

Democracy, Good Governance and Development: Nigeria's Experience

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Abstract: *The quest for democracy, good governance, and development has long been in the minds of many African leaders including Nigeria. Yet not many have achieved this neither do they have what it takes to make a government good and democratic. Using content analysis, the paper reveals that democracy has even in advanced countries not been practiced free and fair, though it is not dominated by many flaws as it is the case in Nigeria. This has prevented development from taking place. The paper examines the link between, democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria and submits that good governance reinforces democratic norms and practices while democracy offers the best prospects for good governance. However, democratic governance is not synonymous with good governance and development. Therefore, the mere existence of democracy does not translate into good governance and development. It however, follows that good governance is enhanced by democracy just as the former is a precondition for the realization of development. The paper clearly demonstrates that development efforts in Nigeria have failed because the tenets of democracy and features of good governance have been thwarted by state apparatus among other factors. The paper concludes that the hope for reconfiguring Nigeria lies in promoting good governance through the principles of democracy to ensure development.*

I. Introduction

“Without good governance, without the rule of law, predictable administration, legitimate power, and responsive power, and responsive regulation, no amount of funding, no amount of charity will set us on the path of prosperity. –Kofi Annan (cited in Adejumo, 2004:11).”

Liberal democracy, good governance and development are in crisis particularly among the Third World Countries and some developed economies. The level of apathy, self alienation, cynicism in public discourse and about political leaders, decreasing involvement of the people in social and political participation and declining confidence in government as well as the rule of law in these economies show that democracy, good governance and development are not doing too well in those societies. In Africa, liberal democracy is witnessing a new jump-start riddled with much cynicism. Indeed, the global thought on Africa especially as rained by western media and practitioners is one of a political dungeon: a tale of chaos, anarchy, genocide and wars. The stereotype constructed is that Africa is a region that works through a reverse logic of political disorder and irrationality, where politics is about barefaced stealing and a game of the belly, where political motion is of oscillation and retreat, rather than any advance or progress, and where the law of the ‘jungle’ subsists, the dictates of the constitution. (Thomson, 2004)

While it is true that there have been apparent political setbacks in Africa, Nigeria in particular, facilitated by a complex interaction of local and global forces, about one and a half decades ago has witnessed intricate internal political dynamics and struggles to engender a culture of politics, good governance and development. Although political turbulence are evident in much of Nigeria’s political expeditions, these deep expressions are linked with the struggle to expand the political space, negotiate power relations, claim individual and group rights, reconstruct institutions and structures of the state, governance, and make way for developmental projects. Dominant political tradition is under attack in the process of creating a new regime of democratic practices, norms of governance and subsequently, development.

Indeed, the main challenge facing third world societies, including those in Africa today is the creation of a political system with legitimacy in the eyes of the majority and actualization of development. Without legitimacy in government borne out of true democratic electoral process, there can be no authority and stability and consequently, no social and economic progress. It should be noted that the mere existence of democracy does not automatically translate into good governance and development. Democratic government ought to have legitimacy which gives it authority and acceptance. It is this particular structure, organization and the roles performed by the leadership that make for good governance and bring about development.

II. Conceptual Clarification

Democracy, Good Governance and Development

The terms democracy, good governance, and development have become universal phrases used especially to describe the trends of current political development in Nigeria. But what do these terms mean? Do they appropriately capture what we seek to describe or analyze? And what is the synergy between these concepts?

Democracy in the classical sense as Ake (2000) argues, is a concept that is uncharacteristically precise. It simply connotes popular power. It is not about delegated authority, or representative governance, but about popular expression of power by the people. Popular power as Ake posits is the essence of democracy. According to Dahl (1982: 11),

"it is viewed as a system of elected representative government operated under the rule of law, where the most significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the practice of making governmental decisions, i.e. of allocation of scarce resources".

In short, democracy is the system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in governance rightly belongs to the people, and that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in human rights, where equitable social and economic gains are the birth right of everyone in the society. According to Ayoade (1998:11):

"Democracy is the form of government in which every citizen in a state has political investments of political participation and trust. This system of government is owned by the people which it governs. It is this ownership that makes it tenable and acceptable to the people.... it is marked by the continuous dialogue and interaction between those who govern and are ruled".

The basic characteristics of democracy include the existence of the mechanism for political and economic choice, balanced political structure and stable political system where periodic elections are held in which the people renew their mandate of those they love and accept or terminate those they are dissatisfied with through the succession of a new government. It is therefore owned and deployed by them at will. Thus, it is only when government is adjudged by the people as having fulfilled their wishes that it can be considered as democratic. Thus democracy allows mutual exchange of views and opinion through freedom of speech. It also allows the people enjoy other rights such as rights of association or freedom of association, worship etc.

There are various forms of democracy and these range from the socialists to the liberal democratic variants practiced mostly in the communist and western capitalist states respectively. There are other democratic forms in the world which are not strictly in line with those practiced by western countries but have contributed immensely to the socio-economic and political development of these areas. Such ones include the peculiar cases of democracies in Japan, India, some South East Asian, Middle East and some African countries.

In Africa, the idea of modern democracy was introduced during the colonial period when constitutional processes were put in place to lead Africans towards the gradual achievement of independence. Various features of democracy such as formation of political parties, elections into legislative houses, and other forms of political participation were introduced. When independence was achieved in 1960, these democratic practices were to be carried out in a more modified and accepted manner to meet the peculiarities of the African states. These unique characteristics made democracy rather cumbersome. Hence, the eventual collapse of the first republic and subsequent ones. Today, many African states have returned to democracy, but the extent to which the present democratic dispensation has been sustained leaves much for thought.

The concept of governance like democracy is a contested one. The range of definitions that have surface on governance can be subsumed into two broad categories. On the one hand are those who view governance in a technical sense. In this case, the concept borrows directly from its usage in the corporate world. It implies the efficient management of state institutions. Issues of public accountability, transparency in government procedures of rule of law, and public sector management are emphasized. This is the restricted view of governance adopted by the World Bank (Adejumobi 2004). The essence of this approach to governance is to instill discipline in the state and its institutions for economic purposes.

The second perspective to governance is a holistic one that transcends the state and its institutions. Governance is seen as the process of steering state and society towards the realization of collective goals. It points to the dynamic but problematic and often times, contradictory relationship between the state and society (Pierre and Peters, 2000; Balogun, 1998:33, Hyden, 1999, Stoker, 1998, Alcantara, 1998). In this direction, a meeting of ex experts convened by the United Nation Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) defines governance as "a process of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a political community. Its components are law making and standard setting, management of regime structures and outcome of the social pact". The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Adejumobi (2004:) views governance as *"the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country's affairs, comprising of the complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise*

their legal rights, and mediate their differences. It encompasses the political, economic, legal, judicial, social and administrative authority and therefore includes: government, the private sector and the civil society”

It should be noted that while there are variations in this holistic perception of governance, there is consensus on the major actors or agencies of government. These are the state, the civil society and the private sector.

However, the rural population that constitutes the bulk of Africa's population does not feature overtly in this conception of governance, where as the civil society that is basically urban based, and the private sector that is small, and limited in African are prioritized.

From the above, it can be deduced that good governance flows logically from the concept of governance. According to Mohiden (1997), governance becomes “good”, when it is operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society. In other words, good governance is a normative concept by which society seeks to provide a guide and direction to itself through standards and norms embedded in the practice of governance. The urge to steer state and society according to defined rules and procedures, and ensuring that governance in all its ramifications serves the interest of the greatest number of people in society through a collective participatory endeavor is the essence of good governance.

According to Ajene (2003:58), while modern democratic government offers the best prospect of good governance, democratic governance is not synonymous with good governance. Good governance therefore implies the following:

- i. The promotion of the best wishes of the majority represented in the actual policies and programmes of constituted authority which best serve and promote those wishes.
- ii. The accommodation and tolerant of the yearnings and aspirations of the minority and discordant groups.
- iii. The principle of consultation whereby the wishes of the majority are not simply assumed but a policy strategy which involves consultation with the widest spectrum of society for the purpose of obtaining consensus over policy at all times is pursued.
- iv. The strict adherence to the rule of law at all levels of society. The adherence to the practice of accountability and transparency by leadership and others in political authority.

The concept of development also generates as much controversy as that of democracy and good governance. The controversy notwithstanding, development may be considered as a process that involves the progress of people in the society, Since people live within some form of social framework consisting of social, economic and political structures, and not in isolation. Development is therefore a multi-dimensional and comprehensive transformation of the society (Burkey 1996:38).

It must be emphasized that the above principles of good governance are more of an ideal and far from reality in Nigeria. The attainment of good governance in Nigeria's political system is largely elusive and seemingly difficult. The policies and programmes of constituted authority are any thing but serve the interest and wishes of Nigeria. Thus, Nigerians are getting poorer while the leadership gets richer. Their standard of living has consistently deteriorated. Most policies and programmes intended to eradicate poverty have been found to lack the requisites political will, implementation, supervision, and often tend to protect the interest of the few privileged political elites.

Furthermore, the principle of accommodation and tolerance of the yearnings and aspirations of the minority and discordant groups suffers the serious set backs. The wide spectrum of domination and marginalization of the minority groups by the so called major ethnic groups has continued to pose challenge to the polity. Failure of the principle of federal character to stem the spate of hegemony of the major groups over the minority ones has frequently metamorphosed into ethnic crisis, a dominant feature of Nigerian politics, hence the constant crisis of equitable sharing of the “National Cake”. A phenomenon that has tended to promote centrifugal force against the much desired unity among the composite groups. The resultant effect has been the inability of Nigeria to build a viable and united nation.

In addition, Nigeria practices democracy that is contrary to its tenets of consultation which undermines the wishes of the people. This is expressed through rigged elections which imposes candidature and leaders on the people. This causes alienation and apathy of Nigerian populace limiting their participation in the economic, social and political activities in the society. This explains while there exists “states” and “republics” within the Nigerian state as argued by Ake (1996).

III. Development

The concept of development like the two concepts explained above is contestable as it is loose in application and rather subjective in meaning which is why scholars differ in its explanation. According to Onyekpe (2004:133), development is a genetic term which encompasses the transformation of the economy, state and society through the achievement of greater capacity to deal with the challenges of:

1. production and its expansion
2. political administration and governance and

3. organizing the civil society as a community of people.

In a similar view, Todaro (2003:) takes a holistic study of development that covers every facet of human endeavor. In his opinion, *development is a multi-dimensional process*

involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social systems. In addition to improvement in income and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs.

Development in the sense Todaro perceives, should transform a people economically, socially, culturally and politically. It is development that improves their standard of living, stabilizes the polity, provides the social needs as well as ensures that moral values and beliefs of the people are upheld.

• To Gideon Agbyoko (2010;23) “development means a process whereby the people of a society increase their capacity to satisfy their needs through the exploitation of the resources within their environment by organizing the abilities and energies of the people to exploit at such resources.” This notion of development depicts a process that is multi-dimensional in nature and in which human beings compete among themselves as social forces to cause change to take place in their material existence(Rodney,1972). The overall goal of development as argued by Adedeji cited in (Agbyoko 2010) is the improvement of man and his environment. Supporting this view, Ibi-Ajayi(2003) clearly identifies the goals of development particularly in Africa as follows:

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

ii. To raise the levels or standards of living 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 well being but also to generate greater individual and national esteem.

To expand the economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people but also the forces of ignorance and human misery.

From the foregoing, development attempts to deal with societal problems of poverty, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, lack of decent shelter, insecurity, and unemployment among other ills. Thus the hallmark of development is to as much as possible, reduce those obstacles that inhibits attaining higher standard of living so as to maximize the potentials of the people to enable them live high quality life. However, the questions boggling the minds of many Nigerians are: How has development enterprise in Nigeria fared? Why has poverty and unemployment continued unabated in the midst of abundant resources? Why has democracy in Nigeria failed to impact positively on the lives of the majority?

Democracy, Good Governance and Development: The Experience of Nigeria

A raging debate in the literature amongst scholars, analysts and political practitioners centre on what form of political regime or system is compatible with and enhances good governance, to bring about development. In other words, what is the linkage in practice between democracy, good governance and development and what is the experience of Nigeria?

Modern democratic government offers the best prospects of good governance but as mentioned above, democratic governance is not synonymous with good governance and a guarantee for development. Therefore, the mere existence of democracy does not translate into good governance and development.

From the liberal perspective, the concept of good governance is believed to be encompassing and inter-linked with the object of liberal democracy. They are seen as mutually reinforced elements in which the latter is a precondition for the realization of the former and subsequently development. Both share core features and values which include the following; political representatives, entronement of civil and political rights, public accountability, the rule of law, and the notion of equality. Good governance it must be noted is not a luxury, it is worked for, and remains but a basic precondition for development. The World Bank in Adejumbi(2004) states that, good governance is central to creating and sustaining an environment, which fosters a strong and equitable development and is an essential component to sound economic policies. Government plays a key role in the provision of public goods. They establish the rules that make markets work efficiently and, effectively, they correct for market failure. In order to play this role, government needs revenues, and agents to collect revenues with which to produce the public goods. This in turn, requires systems of accountability, transparency, adequate and reliable information, efficient resource management and the delivery of public services. The promotion of good governance therefore produces and depends on efficient public sector management, accountability, a legal framework for development, access to information and transparency.

Indeed, the key properties of the governance realm are believed to emphasize and reinforce democratic norms and practices. These are authority, reciprocity, exchange, trust, and accountability (Adejumbi 2004:15). However in Africa and Nigeria in particular, the reverse is the case. It must be emphasized that the above principles of good governance are indeed, an ideal type and far from reality in Nigeria. The attainment of good governance in Nigeria is largely elusive and seemingly difficult. The policies and programmes of government

are anything but to serve the interest and wishes of Nigeria. The country has been faced with the perennial scourges of poverty, disease, ignorance and these trio have incapacitated the nation from initiating and sustaining developmental projects. Thus, Nigerians are getting poorer while leadership gets richer. Their standard of living is consistently deteriorating. This is largely because governance has never really been about the people's well being rather, it has been about a clique who constitute themselves into political elite, driven by greed and corruption, and based firmly in self and ethnic interest, loyalty as well as security (Briggs, 2013). What is more, policies and programmes put in place to eradicate poverty lack political will, implementation and adequate supervision to do so. To this end, the public service delivery institution which facilitates policy making function of government, has performed abysmally because of its involvement in corrupt practices.

Furthermore, the principle of accommodation and tolerance for actualization of the yearnings and aspirations of the minority and discordant groups suffers a serious setback. The hegemony of the minority groups by the so called major ethnic groups have continued to pose challenges of unity, stability, peace and nation building to the polity. Failure of the principle of federal character to stem the domination and marginalization of the minor groups has often metamorphosed into ethnic crises, a predominant feature of Nigerian political system hence the frequent out cry of inequitable sharing of the "National Cake" by the marginalized groups. This practice has rather promoted centrifugal force instead of the much desired unity of the different ethnic nationalities. The result of this has been the incapability of Nigeria to build a united, economically viable and socio-politically stable and strong nation.

In addition, Nigeria's democracy works contrary to the principles of consultation and dialogue, free and fair election etc. As a result, it subverts the wishes of the people as they are neither consulted nor their preferred choice of leadership respected. This is expressed through rigged elections which imposes candidates and leaders on the people. The practice of imposition of leaders is known to breed alienation, apathy and non participation of Nigerian populace in political activities. This has created the problem of legitimacy of the leadership. On their part, the political leaders neglect to provide even the basic needs of the people, and are neither transparent nor accountable to the electorates that "voted them into power." This scenario has led to the dilemma of the existence of two states within one, referred to by Peter Eke in (Ake, 2000) as the two "states" or "republics" to which the people give all allegiance, commitment and loyalty. (the non official, tribal groups to which the people give their allegiance, loyalty and total commitment).

The challenge of good governance in Nigeria has manifested itself in corruption. Corruption is a global phenomenon and is not limited to Nigeria.

However, the degree of this social malaise in Nigeria has gotten to such a pass that the country has consistently appeared on the top of TI rating more than a decade now. The hydra-headed monster has impacted negatively on developmental projects some of which would have improved the living standard of Nigerians if they had been executed. Unfortunately, most of these projects hardly see the light of the day, and the money allocated for these projects are diverted to private accounts for private use. A good example is what happened in Enugu state during the administration of immediate past governor of Enugu state who allegedly diverted a good percentage of money allocated for development projects in Enugu state for his private use. This accounts for the numerous projects he embarked on in the city of Enugu in his name. Among them were: Ebeano housing project, Top Rank hotel, Gulf estate, Queen Elizabeth Mat-Erma College, Renaissance University, (this day, 15 August 2009) This is to mention but a few though the experience is the same all over the nation.

Other notable corrupt practices that have emerged due to lack of good governance include among others; Halliburton scam, pension scam, petroleum/subsidy scam, bribery in National Assembly and money laundry/capital flight of varying degrees. Some of these cases have been probed by National Assembly special committees and anti-corruption crusaders without prosecuting or punishing the offenders.

In another related development, there has been no transparency and accountability in service by both political class and the bureaucrats. Transparency and accountability are key components of good governance. While transparency may mean openness in conducting government business, accountability refers to the extent to which the people can hold their elected leaders or public officials responsible for their actions or inactions. An accountable government engenders legitimacy of power and authority of the leaders as reciprocity of the people. This means that the governed majority retain leaders whom they love and accept back into public office by casting votes for them in elections. This also refers to the nature and quality of the social interaction among members of a political community, and its major indicator is the extent to which individuals are free to form associations to defend, protect their interests, to vote and be voted for. In other words, the salient political values of good governance are credible, free and fair elections, political control and representativeness, freedom of expression and plural politics, which are principles and nuances of liberal democracy. The questions that come to mind readily about Nigeria are; to what extent are these political values made real in governance? How credible, fair and free are elections held in Nigeria? Apart from the political class, what is the involvement

of Nigerian populace in political activities? Why has poverty ravaged the masses and their standard of living on steady decline amidst abundant resources?

It must be noted that good governance is all not about a mode of polity, or a procedural arrangement, but a holistic and consequential variable that is measurable in terms of real effects in the lives of the people. It is not about forms of governance, but the result of governance. It is not the process or course of a political rule, but its effects; it is about effective and productive governance. At the micro-level, good governance denotes organizational effectiveness, that is, the capacity of an organization to achieve tasks assigned to it within set time regulations and favourable environmental conditions. "At the macro-level good governance is about engendering public welfare and promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people" (Adejumobi, 2004).

It is further argued that most of the state institutions that make good governance possible are efficient bureaucracy, fair and equitable judicial system, well-organized police force, and so on, are largely undemocratic institutions of which the issues of appointment, promotion, and operational modes are not subject to democratic practices. The urge to align good governance with democracy and development is therefore to caricature it. This is because some of the East Asian countries that have recorded remarkable growth did so within the context of authoritarian rule, the contention is that what is important is not so much the form of government, but its impact. The prime minister of Malaysia, Mr. Mahathir, and senior officials in Singapore, like senior minister, Lee Kuan Yew alluded to this. According to them, what their societies need is not democratic government, but good government. That is, a government that will provide economic well-being, political stability, social order, communal harmony, efficient and honest administration (Huntington, 1997:11-12). Western political values that liberal democracy embodies are seen to be subversive of the cultural values of the Asian society. In the African context, some scholars make a similar argument. Abdalla Bujra and Patrick Molutsi (2000:ii-iii) contend that "while western style liberal democracy is based on the exclusive concern for individualism, competition and accumulation, values devoid of social welfare, whereas deep social affection, and collectivism that promote social well-being are the core values in Africa"

The discourse about forms of government rather than outcome of governance is an issue of structure. They are not mutually exclusive categories, and may be seen to be opposite of the same coin. If we are interested in outcome, structure and process should also be important. While authoritarian regimes may promote productive governance, there is the problem of sustainability. Without orderly process of political organization and procedure, the gains of development may not be sustainable. Huntington (1997:12-13) puts it thus:

Yet while authoritarian rule may provide good government for a decade, or even a generation, it cannot provide – and throughout history never has provided good government over a sustained period of time. It lacks the institutions for self-reforms; public debate, a free press, protest movements, opposition political parties, and competitive elections. Democracy in contrast, is base on a much more realistic and complex view of the human nature and on the recognition that ambition.... Experience clearly shows that only democracy provides good government over the long haul.

Democracy is quite essential to good governance. It contributes to development by providing a context for effective policy reforms. (Smith 2003:278) for instance, political participation was necessary for education reform in Burkina Faso. The rule of law enabled community-based resource management to go ahead in Tanzania. Therefore, the promotion of good governance and democracy has become a critical pillar of development policy.

However, what is contentious is the form of democracy to be practiced in different social context, whether liberal or social democracy. Social democracy offers better possibility of delivering public goods and ensuring greater well-being and happiness for a higher number of people in society. Unfortunately, the hegemony of the liberal capitalist ideology through the instrumentality of globalization and post cold war politics has thrust liberal democracy to the fore of political agenda in the world. Liberal democracy constitutes the minimum political projects through which many African countries seek to promote good governance.

IV. Conclusion

Africa remains the most embattled continent on earth. Its present and future are filled with trepidation. Nigeria therefore is not an exception. Yet, the hope for reconfiguring her lies in promoting good governance through the application of the principles of democracy to ensure development. If this is done, Nigeria would be on the path to promoting good governance and a culture of democracy which are necessary for sustainable development to take place.

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