A three-day UNDP conference in Rwanda has highlighted the importance of local solutions to Africa's governance challenges. The event, which began on March 11th, brought together experts and officials from across Africa to discuss the best ways to foster peace and strengthen governance on the continent.

Ozonnia Ojielo, the UNDP Coordinator in Rwanda, shared his thoughts on Africa's ongoing governance issues. He pointed out that many African countries still follow colonial-era governance models that are not suited to the continent's unique history, culture, and needs. "While these models were once adopted, they don't reflect Africa's diverse realities," Ojielo explained.

He emphasized that although African nations tried to adapt these models, they haven't always worked. "Africa's history, economy, politics, and relationships with colonizing countries differ greatly. These colonial models haven't always been productive for us," Ojielo said.

Ojielo also highlighted how Western governance models are often seen as ideal by international donors, even though they may not align with African traditions. These traditional systems, he believes, hold important lessons that are often overlooked.

"Africa needs to rethink what governance means for us," he added. He gave the example of Rwanda's leadership during the post-genocide era. "In the early 2000s, Rwanda recognized that divisions were being caused by power being concentrated in one group. So, they made sure everyone had a voice, even small political parties, and gave them a role in the country's governance."

Dr. Emmanuel Ugirashebuja, Rwanda's Minister of Justice, also spoke about the importance of self-reliance. He explained that when African countries chart their own path, they can see real development. "When we chose to rely on our own decisions, many didn't understand. But we knew it would work for us," he said. "Making choices that suit our challenges has helped Rwanda grow."

The conference also highlighted Rwanda's progress in education and poverty reduction. Fatmata Lovetta Sesay, the UNDP Resident Representative in Rwanda, praised the country's efforts to address school dropout rates and reduce street children. She pointed out that providing food for students has helped keep children in school, reduced the number of street children, and led to a decline in crimes associated with them.

The event underscored the need for Africa to focus on solutions that reflect its own values and experiences. Rwanda’s success in finding homegrown answers to its challenges provides valuable lessons for the entire continent.