

The Challenges with Implementing Fact-Based Democracy in Third World Countries

Traditions and Cultural Heritage in the Tribal Communities

How do you implement a fact-based democracy in a country where a considerable part of the population still adheres to old and, in a modern context, outdated beliefs in tribal shamanism and witchcraft? Many of the African central- and southern countries still have issues with illiteracy and lacking knowledge about contemporary science with regards to health and medicine as well as more abstract theorems concerning the workings of the world outside the isolated village in which one lives. It is not uncommon that you open the Herald of Zimbabwe newspaper and read about life stories and reportages depicting a civil society still clinging to the popular beliefs in magic, shamanism, and superstition. It is also very much still present in South Africa, especially in poverty-stricken areas commonly known as townships around the country. An indicator of this phenomenon is visible in the lack of formal education, unregistered citizens, and the amount of foreign help organizations that tirelessly work to educate women and men in sexual health and offer western medical aid as a counterweight to the traditional ritualistic medicine. Millions of South Africans live in remote and rural areas and are solely dependent on traditional healers or sangomas to cure any mental or physical ailments. It is also evident in the former President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma whose traditional beliefs shined through especially clear when he made the public statement during a rape trial he faced after allegedly having raped a HIV-positive woman. Mr. Zuma said that he'd preferred to take a shower after having unprotected sex with the HIV-positive woman rather than wear a condom, and that this method had the same effect and would keep him safe from contracting aids. This sounds ancient right? But the incident occurred in 2006. On the same note, there was long a popular belief perpetuated by some traditional healers, that if you were HIV-positive you could cure the disease by having unprotected sex with a virgin, which resulted in a surge of child rape across the country back in 2001.

It is evident that ritualistic traditions still have a strong hold on a considerable part of the poorer population to this day. With the COVID-19 crisis, you still see communities employing traditional medicine, rituals, and prayers as their main treatment for the disease. So, in a country such as aforementioned, how easy would it be to transition from thousands of years of ritualistic traditions

and cultural heritage based on spiritualism and non-evidential customs, to a much westernized tradition of politics which is primarily based on facts, statistics, best practice and literacy?

How could one mend the gap between the two different approaches? And is it possible to build a democracy based on westernized ideas on how things should work, in a context that does not allow the voters to fully commit or understand the policies due to failure to merge realities? If not every single person in a country has the same opportunity to assimilate the ideas or proposals provided by political parties, is it then really a democracy? Isn't the charade of a relatively newly democratized country in all honesty ran by a minority? In this instance, we are not discussing a slight minority of the population that is illiterate, economically disadvantaged, uneducated, and raised in rural areas indirectly governed by Chieftdoms and traditional leaders or in some cases criminal gangs. We are talking about several millions of people. I for one, can't see how you could argue that South Africa is an operating democracy given the reasons of inequality previously mentioned. The challenge that the democratic institutions around the world are seemingly blind to, is the colonial power-move to once again, implement European standards and reasoning on African nations. Have we not done this enough? Maybe less effort should be put towards ideological convictions supporting forceful implementation and more effort on actually trying to educate and give the people a chance to take a well-informed decision for themselves, isn't that what democracy should be about? That is at least what I dream of it to be. But it cannot be realized until profound inequalities such as literacy, education and evidence-based medical treatment is provided to all people, no matter how remote the village.

It is a lot of pretty words. To make them more accurate and practical we need to break it down to what needs to be done and how. I see one obvious way of bridging the gap between the westernized vision of democracy and the traditional rural communities. If the political forces were to connect with the traditional healers and tribal leaders on a level that explains the need for education and the privileges it brings with it, and have materialized plans for how to make that happen in their villages, maybe, we could begin to see a shift. Where leaders alongside and in collaboration with politicians encourage their people to engage and realize what a massive impact they could have on the future of their children if they voluntarily engaged themselves in community building and education. Lifting people up to help others in their community – this is the way. And to do it in

collaboration. Think tanks. Workshops. Ears to the ground. Making politics great again. With the power and determination of the people. That's a true democratic future which I can believe in.

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