

A Discourse on Good Governance in Contemporary Democratic Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper examines the issue of good governance in contemporary Nigeria's democratic practice. Issues of governance and development are fundamental issues that every society both developed and undeveloped needs in every facet of human endeavours: economic, social, political, cultural and psychological wellbeing for its continuous existence. However, these basic ingredients and/or requirements are lacking or at best ineffectively utilized in some parts of the world especially in Nigeria, hence, underdevelopment economic decline and insecurity pervades the political practice of Nigeria.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Issues of governance and development are fundamental issues that every society both developed and undeveloped needs in every facet of human endeavours: economic, social, political, cultural and psychological wellbeing for its continuous existence.

However, these basic ingredients and/or requirements are lacking or at best ineffectively utilized in some parts of the world especially in Africa, Asia and Latin American with little exceptions of some Latin American countries of Brazil and Mexico, and the Asian Tigers of China, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and Taiwan etc. which of late are emergent economies.

Governance with its appellation "good governance" provides functional, purposeful, dynamic, responsive and visionary political leadership which has been found to be responsible for the steering of the desired progress and transformation in the world best managed economies today. Without these measures, requisite developments have been elusive or impossible irrespective of all other human and material resources which a country and its people possess. This explains the inevitability and indispensability of the concept of governance to the development of the individual person as a member of the society, social group and the entire political and economic system. Development therefore must be conceived and nurtured by a people through a conscious effort made manifest through planning and made realizable through policies that are people's centered to help them overcome their present situation to the position where they could confirm to be better than the former.

Many factors as may have been pointed out in other works have been offered to explain the apparent failures of the development in Nigeria and Africa at large. This work therefore, intends to re-open and re-awaken the debates on the development condition in Africa beyond arm chair theorizing. It provides and offers some more pro-active strategies towards Africa's development.

We shall thus be looking at the present condition of our polity and then review what need re-invigoration for purposeful result. Before then, we necessarily must look at some given variables of governance and development starting with – basic definitional matters of the concepts of governance and development; theoretical consideration; governance and development: as agents of societal transformation; fundamentals of governance and developments; the current problems of governance in Nigeria; and the possible ways of re-energizing the machinery of governments in the country to foster effective governance and development as a way for before drawing the conclusion.

II. BASIC DEFINITIONAL MATTERS

Governance – According to Ozigbo (2000), "denotes how people are ruled and how the affairs of the state are administered and regulated. It also refers to a nation's system of politics and how this functions in relation to public administration and law."

Also a World Bank Report (1989) captions governance as "the exercise of the political power to manage a nation's affairs." By this definition, the issue of governance is perceived to encompass the states institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes and implementation capacity, and the relationship between government officials and the public. It thus implies that public authority plays an indispensable and potentially creative role in establishing a conducive environment to enhance development.

More so, governance also entails a perceived commitment of the government in responding to the needs and aspiration of the people which are not limited to physical and infrastructure but also including freedom, transparency, participation and accountability as elements to make a more meaningful life for the citizenry in recreating themselves and the society (Ake 1996). This means that good governance guides a country along the line and course of development.

Development – Development as a concept has enjoyed quite a number of debates and controversies among scholars in diverse field of human endeavours, in which case some have only articulated notions as to what constitute development. Rodney (2009) conceptualize development from three perspectives:

1. At the level of individual which implies an increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well being;

2. At the level of social group, development implies and increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationship; and

3. At the economic level, development occur when members of a society increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. Rodney's conception of development shows a trend of progressive change and increase in activities of man in the society in relation to his efforts to increasing his capacity personally, socially, in his natural environment to ensure a peaceful and harmonious co-existence. It is an overall social process which is dependent upon the outcome of mains efforts to deal with his natural environment. Corroborating the above, (Ake, 1996), defined development as the "process by which people recreate themselves and their life circumstance to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choice and values." This implies that development must be charted by the people as they desire at any point in time. It must be people centered and geared towards an improvement from the condition of backwardness to a situation of increase in their condition of living. This also goes to say that development must also conquer poverty or eliminate it alongside other menace such as hunger, flood, draught and diseases etc. in the human society which have been seen in contemporary discourses as factors needing attention in the world especially in the third world countries. This means that development must incorporate the basic and fundamental issues of politics, social economic, cultural and health to guide the society along the line of healthy growth and wellbeing. Todaro and Smith (2009:22) hinged development on three cardinal objectives.

(i) To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health, and protection.

(ii) To raise levels of living, including in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material wellbeing but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem.

(iii) To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also to the forces of governance and human misery (Todaro and Smith 2009:22).

Development therefore, is a choice thing which becomes manifest through a people and society's conscientious effort to overcome their predicaments by effectively using their environment through skills, knowledge, competence, and technology acquire through a systematic and well planned educational system etc. towards society transformation. A society which is undeveloped or has much traces of underdevelopment have simply refused to deploy the necessary machineries of state in motion as well as incorporating the best of it citizens and/or individual in and outside the country for a concerted development to take place. This affirms Ake (1996) position that "development is something that people must do for themselves, although it can be facilitated by the help of others. If people are the end of development, as a case, they are also necessarily its agents and it means.

III. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

Ekekwe (1986) posits that "no matter how ill-advised, bizarre or Contradictory, all political actions are informed by some theoretical Perspective." It is important therefore, to understand this discourse from the Utilitarian theorists of which Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) and James Mill (1773 – 1836) are the best exponents. They stood for the greatest good of the greatest number of people. In other words, they stressed on the idea that man is an integral part of society without which it shall not be possible for him to live a happy and joyous life. They believed that man and society are inseparable and these could be obtained by promoting moral development of the people looking after their progress and uplifting them socially, economically, culturally, morally, physically and even mentally.

Bentham contends that "*Nature has placed mankind under the Governance of two Sovereign Masters, 'pain' and 'pleasures'. It is for them to point out as to what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.*"

Against this backdrop, the utilitarian believed in the concerned efforts of people through their institutions to execute development in their societies and that this is the means through which the greatest

happiness of the people could be achieved. It could as well be stated to mean that, the utilitarian were of the opinion that the pleasures should not be the monopoly of only a section or class in the society but of the greatest number of people. Thus, the very existence of the state and its institutions of governance could only be on how and to what extent states promoted happiness. In fact, Bentham even did not bother about the form of government but his sole objective was that the agency commanding authority on the subjects should promote happiness and pleasure and avoid pain (Mukhi, 2008).

It is therefore, axiomatic that the essence of every institutions of the state stood for nothing less than the provision of “a good life for the citizens of the state.” The implication of this statement is that the government of the day has the duty of providing the citizens with a higher standard of living to enable them achieved their fullest potentials.

IV. GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT: AS AGENTS OF SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

Considering the various conceptual definitions of “governance” and “development”, we come to agree that both concepts appear inseparable in fostering development in the society especially in the context of national development. A good government of visionary leadership avowedly targets the development of its citizens and society. Development in this context depicts an increase transformation in their lives from a stage at which they had low self and group aspirations to another stage where their goals and self esteem are made realizable in their economic, social, cultural, political, and psychological lives. These measures of developments are engendered through the provision of government institutions in the state vis-à-vis the executive, legislative and the judiciary in active collaboration with the civil and public services as agencies of effective service delivery.

The concept of governance which ultimately relates to the totality of the processes entailed in the exercise and management of the collective will of the people or group under defined authority or constitution must carry with its certain defining characteristics such as – the rule of law and accountability, law making, maintenance of law and order, policy formulation, protection of life and property, defense and administration of justice which are made possible through the emergence of qualitative public policies, national development plan, provision of good and qualitative leadership to challenge good followership, promote sound and virile political culture etc. (Adejo, 2007).

However, we must recognize that in the modern states, issues of governance and development lay mostly within the exclusive preserve of the institutions of government in their adore role as machinery through which the will of the state are formulated and expressed in a political community.

Be that as it may, these institutions of the state or governmental organs are expected to approach their responsibilities in a transparent and accountable manner. It is expedient of the executive arm of government in the discharged of its constitutionally assigned responsibility to enforce laws, the execution of administrative policy, the conduct of foreign affairs, the control of armed forces and the authority to grant pardon and amnesty to offenders against state (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999).

This suggests the enormous powers of the executive arm of government in modern state which should be effectively deployed for re-engineering, re-invigorating and probably redesigning of the institutions and agencies of government to achieve more credible returns and dividends of good governance whose ultimate aim is the provision of both opportunities for individuals and group achievements. It therefore, behooves the state to come up with development plans and policies that are realizable, feasible and translatable into physical reality for the benefit, achievement and fulfillment of the individual and generally of the members of the public as posited by the Utilitarian theorists. According to Anifowose and Enemu (1999:170)

The executive branch of government is responsible for much of the planning of the modern state. in reality the executive is the active force in any government

This goes to show that for a society to develop, it must possess the ability to tap its natural resources, human and material through effective policy enactment and initiative through the executive process to cater for the needs of the generality of the people. This must include poverty, draught, disease, malnutrition, HIV and aids, climate change, environmental pollutions, civil war etc. that may arise from time to time (Todaro et al 2009).

Zeroing in on the above, it is no doubt explicit to say that for a society to develop, it must have a capable system that will develop the forces of production and strengthen the social relation of production. Nnoli (1993:218) also contend that people are the foundation of development, thus their non-involvement in the governing process is an impediment to socio-economic progress of their countries. This therefore, call to mind that the recruitment of people into public offices is a most crucial factor to engender a good government for the promotion of good governance for development since they occupied such a vintage position in deciding the path and course of action through which much desire development could be attained. Failure on their part as have been seen through endemic corruption, lack of adequate planning and budgeting, lackluster attitude towards

policy implementation, lack of vision and effective planning in both short and long term are responsible for the backward state of development in the country.

V. LEGISLATIVE MACHINERY

Conventional view of the legislative arm of government is that of making laws that guide and direct the affairs of a country (Alapiki, 2005, Oyeneye et al 2000). This function is however, not limited but also includes the exercise of oversight functions on a wide variety of areas in the governance process and institutional management. This is one of the most crucial areas where the legislature and the executive and other Parastatals of government work interact on a regular basis in order to foster good governance and development. According to Nyong (1999:216):

Legislative oversight function is another medium of providing build-in mechanism of checks and balances as empowered by the constitution for the legislature, that outside its primary law making function are want to oversee the activities of other arms of government ministries, board, parastatals etc. and call to order where they erred and make legislation to guide their subsequent operation.

Against this backdrop, the legislative function which included the oversight functions is another strong vehicular process to ensure good governance. The investigative power it possess provide a very effective way of keeping track of a particular piece of legislation and also make administrators to think twice when implementing a policy as they can be brought before a committee to explain their actions. In this regard, whenever a member of the House (representative and Senate) notices some wrong doing in any government ministry, department, Parastatal or agency, he drums the attention of the relevant bodies to that effect and by extension the security agencies and the judiciary for necessary actions.

It is important to know that the effective discharge of oversight functions embedded in the legislature go along way to make the government to live up to its responsibility to providing the citizens with the good things of life, without the limitation of its finance and economic circumstances. Also, the making and passing of bills and legislations into law in both houses of Senate and Representative is also another medium through which the legislatives arm of government could foster development in the country. Legislations that have to do with human capital development, poverty alleviation, child trafficking, early child marriage etc. must be critically evaluated to see their collective benefit on the entire citizenry. But arguably, Nigerians are yet to see these two houses coming up and standing firm to enact laws and even bills to stamp out corruption which has eaten deep into the general fabrics of the society and has become a serious bane in the country's development process. This must be overcome starting with our leaders who are holding this exulted position as exemplar. Unpunished corruption helps to institutionalize the menace. In other words, people are caught and not punished. Also the laws appear not to help matters. The comparative study of the menace makes it difficult to control. For instance, in Brazil, as many as seven ministers have been sent to prison for corruption since President Lula left power, but in Nigeria, the question is, how many ministers have been jailed, so we do not have here a strong institution and president that want to champion the fight against corruption which is one of the big issues that prevent our huge resources from translating into poverty alleviation for the generality of our people (Igini, 2013).

VI. JUDICIAL MACHINERY

The judiciary is widely known and appreciated as the third organ of government whose basic and primary function among others include the settlement of dispute and punishing law breakers. This no doubt states the importance as well as the indispensable role the judiciary plays in guaranteeing good governance and development in a political system.

Essentially, the resilience of the judiciary to live above board of political influence and maneuvering by other organs of government and some powerful individuals in the society to the impartial adjudication and dispensation of justice delivery system among other things engenders good governance for development. In order to do this, they must be independent and impartial as well as make certain that the executive organ in carrying out its functions adhere to the rules and procedures laid down by law. For example, when a person is detained without trial, the court can compel the executive to bring the detained person to court and to show reason for his continued detention. In this case, there must be due process of law which must be transparent and known to all concerned. In law, it implies fair hearing and the unbiased application of the requisite laws of the land irrespective of one's personal interests.

On this pedestal, development is engendered especially when viewed at the individual and social group as espoused by Walter Rodney, to include "greater freedom and capacity of individual and increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationship", and Todoaro and Smith's postulation of "expanding the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and

dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery.”

These sign posts of good governance are also the sign post of development maxim at both latent and manifest levels and wherever they prevail, they guarantee proper dividends to the people. In the task of building a just and humane nation where its people have a fair choice to attain their fullest potentials, I agreed with Professor Ben Nwabueze’s prescriptions of these fundamentals to include the following:

- Total respect for the rule of law
- Efficient and prompt administration of justice;
- Predictability, objectivity and consistency in government measures
- Respect for the sanctity of contracts
- Strict rejection of the pursuit of self-enrichment as the motive for seeking political leadership and office.

VII. THE CURRENT PROBLEMS OF GOVERNANCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA:

There is an increasing loss of confidence on the part of the majority of Nigerians in the ability of the government to resolve the enormous problems confronting the people, where poverty and miseries are endemic.

- Misappropriation of Federally allocated revenue to the different tiers of government in the country. This disturbing trend has eaten deep and permeated every facets of the Nigerian society such that the excessive arm of government for example, at the local government level only try to pay their worker’s monthly salary after which the money is said to be shared among the party henchmen. The essence of developing the rural areas becomes defeated. Hence there is gross backwardness in terms of social infrastructures etc.
- Poor attitude to policy implementation, orientation, resulting in the making of machinery of government obsolete and unproductive.
- Primitive accumulation by the political class, thereby leading to massive corruption, exhibition of insatiable greed, and the pursuit of self enrichment on the part of members of the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.
- The payment of outrageously inflated remuneration in salaries and allowances to political office holders in total disregard of our very low per capita national income, especially when view in the context of increasing pauperization of the people with 70 percent Nigerians living below the poverty time.
- Poor settlement pattern of dispute by the judiciary leading to miscarriage of justice to favour some political class.

VIII. RE-INVIGORATING THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT: WAY FORWARD

For enhanced efficiency and credible governance and development in the country, the institutions of the state and its agencies must be refreshed and energized. The aspects of good governance which must be embraced include:

- The fundamental issue of rule of law i.e. the absolute supremacy or predominance of regular law as opposed to influence of arbitrary power. The rule of law, as posited by Professor A. V. Dicey (1885) must be seen as the glue that binds all aspects of the state, the economy and society.
- The state must have monopoly on the legitimate means of violence.
- Efficient and prompt administration of justice
- Zero tolerance for corruption and the prompt application of adequate sanction against offenders including seizure of all properties corruptly acquired.
- Efficient and timely service delivery by all agencies, unconstrained by rent-seeking and other corrupt practices.

IX. CONCLUSION

Governance and development are two indispensable concepts that every political society must take serious in its transformation bid. The machinery and institutions of government must be efficient, effective, visionary etc. in order to steer the necessary measures and ideas to bring about desirable development. Development must be people’s centered and adapted whether align or indigenous into the way of life of the people. It must be able to change the human condition from bad to good, before it could be said to have conquer and/or reduce poverty, malnutrition, diseases, infant mortality, HIV and Aids and infrastructure which are the basic indices in measuring development in contemporary world. However, in the context of the Nigerian society, the much needed development indices are a far cry. Efforts must be conscientiously made by our political leaders using the state resources to finance and mobilize the much needed development through short and long term planning with enough political will to ensure its actualization.

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