The scale **Journal Website:** https://thescalejournal.com.ng/
An Interdisciplinary Journal of
The ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF POLYTECHNICS - ZONE D
ISSN: 2992-3727 Published 30th November, 2025

MECHANISMS FOR ACHIEVING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: A CRITIQUE

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Abstract
The African continent has been bedeviled by the menace of poverty, corruption, low Gross National Product and other socio-economic maladies attributable to the lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the government and governed. Transparency and accountability are fundamental pillars to good governance. This paper therefore examined these two pillars in its quest to advocate for the good governance principles in Africa. The main objective therefore is to raise a critique on the mechanisms for achieving transparency and accountability in Africa. The doctrinal research method which study data on laws and other legal and institutional frameworks were adopted. The findings revealed that the continent does not have a continental legally enforceable framework for transparency and accountability but each state maintains institutional and legally enforceable frameworks in their respective municipal/domestic laws. This paper therefore concluded that corruption and poverty ravaging the continent is traceable and attributable to inefficient and ineffective mechanisms for transparency and accountability in governance in Africa. The paper recommended that for African continent to realize the vision of good governance, must adopt transparency and accountability virtues as a panacea for the continental economic growth and development. The African Court of Justice and Human rights which is presumed to be Continental Supreme court should come in force to adjudicate on cases of corruption and fraud in the continent.

Keywords: Mechanisms, achieving transparency, accountability, governance, Africa

1.0 Introduction

Transparency and accountability are fundamental pillars of good governance. Transparency ensures that government processes, decisions and data are open and accessible to the public, fostering trust and informed participation in the democratic process. Conversely, accountability guarantees that the public officials are answerable for their actions, with mechanisms in place for oversight and redress when necessary[1].

According to Nwabueze, Accountability or answerability is only an aspect of political responsibility; it implies an obligation on the part of government, an obligation flowing from its responsibility –to account and answer for its use of the State power and resources entrusted to it by the people. It presupposes, but is not co-extensive with the authority and control of the people over the use of State power and resources by the government. It is the authority and control of the people over the government that provides the main sanction for accountability or answerability.[2] Adebayo posited that "another feature which the process of accountability demands upon is the process of transparency in the operations of government". Transparency can be described as the exact opposite of secrecy and secretiveness. What this dimension of accountability actually demands is that the activities of the government should be carried out in such a way that interested citizens and other organizations and especially monitoring institutions such as the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Public Complaints

[1] African Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC).
[2] Nwabueze, B. N, *Constitutional Democracy in Africa.* Vol.3,Ibadan: Spectrum Books,2004.

Commission, can readily have access to required information to carry out their duty of monitoring and supervising the work of administrative agencies[3].

Nwabueze continued that "accountability and transparency have little practical effect as active principles of government unless they are effective sanction". In a democracy, the sanctions for accountability are normally provided by a vigilant, independent and free press, well organized and able opposition political parties, a developed and activist civil society; independent and impartial judiciary; and free and fair elections at periodic intervals of time.[4]

Nkom stated that "the concept of governance refers to the use of political power to manage a nation's public affairs and to shape the economic and social environment in line with the perceived notion of public interest and societal progress"[5]

The1989 World Bank Report entitled *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* which expressed the" Crisis *of Governance*" in Africa identified three related maladies or defects of politics and administration in Africa. They are namely, Lack of accountability, Transparency and predictability as well as absence of the rule of law. Accordingly, the Bank advanced the thesis of "better government" or good governance as the panacea for African economic development.[6]

To foster transparency and accountability in Africa, a combination of strategies is needed, including strengthening institutions, promoting good governance principles, encouraging citizens participation and fostering regional co-operations.[7]

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

Accountability.

Accountability is a design to ensure prudent, efficient and equitable use of the State power and resources for the benefit of society as a whole and check abuse, injustice or unfairness in their use.[8] Wilson puts it "power and strict accountability are the essential constituents of good governance,[9] any government system where the level of accountability is low is necessarily wasteful of human, financial and material resources"[10]

Accountability usually takes three distinct forms: First, the rulers come to their positions of leadership through the express will and mandate of the people. This mandate is usually given in free and fair elections. Secondly, their policies and programmes adopted and implemented by the government are usually those that the majority of the electorate has accepted during popular elections. Finally, the government is accountable when it readily accepts the decision of the majority of the population to transfer their support to another leadership group or party.[11]

Transparency

Transparency in the operations of government on the other hand refers to carrying out government business in an open, easy to understand and explicit manner, such that the rules made by the government, the policies implemented by the government and the results of government activities are easily verify by ordinary citizen. Transparency is a necessary and inherent accompaniment of accountability. Accountability can scarcely be complete unless there is openness in the conduct of public affairs, which requires that the rules governing them are clear, known, easy to understand and

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[3] Adebayo, A *Principles and Practice of Public Administration in Nigeria,* 2nd Ed, Ibadan: Spectrum Books.2001.
[4] Op cit 2.
[5] Nkom,S. A," *Culture, Empowerment and Local Government with reference to North Western Nigeria"* in Adedeji, A and Ayo, B. (Ed) People-Centered Democracy in Nigeria pp73-85, 2000.
[6] World Bank Report entitled *Sub-Saharan Africa From Crisis to Sustainable Growth,* 1989.
[7] ibid
[8] Op cit 2.
[9] Wilson, W.*Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics,*1978.
[10] Ijewere, G. *Accountability, Politics and Development in Colonial and Post Colonial Africa.* p.26 1999
[11] Deutsch, K.W, *Politics and Government: How People decide their Fate,* 3rd Ed. Boston: Houghton Win Co.1980.

are consistently and uniformly applied; that changes in policies are made public and thrown open to public debate; that information about government measures or actions are readily accessible to the public[12].

Governance

Good Governance refers to a system of government based on good leadership, respect for the rule Law and due process, the accountability of the political leadership to the electorate as well as transparency in the operations of government. Good governance therefore means the positive exercise of political power to attain positive societal goals and development while bad governance could be taken to be synonymous with the negative exercise of political power, usually for the private, sectional or group interest of the key political actors.[13]

Landell-Mills & Serageldin quoted that "good governance is perceived and accepted as legitimately committed to improving the public welfare and responsive to the needs of its citizens, competent to assure law and order and deliver public services, able to create an enabling environment for productive activities and equitable in its conduct"[14].

Legal Frameworks

The researcher was unable to capture any Continental legal framework on the transparency and accountability as many States have legal frameworks in their domestic laws but was able to trace institutional frameworks in this respect like the following;

The African Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) .[15]

As a Pan-African network, AFIC champions the right to information, advocating for policies and practices that strengthen both transparency and accountability. Through their dedicated efforts, AFIC empowers citizens and civil society organizations to actively engage in governance, demand fair practices, and hold leaders accountable. This, in turn, has fostered a robust democratic environment and paved the way for sustainable development in Africa.

The African Debt Monitor (ADM) 2019[16].

It provides a unique platform for sharing information on African Central government debt and debt management policies, practices and institutional arrangements. It offers multiple tools for cross-country peer learning on public debt issuance and management and provides policy makers with additional insight into the capacity of their Debt offices to manage debt and associated risk.

African Development Bank (AfDB)[17]

The African Development Bank has introduced an independent inspection mechanism to address complaints from citizens concerning private investment.

Code of Conduct Bureau. (CCB)[18]

The Code of Conduct Bureau in Nigeria is a Federal Executive body established to ensure ethical conduct among public officers and prevent corruption. It is responsible for enforcing a code of conduct for public officers, receiving and examining asset declarations, investigating breaches of the code, and

[12] Op cit.2
[13] Op cit.11
[14] Landell-Mills, P & Serageldin, I, *Governance and Development Process in Africa*, Washingston: IMF Pub. 1991
[15] The African Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC)
[16] The African Debt Monitor(ADM)
[17] African Development Bank(AfDB)
[18] Code of Conduct (CCB).

referring violations to the code of conduct Tribunal. The CCB's core mandate is to promote ethical standard, accountability, and public trust in government.

The Independent Corruption Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission[19]
ICPC is a Nigerian agency that was inaugurated on 29th September 2000 following the recommendation of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The ICPC fights Corruption in Nigeria by investigating and prosecuting offenders of corruption, improving public sector systems and educating the public.

Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance (NCCG) 2018[20].
NCCG issued by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), aims to establish best practices for corporate governance in Nigerian companies. It is a principle-based code that applies to both public and private companies, encouraging transparency, trust, and integrity in the Nigeria business environment. In essence, the NCCG 2018 is a framework for Nigerian companies to improve their governance structures, foster ethical behavior, and trust with stakeholders.

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) 2003.[21]
EFCC is a Nigerian Law enforcement and antj-graft agency that investigates financial crimes and unknown transactions such as advance fee fraud and money laundering. The EFCC was also set up to fight against corruption and protect the country from economic saboteurs.

National Public Complaints Commission[22]
NPCC also known as the Public Complaints Commission (PCC), is a Nigerian government agency that acts as an Ombudsman, handling complaints from citizens against government agencies and private organizations. It aims to ensure accountability and transparency in public administration and curb the abuse of administrative power. The PCC investigates complaints, mediates disputes, and seeks redress for citizens who have experienced injustice due to administrative errors, omissions, or abuse of power.

3.0 Mechanisms for Achieving Transparency and Accountability in Governance in Africa.
To foster transparency and accountability in Africa, a combination of strategies is needed, including strengthening institutions, promoting good governance principles, encouraging citizen's participation and fostering co-operation.

a. Strengthening Institutions

Independent oversight bodies established and empowered by statutory law like Ombudsman, legislature, anti-graft agencies, and audit offices with authority and resources to investigate and address instances of corruption and mal-administration are required to provide the mechanism in this regard. In Nigeria, these institutions however connived and associated with the government power to perpetuate corruption without any sanction imposed on the culprit to deterred others from corruption. Like the political maxim in Nigeria that *"if you join the ruling party, your sins are forgiven and erased from the list of corrupt individuals"*. But the perceived oppositions are often made to face the full force of the law instead.

- **Judicial Independence**.

The capacity of the courts to ensure that the law reigns supreme in a country, and that all citizens are given equal treatment, demands that the judges who sit in and preside over the courts are independent

[19] Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offenses Commission(ICPC)
[20] Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance(NCCG)
[21] Economic and Financial Crimes Commission 2003.
[22] National Public Complaints Commission

and impartial. This requires two related processes; first of all, the members of the Executive and legislative branches of Government will refrain from trying to dictate to or interfere with the work of the courts, as they consider and decide cases. Secondly, the legislature will not seek to oust the jurisdiction of the courts from examining the legality or otherwise of their enactments. Any interference by the executive or any attempt by the legislature to prevent the courts from considering any corruption matter will negatively affect the independence of the judiciary. Again, the independence of the judiciary is affected by the capacity of individual judges to resist the temptation to allow their judgments to be influenced by pecuniary interest or other rewards. Cases of widespread corruption by judges tend to reduce the credibility of the judicial and their capacity to enforce the rule of law[23]. African Freedom of Information Centre expressed that Judicial Independence is to "ensure the judiciary is free from political interference, enabling it to impartially adjudicate cases related to corruption and government issues"[24]

- **Public Finance Management (PFM)**

Improve PFM systems to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of public funds including extra-budgetary sources. This takes place with regulatory frameworks that develops and enforces clear and consistent regulations across various sectors, particularly those prone to corruption, natural resources and procurement. The African Freedom of Information Centre's accountability initiatives are crucial in ensuring that public resources are used efficiently and effectively, reflecting the organisation's dedication to fostering responsive governance. AFIC actively monitors public contracts to ensure they are awarded transparently and executed according to plan. This oversight helps prevent corruption and mismanagement of public funds. The organization further evaluates service delivery outcomes to ensure public services meet the needs of the community and that funds are used appropriately[25].

- **Media Regulation.**

The main aim of the right to freedom of expression is to secure freedom to engage in communication and transmission or extraction of information. This includes: freedom of communication and press freedom. This right is necessary in democracy for people to air their views and opinions. It is also a fulfillment of the right to freedom of thought since a thought not expressed may never be known or otherwise be useful[26]. ***Section 39(1) CFRN 1999***[27] provides that "every person shall be entitled to Freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and information, without interference". Regulate the media in a matter that protects freedom of expression while ensuring accountability and preventing the spread of misinformation. AFIC envisions "a future where every individual has the information, they need to make informed decisions or choices about their lives and hold those in power accountable, ensuring that leaders serve the public interest with integrity and fairness"[28]. It recognizes the crucial role of both informed collaborative engagement in fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

b. Promoting Good Governance Principles

-Rule of Law

Rule of law simply refers to the "*supremacy of the law as opposed to the arbitrary power of government or individual"*. Establish a system where laws are applied fairly and equally to all citizens regardless of their status or positions. Nwabueze posited that Rule of Law in its primary meaning is

[23] Malemi, Administrative Law
[24] AFIC cit.op
[25] ibid
[26] Ngwakwe, E. C, *Issues in Human Rights Guarantees,* Owerri: Hudson-Jude Pub,2018
[27] *Section 39(1) CFRN 1999.*
[28] AFIC op cit,

that "only law applying equally to all persons, and administrated impartially by independent court, is to govern the affairs of people in society, as well as the dealings and relations of the state with the individual, as opposed to arbitrary rule or rule according to the whims and caprices of the rulers unfettered by law[29].

-Transparency

Promote open access to government information, processes and decisions, fostering public trust and participation. AFIC in its partnerships with governments and other organizations collaborates with government bodies to advocate for the implementation of open information policies. This collaboration includes providing technical assistance for the development of legal frameworks that promote transparency and facilitate easy access to information for citizens.

- **Participation.**

Encourage citizens participation is decision making processes through public consultation, town hall meetings and other platforms. AFIC understands the power of an informed and engaged citizenry. They actively promote public participation in governance. This involves raising awareness about citizens' rights, equipping them with the tools and knowledge to demand accountability, and fostering a culture were holding leaders responsible is seen as a civic duty.

- **Ethical Leadership.**

Promote ethical leadership and integrity among public officials through training, codes of conduct and public awareness campaigns. AFIC through its capacity building advocacy, invests in capacity building initiatives, train both government officials and civil society actors on implementing and upholding transparency and accountability standards. This equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively navigate these crucial principles within their respective roles.

c. Regional Co-operation.

By facilitating the sharing of best practices in transparency and accountability among African continent through regional monitoring; establishing monitoring mechanisms to track progress in government reforms and hold countries accountable for their commitments. By Joint initiatives to address cross-border governance challenges such as corruption and illicit financial flows.[30]

d. Technology and Innovation.

Using **E-governance** attributes in utilizing technology to enhance transparency and accountability through on-line platforms for public information service delivery and citizens' feedback; **Digital Public Finance Management systems** with digital solutions to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability; **Block chain Technology-**exploring the use of block chain technology to enhance transparency and traceability in areas like procurement and land administration. AFIC maintains a vigilant eye on government actions through diligent monitoring by tracking activities identified as potential discrepancies and bring instances of corruption or fraud to light through public reporting.

4.0 Conclusion/Recommendations

Poverty, unemployment, low GDP, poor economic development, inequitable distribution of resources and basically, corruption ravaging the continent have been attributed and traced to inefficient and ineffective mechanisms for transparency and accountability in governance in Africa. The World Bank tagged it "Crisis of governance" and thereafter prescribed good governance as a panacea for African economic growth and development. The African Freedom of Information Centre professed that "through united efforts, Africa can realize the vision of African characterized by informed citizens, responsive government and equitable development". The mechanisms so far identified should be embedded in the legal frameworks existing in the States. Institutions for the enforcement of laws, policies and procedures should be strengthened without the States' government imposition and

[29] Nwabueze, B Constitutional Democracy,Vol.3, Ibadan: Spectrum Books,2004
[30] AFIC

ISSN: 2992-3727 Published 30th November, 2025

interference in the process. The African Court of Justice and Human Right which is presumed to be the Supreme Court for the continent should come in force to adjudicate in cases of fraud and corruption in the Continent.

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