Rawlings and the NDC kept their promise to respect the outcome of a democratic electoral process. The NDC bowed out of power gracefully, and Ghana was now progressing firmly along the path towards consolidation of long-term political stability where free and fair elections are accepted by all contestants – both winners and losers. This marked a peaceful transition of power from one political party to another, a second feat in the consolidation of democracy in Ghana. This switch of government by way of respecting the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box sent a clear and encouraging message to other African countries that Ghana had come of age in the quest for nationhood.

Another election took place four years later, in 2004. Although the NDC was hopeful that they could wrestle power from the NPP, the latter party won again. In line with the growing expectation that the electoral outcome would be acceptable to every Ghanaian, the NDC conceded defeat for the second time, leading to a very peaceful post-election period. This allowed John Kufuor and the NPP to enjoy two terms in power. Then, in December 2008, and for the third time running, Ghana earned and consolidated its position as a pacesetter in Africa, in terms of respecting the will of the people.

Dogged adherence to clear constitutional provisions usually helps stabilise countries. It is against this background that Ghana is applauded for its continuing entrenchment of democratic principles and values

Another election was peacefully conducted, leading to the country's second peaceful transition – this time from the NPP to the NDC. The NDC bounced back into power after John Atta Mills won the presidential election, beating the NPP presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo, by a razor-thin margin of about 40,000 votes. This was despite the fact that the NPP had almost 100,000 more votes than the NDC in the first round of voting which did not produce an outright winner, and coupled with the advantage of incumbency and the huge support base as evidenced by the total number of votes that the NPP got during the first round of elections. The NPP humbly conceded defeat and handed over power to the NDC – clearly signifying a maturing democracy.¹⁷

These developments earned Ghana international praise. On 4 January 2009, the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, praised Ghana for the orderly elections and peaceful transition, which he said was a sign of commitment to democratic processes. Furthermore, the International Institute for Justice and Development and the World Bank Governance Indicators for 2009 both recognised Ghana's good governance and democratic processes. They praised Ghana's peaceful transition of power, despite a tightly contested and drawn-out election. These democratic developments created ample evidence of Ghana's political stability and a much needed hope for Africa in view of the continent's dented electoral credibility.

It is pertinent to note that praising Ghana's transparent and credible elections and change of governments does not necessarily imply that its political system is perfect. Like most nations, both the developed and the developing, there are

always some ‘bumps’ along the way. Widespread electoral malpractice and political chicanery has neither been witnessed nor reported much in Ghana’s elections since the 1990s.¹⁸ Although politically motivated violence has been reported in some instances during election times in northern Ghana, the incidence is usually relatively low compared to other African countries. Even the ethnic divisions which were witnessed during the 2008 election run-off were not as widespread and destructive as in other countries. By and large, it is the mature and peaceful manner of handling these challenges which make Ghana stand out as the epitome of democracy in Africa.

Smooth power transfer after the death of John Atta Mills

Some African countries experience political upheavals when heads of state die while in office. This is usually a result of ambiguous constitutional provisions and the presence of political opportunists who take advantage of an arising power vacuum. Two issues surround such incidents; first, the news of such deaths in some countries is kept a closely guarded secret for some time while consultations for strategies on the way forward go on behind the scenes. The announcement of the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the late prime minister of Ethiopia, in August 2012, following speculation over his ill-health and whereabouts for several weeks, is a case in point. Even the announcement of his successor took a number of weeks, as if constitutional provisions for transfer of power were not clear. Secondly, succession wrangles about the person who should take over power is sometimes evident. These two scenarios were witnessed in Malawi in April 2012, where the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika was shrouded in much secrecy and his succession mired in controversy as some politicians attempted to subvert constitutionalism. Such developments run contrary to the dictates of democracy and good governance, where the citizens have the right to information and to be kept informed about issues that have a bearing on the public affairs of their country.

The situation was different in Ghana following the death of the then president, John Atta Mills, in July 2012. The public was made aware of his death immediately after it took place. Most importantly, the manner in which the then vice president, John Dramani Mahama, was constitutionally sworn into office was a sign of clear constitutional provisions which help democracy to thrive in Ghana. The transfer of power was smooth and prompt. Dogged adherence to clear constitutional provisions usually helps stabilise countries. It is against this background that Ghana is also applauded for its continuing entrenchment of democratic principles and values, as enunciated in the country’s constitutional provisions. In addition, the pace with which John Dramani Mahama was inaugurated as interim president was important in avoiding a leadership vacuum. Such instances of a power vacuum have a very high propensity

of fuelling crises. Therefore, the smooth transition of power was yet another significant legacy of stable and enduring democratic practices, which proved that Ghana is indeed the epitome of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Progressive electoral system

The need for transparent electoral processes has always been paramount for all peace-loving countries. As a result, electoral systems all over the world have changed for the better with the passage of time. These changes are meant to reduce the incidence of electoral fraud, which may include improper voter registration and double voting, amongst other irregularities. Therefore, the need to improve procedures and transparency and bolster the chances of acceptance of the outcome of an election by competing political parties and the citizens has always been critical. In this regard, Ghana has not been left behind. Since 1992, the country has been continuously improving its electoral system. One of the latest improvements to its electoral processes is the adoption of the biometric voting system.

The smooth transition of power is a significant legacy of stable and enduring democratic practices, which proves that Ghana is indeed the epitome of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa

In Africa, biometric voter registration has only been tried and tested in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. Partaking in the consolidation of electoral democracy in Africa, Ghana has become the fifth country in Africa to adopt this modern electoral practice, in its endeavour to improve the accuracy and credibility of elections. Although the system was adopted at the beginning of 2012, the voter registration exercise was conducted from 24 March to 5 May 2012 and the system is set to be utilised for the first time in December 2012, when Ghanaians go to the polls to elect the president and members of parliament.¹⁹ Besides enhancing the efficient conduct of elections, biometric registration also helps to prevent double-registration of voters and double-voting on election day – issues which are the most highlighted when it comes to electoral fraud and irregularities. However, implementing the system had some challenges. Besides the occasional lack of internet bandwidth from rural stations for transmitting captured prints to the central processing facility, the team which implemented the exercise was also inexperienced and this led to some processing delays. Although training of more manpower will be done in the future, the benefits of adopting the system at this stage far outweigh the disadvantages. It remains a noble system with enormous potential to enhance electoral

transparency, accuracy and credibility – virtues that Ghanaians have always strived to achieve as evidenced by the crafting of their robust constitution.

There is resolve within the Ghanaian government to improve the country's electoral process, by ensuring that the new system is fully and effectively implemented for the benefit of the country. A total of US\$30 million has been set aside for the procurement of about 30,000 verification machines for use in 23,000 polling stations across the country, with some equipment reserved for back-up in the event of any breakdowns on voting days. The voter registration exercise was carried out over a period of 40 days, covering an estimated 12 million eligible voters. This determination by a government to pour resources into such an exercise contrasts with other countries in the region. In Nigeria for instance, there were 23 days dedicated to the registration of 73.5 million voters, using only 7,000 items of equipment, which had to be rotated to cover a total of 119,973 polling stations across the country.²⁰

Ethnic diversity and tolerance

A number of countries in Africa continue to experience conflicts of different magnitude as a result of tension emanating from a mosaic of ethnic groups. These groups at times engage in a tug-of-war for various reasons – one of them being the desire to supplant their rivals in order to emerge as the dominant tribe in a given country. Examples abound and include Zimbabwe, which experienced almost seven years of deadly ethnic clashes between the Ndebele and Shona immediately after the attainment of independence in 1980. The 2010 post-electoral conflict in Côte d'Ivoire also took on an ethnic dimension, while Kenya's post-2007 electoral violence had, to some extent, ethnic undertones, which have haunted the country for some time.

The diverse ethnic groups in Ghana may be separated by some peculiar cultural traits, but Ghanaians have made it clear that the line separating one from the other is too thin to be used for petty political purposes

Ghana's ethnic story is very different from most other African countries. Although there are some tribal/ethnic tensions in some parts of the country, the friction never really causes debilitating political or social problems. Although ethnic politics and tension is evident in northern Ghana for various reasons – one of them being economic marginalisation – what stands out as being unusual is that the tensions do not seriously threaten the peace and security of the immediately affected communities, or the state. This is unlike in the past

when the Ewe-speaking people from the Volta Region used to advocate seceding from Ghana to join Togo. This was because a large number of Ewe speakers resided in Togo and the Ghanaian Ewe people even went as far as to form a political party called the Togoland Congress Party.²¹ However, ethnic politics is kept in check and the related tensions are usually well managed, preventing them from escalating into destructive violence. Generally, Ghana has a history of cross-ethnic cooperation for the good of the country. Also, because of intense competition during elections, political parties enhance their chances of winning by going outside their narrow ethnic bases.²²

It is interesting to note that Ghana is home to a number of diverse peoples and cultures, who are all finding ways to somehow mix and weave together into a cohesive and coexistent whole. This is against a backdrop where national peace and cohesion should not be taken for granted, especially in nation states like Ghana where a multi-ethnic miscellany was cobbled together to satisfy colonial logic.²³ Notwithstanding Ghana's multi-ethnic composition, which the 2010 Population and Housing Census put at 75 groups, none of the ethnic groups face systematic discrimination. Interestingly, the diverse ethnic groups in Ghana may be separated by some peculiar cultural traits, but Ghanaians have made it clear that the line separating one from the other is too thin to be used for petty political purposes. Being amongst some of the world's best multi-linguists, the people of Ghana have always insisted that their consciousness of one nation, one people, and one common destiny must prevail in order to keep the people together and focusing on developing their nation. Their tendency to abhor petty ethnic politics has immensely helped the country to foster democracy and enjoy the attendant peace.

Although the 1950s witnessed a proliferation of ethno-regional political parties, the First Republic of Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah made national unity a major objective and this resulted in comparative ethnic quiescence.²⁴ Long after Nkrumah, political elites in Ghana continue to recognise the centrifugal potential of ethnic, religious or regional political formations. No wonder that the successive constitutions of 1969, 1979 and 1992 respectively, as well as the Political Parties Act of 2000, all contain provisions which aim to curb ethnic electoral politics – developments which have helped minimise the occurrence of ethnic conflicts in Ghana.²⁵

Democracy and good governance: The nexus with economic growth

Governance encompasses four variables: political governance, economic governance, administrative governance and systemic governance, which embraces all the other three.

While political governance refers to political decision-making and policy implementation of a legitimate state, it is closely linked to economic governance which involves decision-making with a bearing on a state's economic activity. According to Yi, the political and economic systems of a country are intertwined and usually affect each other. Yi argues that economic activities are fundamentally human affairs, and therefore subject to the influence of political institutions that may inhibit or advance their growth.²⁶ Sharma supports the assertion that durable democracy is strongly correlated with economic development.²⁷ The core consideration is that a state's economic performance is based on the country's social infrastructure, and thus the institutional and government policies which provide incentives for individuals and organisations in the economy. Good governance promotes economic growth and that growth further improves governance. On the contrary, poor governance, which is usually characterised by corruption and weak state institutions, has negative effects on economic growth. That is why the World Bank reported in 2000 that without the foundations for good political and economic governance, Africa's development will be sluggish or even stalled.²⁸

There is an emerging school of thought which argues that as Ghana's respect for good governance continues to rise, there is a corresponding improvement in terms of the welfare of the people. The years that Ghana has been enjoying stability and good economic governance have greatly impacted on the production and distribution of wealth and general improvements in terms of the quality of life of citizens. From 1992, economic performance has been impressive, growing by about 5% each year. The country's per capita income rose from US\$950 in 1992, to about US\$1,500 in 2009 and poverty was reduced from about 50% of the population to about 30% in 2011 – coupled with improved health and education across the country.²⁹

According to various economic indicators, the Global Centre for Development classifies Ghana as a middle-income country.³⁰ Evidence of Ghana's economic achievements can be deduced from the country's 10 years of relatively improved power supply, starting from the turn of the 21st century, to around 2010. This is unlike many other African countries. Although the country is, of late, also facing power supply challenges, mitigatory measures are being implemented to address the problem. These include the construction of the Bui Dam to supplement supplies from the famous Akosombo Dam. Notwithstanding this, there are complaints that economic development is concentrated in the southern part of the country, an issue which needs redress.³¹

The discovery of offshore gas and oil deposits in 2007 was a further boost to the Ghanaian economy. Although mining started in 2010, Ghana has not experienced disruptions as a result of this recent discovery. The country's ability to handle conflicts has helped greatly in managing the challenges typically associated with the scramble for this much-needed resource. Governments, among them the Nigerian government, continue to battle with some of their communities over a wide range of issues related to the extraction of oil. These problems include the destruction of the environment and the lack of development in the oil-producing states – challenges which Ghana is likely to face. Some people are already sceptical about how much money Ghana will make from the emerging oil industry, with suspicion abounding that the funds may be misused.

Some emerging challenges include the recent demand by traditional chiefs that they want 10% of all oil revenue, an idea which is being criticised by most Ghanaians. In addition, community expectations are also becoming high. Areas like Takoradi have already started to witness an influx of people, a situation which will put pressure on the regional infrastructure, if it does not speedily transform to match the emerging trends.³² These are some of the budding challenges that Ghana will have to deal with. In addition, community expectations in the oil-producing regions are also becoming high.

Recommendations

For political parties and the people of Ghana:

- The momentum in terms of democracy and good governance that has prevailed in Ghana over the past two decades needs to be sustained. Political parties, whether in power or intending to wrestle power from the ruling party, should continue to shun participating in the elections with a 'do or die' attitude. Such an approach is known to ignite political tension and deadly violence, which mars and discredits the electoral processes, leading to disputed outcomes. This also tempts the losers not to accept the outcome of elections, especially if the winning margins are not significant. Contested outcomes usually fuel further divisions within a country and create a high chance of plunging the country into chaos. What has been witnessed in Ghana is really an ideal situation, where political parties enter into elections with the spirit of fair electoral competition and readiness to accept the outcome – situations which have led to repeated smooth transitions of power between the NDC and the NPP. Both parties have consistently respected the outcome of elections and this underlies the peace and tranquillity which prevails in Ghana during post-election periods.

- Ghana is scheduled to hold parliamentary and presidential elections on 7 December 2012. Electioneering is already off the ground and so far, campaigning, although low key, is going on unhindered. As the election dates draw closer, Ghanaians are encouraged to remain united and focused in order to ensure that they maintain and consolidate the record of peace and stability that they have earned over the past two decades. Ghanaians' ability to manage such historic moments, as well as any changes that may accompany the elections, will surely be the real test of Ghana's highly esteemed democratic record.

For the Government of Ghana:

- Given Ghana's democracy and good governance record, it is high time that the country moves beyond leading by example and asserts its influence by taking a more active role in the governance of the African continent, where several countries are experiencing civil strife. Although Ghana has been taking part in numerous peace efforts by way of training peacekeepers at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra, as well as contributing forces to regional and international peacekeeping missions, there is a greater need for the country to be an active participant and to play a leading role in resolving conflicts in Africa, particularly in West Africa. Ghana's status facilitates the leverage and moral high-ground for the country to mediate in conflict-riddled countries by engaging them in dialogue in order to find durable solutions to governance and democracy challenges.
- Since political governance is closely linked to economic governance, there is a need for Ghana to ensure that all citizens enjoy the benefits of the country's economic development. Although Ghana's economy is performing very well, the country faces challenges in terms of creating a broad-based prosperous economy. Besides increasing the formal private sector, there is a need for more equitable distribution of economic resources, especially among the regions. For about two decades, Ghana's economic growth has been concentrated in the southern part of the country, with the benefits increasingly concentrated amongst those perceived to be linked to the ruling party. Attending to this economic aspect of governance will help contain tension that may arise among some people who may feel marginalised in terms of the economic development of the country.

For West Africa and other African countries:

- Countries in Africa, and most importantly those in West Africa, should aim to emulate Ghana. Clear constitutional provisions to guide the country, peaceful ethnic coexistence and tolerance, a good human rights

record, peaceful elections which at times result in smooth power transitions and attendant economic development, are some of the positive aspects that have caused Ghana to rank highly in terms of governance and democracy. If an increasing number of African countries that are failing to find their own ways of dealing with their issues could learn from and be encouraged by the good practices in Ghana, then Africa could go a long way towards eliminating the wars that are plaguing the continent and achieving the dream of a peaceful and prosperous continent could come closer to reality.

Endnotes

- 1 The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of his colleagues Dr Grace Maina and Beatrice Torto towards the development of this brief. He is grateful for their invaluable comments, insights, reviews and critiques.
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