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**Africa and the Commonwealth: What Relationship since 1994?**

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### **Abstract**

The Commonwealth is a global organisation with some unique and important characteristics that complement other global multilateral organizations. Its peculiarities most especially its networking and informal qualities have endeared the organization until recently to her members. In this age of internet in which smartness and alertness are highly valued, some of her traits are now becoming a thing of an anathema, regarded as a cog in the wheel of progress. African continent alone has over thirty percent of Commonwealth membership. This paper examines Commonwealth connection with Africa since 1994, with particular emphasis on Nigeria. It recommends what both parties would have to do to make the relationship more robust and the partnership more effective and impactful in the interest of all.

**Keywords:** Africa, Nigeria, Commonwealth, International Organizations, Mutual Relationship.

## Introduction

The fifty four Commonwealth member nations of the world are found in the six continents of the world with the African continent having nineteen. Though Britain's relationship with Africa had a chequered history, the relationship was not always robust.<sup>1</sup> Before apartheid was dismantled in 1994, relations between Africa and the Commonwealth became strained. And after the collapse of apartheid a new relationship developed between both parties.

There are several elements to this new relationship, some of these elements keep on vibrating and ringing to the extent that they now stand for the opposite of traditional drivers of foreign policy of the apartheid era. The first of these ingredients was the interest in the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) phenomenon expressed in the engagement with civil society by the Commonwealth in order to wage war on poverty and want. The second element of this new relationship between Africa and Commonwealth is the change in the foundation of inequality between the developing countries of Africa and the developed countries of the Commonwealth. The change was manifested in the emphasis on governance as the driving force or what Christopher Clapham called the critical driver of development.<sup>2</sup>

It was in order to drive home the point that the British Labour party removed Africa from the realm of super power competition and in the process enhanced the moral context of the relationship. Lynda Chalker was made the first British Minister of State for Overseas Development and Africa in 1989 and served in this capacity until 1997 after apartheid had been dissolved. Chalker's role in helping to evaluate and balance economy with politics in a bid to reduce poverty in Africa is yet to be documented but there is no doubt that she played a significant role in Africa's post-apartheid development. The critical link between governance and public welfare was emphasized and attempt was made to provide African indigenous support for policies favoured by the developed countries of the West: The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand which are the leading members of the Commonwealth and are also among the leading members of the twenty largest economies that emphasize good governance, democracy, human right, rule of law, education. These became core values that the Commonwealth seek to integrate in the domestic political processes of African member countries. The extent to which these values have been integrated into African domestic process is a real challenge to the Commonwealth as will be seen in this paper.

## The Commonwealth Values and African Response

An in-depth analysis of the Commonwealth response must be situated within the context of the overall purpose of the Commonwealth. The denotation and connotation of the word Commonwealth has been fully discussed by Professor Bola Akinterinwa, the former Director General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and therefore need no further discussion here.<sup>3</sup> What is required here is to give the history of the origins of the Commonwealth even if cursorily.

The Commonwealth has a long history. According to the Report of the House of Commons on the role and future of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth has been called the world's oldest political association of sovereign states.<sup>4</sup> Although the British Empire from which Commonwealth evolved dated back to the 12th century as an

organisation of sovereign states the Commonwealth's origins could be traced to 1869/1870 when representatives from self-governing colonies met unofficially to demand consultative arrangements. The first colonial conference took place in 1887, coinciding with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. From 1907 there were regular meetings of Prime Ministers with countries invited to send their heads of government only if they had responsible government on the British Parliamentary model. The Prime Ministers' Meeting (PMM) as the regular meeting of the prime ministers came to be called, was a major milestone in the evolution of the Commonwealth as it came to represent 'a meeting of responsible government', that is a government that had concern for its citizenry. This concern as will be shown later, in this article resonates in some of the core values of the Commonwealth as the 20th century unfolded as well as even to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and hopefully to the distant future.

The Prime Ministers' Meeting (PMM) which started in 1907 was attended not only by the white colonies of Britain, viz: Canada; Australia and New Zealand but also by India in 1917. India, although not yet a self-governing country, was invited to send representatives from 1917. Southern Ireland as the Irish Free State was added in 1922. An agreement of 1926, commonly referred to as the Balfour Declaration, another significant milestone in the evolution of the Commonwealth, defined the position and mutual relation of the members "as autonomous, equal in status, owing common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated."<sup>5</sup> These principles as enshrined in the Balfour Declaration were embodied in the preamble to the Statute of Westminster of 1931 which also declared that the Crown was the symbol of the free association of the members. The term "British Commonwealth of Nations" was first used formally in 1921 and from 1948 the term "The Commonwealth" replaced it.

After the Second World War of 1939 to 1945, additional members were recorded. India and Pakistan in 1947 and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1948. When India, the largest member became a republic it sought to remain in the Commonwealth and this was agreed by the existing members. The British monarch is the symbol of the free association of the independent member nations and as such, the Head of the Commonwealth. The words of the Declaration set the tone for the future of the Commonwealth. The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon declared that 'they remain united as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1952, on assuming the throne, the present Queen, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, became the Head of the Commonwealth. Having emerged from a group of countries that had a connection with Britain, the modern Commonwealth has been based from the beginning in 1949 on the maintenance of fundamental values and principles. Since the 1949 Declaration, the Commonwealth has regularly restated and refreshed those principles and values which have become key to the Commonwealth. Two documents have been especially important. In 1971, at the Singapore Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM, formerly PMM) the Declaration of Commonwealth principles defined the voluntary character and consensual working methods of the Commonwealth specifying its goals and objectives. Among the fourteen detailed principles in the Declaration were these:

Within (its) diversity all members of the Commonwealth hold certain principles in common. It is by pursuing these principles that the Commonwealth can continue to influence international society for the benefit of mankind.

We believe in liberty of the individual, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief, and in their inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic process in framing the society in which they live. We therefore strive to each of our countries those representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law our common heritage.<sup>7</sup>

The 1991 Harare Commonwealth declaration sought to apply those principles in the context of the cold war pledging the heads of government to work with renewed vigour on the protection and promotion of the fundamental politics and values of which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government.

These principles were underlined at the port of Spain CHOGM of 2009. When meeting in the 60th anniversary year of the modern Commonwealth, the heads of government, taking pride in their collective achievements over the past six decades reaffirmed their strong and abiding commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental values and principles.

For the Commonwealth to achieve the task it has set for itself, there are Commonwealth intergovernmental organizations:

- The Commonwealth Secretariat, which carries out plans agreed by Commonwealth Heads of Government through technical assistance (via the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC), advice and policy development. The secretariat's mission statement is: we work as a trusted partner for all Commonwealth people as: a force for peace, democracy, equality and good governance; a catalyst for global consensus-building; a source of assistance for sustainable development and poverty eradication.
- The Commonwealth Foundation, which helps civil society organizations promote democracy, development, culture and understanding.
- The Commonwealth of Learning, which encourages the development and sharing of open learning and distance education.
- The work of the formal intergovernmental Commonwealth institutions is only part of the picture, and perhaps not the most visible part. There are around 100 associations (70 accredited) in the Commonwealth network. Among the associations are bodies, concerned with land rights, parliamentary assemblies (the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association), culture, gender equality, health, humanitarian relief, disability, education and trade unions. The aims of the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association (CMJA) include: to advance the



administration of the law by promoting the independence of the judiciary and to advance education in the law, the administration of justice, the treatment of offenders and the prevention of crime within the Commonwealth. Another example of the non-official Commonwealth at work is the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC). This is a UK based youth development and education charity which works alongside young people to support them as active global citizens through sharing lives, exchanging ideas and working together. The CYEC supports a bilateral UK - Commonwealth group, youth exchange programme and Commonwealth—wide youth-led development and leadership projects.<sup>8</sup>

From all of the above, a few comments are in order. The first thing to note is that the Commonwealth over the years relies on building consensus among its members in an informal manner through the PMM and later, CHOGM. The second thing to note is that Africa was not central to Commonwealth's concern. U.K, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) were perceived to have been at the core of Commonwealth foundation and therefore of more value than Ghana which joined the Commonwealth in 1957, Nigeria in 1960 and the rest seventeen African member nations of the Commonwealth later. Another thing to note is that the core values of the Commonwealth have been increased not just to incorporate democratic principles and values but also economic development. Democracy has always been the stronger when there is free and open market in goods and services, in ideas and in education. There are many diverse economic philosophies to be found across the Commonwealth but all want economic success to improve the wellbeing of their people and assist many to escape from poverty.

How then have the Commonwealth cores or key values impacted upon Africa given the fact that some African members of the Commonwealth had no colonial ties with the United Kingdom? Cameroon and Mozambique are Francophone and Lusophone countries respectively, and Rwanda was colonized by Belgium. How then will they cope with the Commonwealth?

### **Commonwealth Values and Impact on African Member Nations**

According to Professor Ade Adefuye when he was the Head of the African section of the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, "most of the African member countries fall in the category of least developed countries of the world and the continent has the potential for political instability. Africa therefore presents the Commonwealth with the greatest challenge."<sup>9</sup> After the eradication of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the Commonwealth had somewhat been emphasizing commitment to the Harare principles in such a way as to remove one of the most potent criticisms of its activities, which is that in spite of its commitment to democracy, it has within its fold member countries, that were governed by non-democratically elected regimes.

It is therefore not surprising that since 1994, the Commonwealth has intensified its activities at democratising its African member countries by encouraging or persuading member countries that were governed by military or one party regime to adopt multiparty democracy. Among these are Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya and Rwanda.<sup>10</sup> In

all these countries, the Commonwealth assisted in the preparation of multi-party elections. It also helped by providing independent election monitors. Election observation has been one of the many ways in which the Commonwealth encourages adherence to the democratic process. The presence of Commonwealth observers has reinforced belief in democratic processes and has served as insurance against fraudulent practices and rigging. As of today, the Commonwealth has observed 44 elections in over 30 countries.<sup>11</sup> Most of these countries are in Africa. In recent times, the Commonwealth has been assisting in the preparation for elections by observing the registration of voters. After the elections, it sets up a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the observers' recommendations. There are other ways by which the Commonwealth encourages adherence to democratic processes and good governance in Africa. Amongst these are: strengthening institutions that uphold democratic principles, such as the judiciary, the parliament, the independent electoral commissions, the civil service, the office of the ombudsman and nongovernmental organizations. Individuals in these organisations are assisted in improving their competence by a series of training workshops organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat, some of which are funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC). Newly appointed cabinet ministers are assisted in settling in their new jobs, through a series of seminars and workshops.

In recent years, the Commonwealth has demonstrated its capacity for conflict prevention and resolution. The 'Good Office' role of the Secretary-General is the institutionalised procedure for preventing and resolving conflicts in Africa. This is done either by the Secretary-General himself—and (or) delegated officials—or by the appointment of Special Envoys usually made up of eminent Commonwealth citizens who command respect in the country concerned. In the recent past, the Commonwealth had helped to resolve conflicts in a number of African countries, including Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Uganda and the Gambia.<sup>12</sup>

The 1995 meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government held in Auckland established the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which consists of eight ministers who ensure that member countries adhere to the Commonwealth Harare declaration. Serious violations of the Harare Principles have led to the suspension of member countries such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe (in Africa as well as Pakistan in Asia and Fiji in the Pacific).<sup>13</sup>

A major component of the Commonwealth support for democracy and resolution of conflicts is the provision of necessary technical assistance to ensure that the basic and immediate causes of conflict are addressed through the provision of necessary expertise. This is often in the form of competent individuals who establish and strengthen institutions that will ensure that the conflicts do not recur. Sometimes activities involving the collaboration of many Commonwealth Secretariat divisions are coordinated by a Deputy Secretary General, as was the case with the Sierra Leone task force.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to development, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) is the operative arm of Commonwealth development programme. It provides a number of services to many African countries, including skill acquisition, seminars and workshops for government officials to improve their efficiency, assistance in sourcing for capital for investments, and advice on debt management. The CFTC also assists African countries in dealing with issues such as combating money laundering and dealing with

matters of intellectual property rights. The Commonwealth realises that Africa more than any other region presents a challenge for development. This is why the region receives the highest level of technical assistance from the Commonwealth<sup>15</sup>, 43 per cent of the CFTC budget is spent on Africa and in the last five years the region has received £4.5 million worth of CFTC national and regional assistance.<sup>16</sup> The CFTC budget may be just over £24 million, but this is considerably supplemented by the support the fund receives from friendly institutions such as the Department for International Development (DFID) in UK, the European Union, and the Canadian. International Development Agency (CIDA).<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the negative impact of debt on African development is an issue which the Commonwealth has been concerned with. This is why it has a Debt Management Programme which uses CS DRMS software. This now installed in 12 African countries; it provides advisory services and capacity building for effective domestic and external debt management. Over 65 per cent of debt management assistance has been targeted at African countries. This is because of the 26 countries officially recognized as High Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), 22 are in Africa.<sup>18</sup> The HIPC initiative was mooted by the Commonwealth. Three Commonwealth countries, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda have now reached completion point. Six others, Cameroon, the Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Zambia have reached their decision points (that is, they are in the process of getting their debt well managed). The HIPC initiative was expected to reduce the 22 African countries' debts by \$19 billion in 2020.<sup>19</sup> And while not meeting these targets, it has come pretty close. The recent plan by G8 finance ministers to completely forgive the debt of HIPC countries is also very much welcomed by the Commonwealth.

Democracy is a hollow concept without economic development. To this end, the Commonwealth recognises the importance of trade in Africa. In collaboration with the European Union, the African Region is currently benefiting from the 'Hub and Spokes' project which covers three areas: policy advice at regional and national levels, effective guidance on WTO and EPA trade policy matters at national and regional levels. To achieve its objectives, the project will provide, amongst other things, technical assistance and Senior Trade Policy Advisers stationed at the African Union, COMESA, SADC, and ECOWAS offices. It will also provide for the attachment of ACP experts to the Geneva and Brussels offices of African member countries.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has been providing technical and analytical support to Commonwealth developing 'countries on a wide range of issues under the Doha Development Round negotiations. The issue has to do with the problems arising from the world trade. The Commonwealth believes that tourism can be a major component of revenue generation in Africa. At the meeting of the Commonwealth Tourism Ministers, which took place in April 2005 in Abuja, the ministers pledged to work together to use tourism for sustainable development and the reduction of poverty for attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They also agreed to place tourism on the national and international agenda as a catalyst for poverty reduction.

The Economic Affairs Division of the Secretariat has implemented a two year project supported by DFID, between 2012 and 2014. The project examined the experiences of four countries to assess, how far their Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) were country-owned and to what extent donors were aligning their assistance behind the PRS. The Commonwealth has also identified itself with the objective of the New



Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) which emphasizes African ownership, leadership and accountability for its development. NEPAD is a development programme that is both African managed and owned. It brings the concept of a new partnership with mutual commitments, obligations, contributions and benefits. With NEPAD, Africa is undertaking certain commitments and obligations in its own interest which are not externally imposed conditionalities. NEPAD has been incorporated as a programme of the African Union designed to meet its development, and political objectives. Among the expected NEPAD outcomes are economic growth and development, a reduction in poverty, increased exports, and increased African integration.

One of the institutions created by NEPAD is the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) by which African countries agree to submit themselves to the scrutiny of their peers in order to ascertain that they are being governed in accordance with acceptable standards. The Commonwealth has been fully supportive of NEPAD and has been encouraging African member countries of the Commonwealth to sign up to the APRM. The Commonwealth has also been recognised by the AU and NEPAD as a partner organisation in the implementation of the APRM. Finally, the Commonwealth has endorsed the conclusion of the Blair Commission on Africa and has said it will assist in the implementation of its recommendations.

In spite of the criticism of the Commonwealth as being a racist international organisation, it has been making frantic efforts since 1994 to emphasize equality of all human beings and is combating racial and cultural divisions. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held biennially is usually preceded with an exhibition of the arts and crafts of the host country. This affords the host country an opportunity to showcase its culture. Apart from CHOGM, ministers responsible for education, environment, finance, foreign affairs, gender, health, law and youth also meet regularly. This gives member countries whether from Africa or other continents better understanding of each other's goals in the compacting world of the 21st century.

Part of what makes the Commonwealth unique is its diversity and its geographical spread. It therefore cherishes this diversity. Member countries of the Commonwealth span six continents: 19 in Africa, 8 in Asia, 3 in the Americas, 10 in the Caribbean, 3 in Europe and 11 in the Pacific. This geographical spread has enriched and added colour to the exhibitions in the host country of its culture. The same point of diversity and geographical spread also resonates in the benefits accruing to member countries on the issue of trade. The Commonwealth market is nine times greater than that of the European Union. The Commonwealth represents the less developed countries of which majority are in Africa. In 2012, the Commonwealth made a passionate appeal to the G20 to visit some of these countries and negotiate trade deals with them.

From all indications, it would appear that some of those who clamoured for Britain's exit (BREXIT) from the European Union (EU) did so on the strength of the argument that Britain is giving lesser attention to the Commonwealth because of certain extraneous factors imposed on her by the E.U. It could be said that EU's customs tariffs on Britain impede British trade with the Commonwealth members and that if Britain should exit EU, the Commonwealth would be at the core of Britain's foreign policy and this would translate to better deals for Britain as well as the entire Commonwealth. The argument goes further to say that Africa with its teeming population will be a large market

for British goods and that if Britain did not quickly do this, she may lose out in a highly competitive world.

It is strongly believed in Britain that with a common working language, familiar legal systems and shared values, there is a natural advantage for U K - Commonwealth trade than for U.K - EU trade. The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) paper titled "*Trading Europe and the United States of America*" has shown that the growing Asian economies and parts of South America and Africa are bringing them not only economic success but growing global influence. In this regard, the Commonwealth is particularly fortunate in that the Commonwealth's membership include two of the world's largest 10 economies (the U.K and India), two members of the G7 (Canada and the U. K) and five members of the G20 (the U.K., Canada, India, Australia and South Africa). There is therefore optimism that in the next 40 years much of global GDP growth will occur within the Commonwealth. Although U K's trade with the Commonwealth in 2010 in terms of export was €35 billion her exports to Commonwealth countries were dwarfed by exports to the U.S.A.<sup>20</sup> It is hoped that with BREXIT, U. K-Africa trade will be on the upward swing and would be of mutual benefit

With regard to education, the U.K., Canada, and Australia are assisting African member countries in some ways. Commonwealth scholarship and fellowships are enjoyed by some African members through the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). The number of the Association of Commonwealth Universities has increased from 233 to 533 recently.<sup>21</sup> Commonwealth fellows have the opportunity to interact with scholars from the developed countries of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth also provides many opportunities for the education of the citizens of member states. In particular, it supports tertiary education in some member countries. Of the five countries that receive more than 59% of foreign students, three are Commonwealth member states: Australia, Canada and U.K.<sup>22</sup> The Commonwealth scholarship and fellowship indirectly impact on recipients to spread the values, sympathies and culture while having direct benefit on individual career development.

Education lies at the heart of personal and social development and has always been a key priority for developing and developed Commonwealth countries in their plans for social and economic development. It has a key role to play in promoting knowledge and awareness of the Commonwealth and its values. It provides the setting and the impetus for much of the movement of persons, services and ideas that have produced a shared sense of Commonwealth identity. Students and teacher mobility, academic exchange, cross-border provision of courses, examinations and qualifications, trade in books and educational materials, all contribute significantly to building Commonwealth consciousness. The education sector more than any other sector (whether gender, human right or health) has more pan-Commonwealth voluntary and professional organizations and associations within the Commonwealth.

Apart from education, democracy, human right, trade and economic development, the Commonwealth also helps to build shared understanding of global issues such as national debt, environmental degradation, promotion of ICT and so on. The Commonwealth provides a mechanism for reaching joint position on key issues facing the world. For example, in the ICT world, the Commonwealth International Telecommunication Union (ITU) group strives to harmonize the different positions of

Commonwealth countries within the ITU system and to act as a pressure group. Its strength has been proven on several occasions including elections in the ITU council. On the issue of climate change, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting CHOGM in 2009 and 2011 expressed concern and have been brain storming on the next line of action.

The Commonwealth is the only multilateral organisation that has the Youth Programme not only to inform and involve the young people in development, but also in opening up of elite Commonwealth associations to younger members. The Royal Commonwealth Society has run student Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting but lack of finance has prevented continuity.<sup>23</sup> The Commonwealth needs to look into this. The major Commonwealth attraction for younger people is of course the Commonwealth Games, sufficiently being utilised for the benefit of Commonwealth understanding.

In addition to the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), the Commonwealth is also interested in gender issues as it strives hard for females in some member countries to acquire vocational skills. It also encourages women to play more visible role in politics. The Commonwealth has blazed the trail in being the first multilateral organisation to have a female (though a Guyanese) as the Secretary General. Certainly this will impact positively on African female members of the Commonwealth.

### **Commonwealth and Africa: Any Mutual Benefits?**

The Commonwealth of today bears no resemblance to the British empire of the past. Rwanda joined the Commonwealth in 2009 while Mozambique joined the Commonwealth in 1995. Algeria (a Francophone country) is among the applicants (in addition to Suriname, Kuwait, and Lebanon) for Commonwealth membership. What this means is that the Commonwealth in spite of various criticisms from some members, is still attractive and fascinating. As Professor Ade Adefuye observed, the Commonwealth is an entirely new conception built on the highest qualities of the spirit of friendship, loyalty and the desire for freedom and peace.<sup>24</sup>

Although the British government provides 30% of the budget of the Commonwealth Secretariat in addition to the free use of Marlborough House and Quadrant House as offices and the British Monarch, the Queen, Elizabeth II is Head of State in each of the Commonwealth countries individually; every member of the Commonwealth is equal. With the collapse of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 and the enthronement of Nelson Mandela as the first African President of South Africa, it is clear that the British Government would have to respect the view of the majority of every member country even if the view clashes and/or conflicts with the British view. Downing Street would therefore continue to “play the piper without necessarily calling the tune”.<sup>25</sup>

One unique feature of the Commonwealth is that it is an organisation whose structure is not based on a formal constitution or charter. Rather, it has a series of declarations and statements which define the principles on which the organisation is based and which have become the core values of the Commonwealth as pronounced in Singapore in 1971, reaffirmed in Harare in 1991 and strengthened at Millbrook in 1995 with the establishment of a machinery (Commonwealth Monitoring Action Group (CMAG) for their implementation. Singapore, Harare, Millbrook and Coolum statements

declare the Commonwealth belief in democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality of all citizens and the commitment to 'sustainable development of all member countries. The Harare principles came about as a result of the establishment of a committee of heads of Government known as the High Level Appraisal Group established in the 1989 CHOGM in Kuala Lumpur to review all activities of the Commonwealth and chart a course and the activities and role of the Commonwealth. After every CHOGM the Chairperson in Office (i.e the host of CHOGM) with some officials will review what action had been reached at the meeting. This is in a bid to walk the talk.

The Commonwealth incontrovertibly has proved its relevance in Africa, most especially with regard to Harare principles as well as the democratization of some African member nations. If not for the Commonwealth, Nigeria and Zimbabwe would not have been suspended. As at the time of writing this article in September 2016, the people of Zimbabwe were still protesting against Robert Mugabe's 36-year rule. However, the CMAG would still have to be strengthened to play more effective role in unseating despots. Though there are still violations of human rights in Africa as well as gender inequality, the very fact that the Commonwealth is not folding its arms shows that such violations will decrease as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses.<sup>26</sup>

At the Abuja CHOGM in December 2003, the Commonwealth recognized that corruption erodes economic development as well as corporate government and pledged maximum cooperation and assistance to recover assets of illicit origin and repatriate them to the countries of origin. Many African countries are known for high level corruption and fear is being expressed that no matter the profitability of African trade with the Commonwealth, if institutions are not strengthened in such a manner that corrupt Africans can end up behind the bars, the wealth derived from commerce will be looted and majority of African Commonwealth members and none members will still remain poor. In effect, Africa must put its house in order so as to benefit from Africa's relations with the Commonwealth.

### **Conclusion**

There has been a somewhat shift in Commonwealth focus after the collapse of apartheid from blatant and outrageous racism to economic development, agitation against unfair international trade practices as well as democratic issues. Rather than go cap-in-hand to the developed countries for aid, Africans now prefer to trade with the western countries on terms that will be beneficial to Africans. Africans, most especially Nigerians are mounting irresistible pressure on Britain to return Abacha's loot to the Nigerian government. Nigeria must ensure that Britain fulfills the promise. In addition, Africans must use the Commonwealth to come up with decisions that will forbid the developed members from providing safe haven for looted funds from Africa. African members should continue to use the Commonwealth for effective and collective articulation of their interest in world politics. For Africa and the Commonwealth it has been an effective and beneficial partnership as both Chief Emeka Anyaoku and Professor Ade Adefuye would seem to agree. Professor Bola Akinterinwa agreed with this position. I believe very strongly that Africa can still use the Commonwealth in more effective ways than it is currently doing.

Africans can use the Commonwealth to get their governments to be much more transparent and committed to democratic principles, rule of law, human rights and

economic development if both the African continent and the Commonwealth are sincere. If the Commonwealth is genuinely interested in the development of African member nations, the developed member countries must promote the welfare of the less developed countries by not supporting the corrupt governments that loot the treasury and hide the loots in the developed member countries. Those who support thieves are themselves rogues! The rest of the 21st century must be completely free of corruption.

Africa's democratic journey has improved, thanks to the Commonwealth. Nowhere is this more evident in Nigeria than when in the 2015 general elections an incumbent was defeated by the opposition candidate in a smooth and peaceful transition. Nigeria was commended by the whole world for this feat. Furthermore, for the first time in Nigeria's history, democratic rule since 1999 is uninterrupted and hopefully will continue to be so. Professor Ade Adefuye's labour is therefore not in vain.

It is a fortunate development that my suggestion to the effect that the Commonwealth should blaze the trail in appointing a female as the organisation's Secretary General has found favour in the sight of the Commonwealth. However, the organization will still have to do more for the female gender. The female gender is still largely discriminated against and still has no voice. The Commonwealth must be much more vocal and supportive of the girl child than hitherto. Dynamism and aggressiveness must be Commonwealth's password.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> On Nigeria- Commonwealth ties, see Bola A. Akinterinwa, "The Future of the Commonwealth" in *Nigeria and the Commonwealth Reflections and Projections*, in Modupeolu Faseke (ed.) (Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria publishers 2009), pp 203 –236

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Clapham, "U.K - African relations: The Background, to Labour's African Policy"; (paper presented at Sheffield, workshop on U.K- African relations, Sheffield January 20, 2014), 2

<sup>3</sup> Bola Akinterinwa, "The Future of the Commonwealth", 203-236

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 'The role and future of the Commonwealth' Fourth Report of Session 2012-2013 in (London: The Stationary Office Limited, 2012), 11

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> . House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on The Role and Future of the Commonwealth published on November 15, 2012 by authority of the House of Commons London.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ade Adefuye, "The Commonwealth in Africa: A General Framework" *Progressive Politics* 4(2), 2009, 34-38, 36.



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<sup>10</sup> See Commonwealth Secretariat, ‘Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Mozambique, December 1—2, 2004: The Report on the Commonwealth: Exped Team on the Result Process, 2004’ (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004)

<sup>11</sup> Marcus Power, “The Commonwealth, ‘development and post-colonial responsibility’”, *Geoforum* 40(1), 2009, pp14-21, 18

<sup>12</sup> See Mathew Ford, ‘Building Stability Overseas: Three case Studies in British Defense Diplomacy- Uganda, Rhodesia- Zimbabwe, and Sierra Leone’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 25(3), 584-606, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Ade Adefuye, ‘The Commonwealth in Africa’, 35

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>15</sup> See Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation Advancing Development and Building Prosperity, (London Commonwealth Secretariat, 2006)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ade Adefuye, ‘The Commonwealth in Africa’, 36

<sup>18</sup> See Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Secretariat’s debt management Programme, (London Commonwealth Secretariat, 2006)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs ‘ Future of the Commonwealth...’, 36

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>24</sup> Ade Adefuye, “The Commonwealth and of the Future”, *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs* (NIJA) vol. 30, No, 2004 *Special Issue on The Future of the Commonwealth*, 116-119

<sup>25</sup> Ade Adefuye “Obasanjo Commonwealth Chairperson: Challenge and Strategy 2004-2005” in *Nigeria’s New Foreign Policy Thrust. Essays in Honour of Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji*, Bola A. Akinterinwa (ed.) (Ibadan: Vantage Publishers, 2004), 413

<sup>26</sup> See Modupeolu Faseke “Commonwealth Attitude to Feminine Issues: A Case Study of Women Empowerment” in Modupeolu Faseke (ed.) *Nigeria And The Commonwealth: Reflections and Projections*. Ibadan Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 2003