

DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: INGREDIENTS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper is a discourse on the state of the nation, Nigeria, in terms of its status on democracy, good governance and socio-economic development. Democracy is being embraced across the globe by most civilized and developing nations. Nigeria joined the trend with the inception of democratic rule in May 29, 1999. The paper aims at exploring these concepts in the context of Nigeria with a view to establishing the need for true democracy and good governance to prevail in Nigeria. The paper discusses the synergy of democracy and good governance while identifying them as basic ingredients for the actualization of socio-cultural and economic development of Nigeria. The paper ends with some recommendations and conclusion.

Keywords: Democracy, Good governance, Ingredients, Socio-economic development.

Introduction

The twin concepts of democracy and good governance are no longer new to many Nigerians who are at least used to hearing or reading about them on media every other day. They are two of a kind in the sense that they help to strengthen each other in a given political system. The following quotations can help us gain little insight on democracy and good governance.

Democracy is unfinished business, not fulfillment; it is a process of always advancing towards fulfillment Raymond Grams Swing (1887-1968).

That is the best government which desires to make the people happy, and knows how to make them happy.

Thomas B. Macaulay (1880 ó 1859). (See quotations in Standard Encyclopedic Dictionary,1971).

Nigeria is presently under democratic rule which came on board on May 29, 1999, about a decade ago. Ordinarily speaking, democracy should lay the foundation for good governance to strive in any nation. But neither democracy nor good governance can be said to be on strong grounds in Nigeria today. A particular disgruntled Nigerian recently declared that, "Nigerians have never experienced any good governance since 1999, and that for the citizen to have any sense of belonging, there should be provision for social amenities and infrastructure, employment, health, security and constant power supply" (Akosile, 2010). This statement establishes the current need for good governance in

Nigeria. This is expected in any democratic polity working to succeed.

The paper believes that ours is a nascent democracy that can evolve adequate strategies to bring good governance to the citizenry in a progressive manner. But the situation in Nigeria today does not indicate that the leadership is on the path to delivering good governance and gains of democracy to the people. This is true, judging from the recent damning reports about Nigeria from reputable organizations. The Africa Governance Survey of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2009) indicates that Nigeria ranks 35 out of 53 other African countries and 11 out of 16 West African countries on assessment of the quality of governance. To support this, the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI), ranks Nigeria 158 among the 182 countries that were assessed based on life expectancy, literacy, school enrolment and gross domestic product (GDP), etc. The paper argues that democracy and good governance are pre-requisites for growth and development to occur in any nation, particularly Nigeria. It sees the concepts as necessary ingredients for the actualization of socio-economic progress of Nigeria.

This paper discusses the synergy of democracy and good governance and its capacity to bring about strong social and economic returns for Nigeria. It calls for removal of certain obstacles to attaining true democracy in Nigeria and also makes recommendations that can help to ensure good governance as well as deliver the long-awaited democracy dividends. The conclusion is emphatic on the need for Nigeria to continue to strengthen her democratic principles and structures in order to effectively bring good governance to her people especially now that the country is fifty years old since independence. This conclusion is predicated on the ground that the achievements in the next fifty years will no doubt depend largely on the application of strong democratic principles, structures and good governance.

Concept of Democracy

The idea of democracy, or government by the people, is very old, dating back to ancient Greece. The word itself comes from the Greek words: *demos*, meaning 'the people', and *kratos*, meaning 'authority'. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995) defines democracy as 'a system of government in which everyone in the country can vote to elect its members, a country that has a government which has been elected by the people of the country, a situation or system in which everyone is equal and has the right to vote, make decisions etc. Macdonald (2005), simply defines democracy as 'a type of political system that gives to the people as a whole'. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1995), has a broader definition of democracy as 'a system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elect, thought as allowing freedom of speech, religion and political opinion'. Abraham Lincoln, one time president of United States of America (U.S.A) gave a classic definition of democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. This definition of democracy has remained popular to date and is seen by the author as a very simple and direct picture of what democracy implies and therefore the preferable definition of democracy for this paper. This is because it captures the real essence of the practice of democracy as a kind of government that has popular power in which the people are free, happy, duly represented and people decide what happens through their representatives. And the government is continually focusing on the general will of the people.

In a democratic state, authority is rooted in the consent of the people, that is, in the belief that people have the right to run or at least to choose their government. Democracies impose clear, legally established limits to what elected officials can do. All participants in the system must obey the rules regarding such principles as open, free and fair elections, one person, one vote, and acceptance of majority decisions while respecting a minority's right to dissent. Calhoun et al (1997), describe democracy as a system in which "the law guarantees extensive civil liberties, including the freedom to associate with whomever one chooses, freedom of speech and the press, and freedom from unreasonable search and seizure". A democracy does not claim exclusive, unquestioning loyalty from its people; in fact, if those in power overstep their authority, the people have a right, even a duty, to vote them out of office or impeach them through their representatives. Democracy is increasingly getting attention globally and with globalization it is not losing momentum in popularity. However, democracy in Nigeria is relatively young with a lot of challenges facing its survival and growth.

Governance and Good Governance Conceptualized

Literally, good governance simply means good government or good leadership. To appreciate the concept of good governance, it will be better to start with knowing what governance implies. The term, governance, is a very versatile one with different meanings. It is simply used to refer to the way in which a government discharges its duties and obligations. 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 (Alcantara,1998). United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2000), defines governance as a process of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a political community. Its component parts are rule making and standard setting, management of regime structures and outcome and results of the social pact.

The United Nations Development Programme (1997) 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.

On the other hand, good governance flows logically from the concept of governance. Mohideen (1997) states that governance becomes "good" when it is operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society. Good governance in a wider context can be perceived from two points. Firstly, the creation of conducive environment for economic activities ensures macro - economic stability which is imperative for national growth and development. Secondly, having the political will to

embark on political reforms to achieve improvement in public sector management, economic and financial accountability, predictability underlined by the rule of law and transparency. With this sort of state of affairs, the provision of the material conditions for individual and collective self actualization is assured. World Bank (1994) states that good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos, an executive arm of government accountable for its actions, a strong civil society participating in public affairs and all behaving under the rule of law. The European Union (2002), conceptualizes good governance as the rule, process and behaviour that affect the ways in which powers are exercised at the state, national and international level, particularly as it regards openness, participation, accountability effectiveness and coherence.

These above mentioned features of good governance clearly depict that it is imperative for development to take place in any nation. These features are interrelated and have the potential to reinforce one another towards ensuring the prevalence of good governance in any democracy. Annan (1997) cited in UNDP (1997:20) caught the need for good governance in this statement:

Without good governance - without the rule of law, predictable administration, legitimate power, and responsive regulation ó no amount of funding, no amount of charity will set us on the path of prosperity.

Good governance entails meeting the aspirations and needs of the people without any form of abuse, corruption and with conformity to the rule of law. A true assessment of good governance in any democracy must observe the degree to which it delivers the promise of human rights and availability of infrastructures, social amenities and other factors necessary for better life for the people. This is the test before the infant democratic government in Nigeria. The call by Nigerians for democracy dividends is basically a clamour, an outcry for good governance in Nigeria. Nigerians need governance that translates to concrete development of infrastructures, such as good accessible roads, good schools, telecommunications, hospitals, affordable houses, improvement of security etc. The country is also in desperate need of social amenities like clean water, electricity, cheap transport system, industries for employment and production of commodities and services as well as other things that can help promote the general wellbeing of her citizens. The condition of the nation today makes good governance seem elusive. The question here is ó why have Nigerians not felt good governance after ten years of democratic rule? This is a question that can simply be approached by identifying some obstacles facing democracy and good governance in Nigeria since 1999.

Some Factors Militating Against Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

Bad/Poor Leadership The leadership in Nigeria has the bulk of the blame for the state of democracy and good governance in the country. At the federal, state and local government levels, many officials of government have lost sense of duty and are engaging in all sorts of illegal action. The local governments in some states are said to be óconduitsö for heavy looting of public funds. Adegboyega (2009), was so disturbed by the quality of

leadership in Nigeria and he declared "this is one huge joke of a country that needs deliverance. So blessed, yet so impoverished. I often wonder (sometimes to the point of almost asking God) why he gave Nigeria quality human and natural resources but did not ensure that the country has the right leadership to manage all these. Until the leadership in Nigeria becomes positive and result oriented, democracy and good governance will continue to elude the nation.

Corruption This is one factor that strongly inhibits the growth of democracy and prevalence of good governance in Nigeria. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. Corrupt leadership can only beget corrupt followership and vice versa.

Electoral Reforms Nigeria is seen by some individuals as a country with very faulty electoral system that has failed to conduct true, free, fair and acceptable elections. Most elections held in Nigeria have been marred by irregularities and sharp practices thereby resulting to the election of some unpopular and dubious individuals. These individuals get into positions of authority and perpetuate different forms of unethical and illegal acts that directly undermine the growth of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. The country needs electoral reforms that can ensure credible elections.

Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB) This bill is presently being considered by the National Assembly. In many advanced democracies such as the U.S.A, Britain and Canada etc, there is high degree of freedom of speech, expression and press. Citizens can get information about government activities very easily. The FOI bill can encourage the free flow of information which is vital for the growth of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

Impartial/Strong Judiciary The judiciary is a very important arm of government that acts like a "stabilizer" in a democracy. The judiciary interprets the law (constitution) of the nation and must endeavour to use its power to guide our collective interests through balanced, fair and acceptable judgements for democracy to thrive in Nigeria.

Faulty Constitution Many well-meaning Nigerians have continued to call for constitutional reform. They argue that the Nigerian constitution requires a thorough review and that some part of it should either be expunged or altered to suit the demands of most Nigerians. For instance, there has been calls for the removal of the "immunity clause", which protects some top government officials from prosecution while in office. The advocates of this claim that it allows these officials to amass so much wealth with which they bribe their way out when they are out of office.

Poor/Sluggish Legislative System The legislative system and the legislators in Nigeria are undermining the role of the legislature as a prominent arm of government. They are not playing their oversight functions effectively and they are less active in enforcing democratic principles and good governance in Nigeria.

Non-Conformity to Rule of Law The failure of many Nigerians to live and act in accordance with the rule of law remains a clog in the wheel of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

Forms of Abuse The non-observance and lack of respect for human rights exemplified in unlawful detention of people, extra-judicial killings by the police, child trafficking, women marginalization etc. are all contributing to weakening democracy in Nigeria.

Illiteracy Human development, particularly in terms of acquisition of skills and knowledge is very vital for the growth and sustenance of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. Doing away with illiteracy by at least improving basic education for the citizens should be government's first priority. This can go a long way to engender democracy in Nigeria.

The table below shows an assessment of the quality of governance among African and West African countries by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation survey in 2009. Take note of Nigeria's back-bencher situation in the data.

Democracy and Good Governance: The Synergy

There is a raging controversy among political analysts and social scientists on what form of political system best supports and reinforces good governance. Many researchers believe that a democracy may be more equipped to deliver good governance. This brings us to exploring the connection between democracy and good governance. Literally speaking, these concepts are sort of 'twins' in practice. They are linked to one another in the sense that democracy can provide an enabling environment for the provision of good governance. Conversely, good governance can be a precondition for the realization of democratic rule because only by meeting the people's will in terms of their needs, can a democracy claim some degree of effectiveness. Put simply, these are elements that mutually reinforce each other and therefore neither of them can be adequate or realizable in the absence of the other. They have common features and values: political representativeness, enthronement of civil and political rights, public accountability, rule of law, and the notion of formal equality, social justice etc. Charlick (1991), stated that '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'.

Moreover, authority seeks expression in the legitimate use of power in which the people elect and control their leaders. Accountability is the degree to which the people can hold their elected leaders or public servants responsible for their actions. Reciprocity refers to the nature and quality of the social interactions among members of a political community, and its major indicator in the public realm is the degree to which individuals' fundamental human rights are upheld. The fact is that the political values of governance such as elections, political control and representativeness, freedom of expression and plural politics are equally the pronounced ethos of democracy. Professor Wole Soyinka, 1986 Nobel laureate winner for literature, recently stated that electoral integrity begets governance integrity (The Nation, 2009).

However, it is important to observe that good governance is not about the forms of government in a country or a mode of polity but rather focuses on the concrete result of positive governance. It is not the process or course of a political rule, but its effects; it is about effective and productive governance. It is anti-ideological and best defined ostensibly rather than by semantic prescriptions (Chabal, 1992). Good governance cannot be completely attributed to the democratic form of government because there are democracies that have systematically failed to give good governance to their people. In some Asian countries that have recorded remarkable growth rates, the form of government in place can best be described as authoritarian. In Nigeria, democracy is ten years now, yet Nigeria is so politically unstable and underdeveloped, let alone having a feel of good governance. Therefore, what is important is not so much the form of government but its impact and outcome.

A democratic government that came into power illegally through flawed elections perpetuates corruption and lacks conscience. It cannot have any business in the realm of providing good governance. But a true democracy, with all its principles and structures in place can provide ample space for good governance to nurture. This is why many patriotic Nigerians have preferred to use the phrase true democracy to differentiate it from the sort of democracy we are witnessing in Nigeria currently and which has all the attributes of bad democracy, that is, democracy by name but in reality not much better than authoritarian regime.

On annual basis, May 29 marks the national democracy day in Nigeria since 1999. The celebration of democracy in Nigeria must be considered in terms of the solid improvement in the living standards of the people. Nigerians can no longer be deceived by some inglorious politicians claiming to be democrats. The country is lucky to be a democracy today and must try to nurture it to maturity. It is easily arguable that democracy may be the best form of government in the world today because of its principles of freedom, equality, participation, representation, justice, transparency, etc. Therefore, the prevalence of democracy in Nigeria no matter how young or undemocratic it may look, should have by now, began bringing the blessings of democracy which is embedded in good governance.

Interaction Between Democracy, Good Governance and Socio Economic Development in Nigeria

Socio-economic development is all about development that impacts on the life of people in terms of their social relationship and economic activities. To grasp the concept of socio-economic development better, one can start with understanding what development means. The term development is a dynamic concept that has continued to receive diverse interpretations and explanations among scholars and researchers particularly in the less developed countries. Rodney (1972) conceives development as a phenomenon which is inherent in all societies. He states that every part of the world, including Africa, was in fact developing before the coming of the white man with his colonialism. He maintains that it does not matter whether a society is primitive or modern provided that society is in a

position to creatively harness and utilize the objects of nature at its disposal to improve its living conditions on a sustainable basis.

Development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. However, a society or a nation like Nigeria is said to be developing socio-economically when its members jointly increase their capacity to deal with their environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology) and on the manner in which work is organized. In a nutshell, socio-economic development is a holistic form of development that encompasses all dimensions of the social life of the people and the capability to harness their human and environmental potentials towards better living standard for themselves.

Democracy and good governance are basic ingredients for the growth and sustenance of socio-economic development in a nation because the three concepts (democracy, good governance and socio-economic development) can be seen as elements that are linked and tend to support and reinvigorate each other. The argument here is that the three concepts can help to breed one another. As stated in this paper earlier, democracy and good governance share common features. It also follows that socio economic development (the ability of the people to harness their potentials positively) can be better realized in a condition provided by a democratic government on the path of bringing good governance to her people. In fact, a democracy that is particular about delivering the gains of democracy must embrace good governance which will in turn bring about the socio-economic development of that democracy and her people. In democracies such as the U.S.A, Britain, Italy, and Australia etc. that have attained what can be called 'appreciable degree of good governance', there has been and will continue to be solid socio-economic development simply because of clarity and sincerity of purpose on the side of their governments. These democracies understand that a nation cannot be a democracy without being responsive and committed to their people. They believe that democracy should translate to good living for their citizens. Nweze (2009) puts it in this way:

The terms, governance and good governance, are being increasingly used in the developmental literature. Governance describes the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Hereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights.

Good governance is simply leadership at its best or at least continuously improving towards the best by the active implementation of the right decisions for the people which affects their socio-economic development. Good governance according to the Independent Commission for Good Governance in Public Services (1999), means focusing on the organization's purpose and on outcomes for citizens and services users. In the context of a nation, like Nigeria, it amounts to the democratic government focusing on the needs and

aspirations of the people and making sure that it actually reflects positively on the quality of life of Nigerians. That is what brings social and economic returns to the nation and that is what this paper calls 'socio-economic development'. Conclusively, a true democratic regime that incorporates good governance in its activities and plans for the people, will achieve tremendous socio-economic development over time. There is no doubt that democracy is a process at all its stages. U.S.A is a democracy of more than two hundred years and it is still on the process, experimenting and learning from experience over time. Nigeria's democracy is relatively an 'infant' one and if it has to leap with faith to greater height, it must begin to entrench good governance which is synonymous with good and adequate delivery of what the people need and require to be healthy, educated, safe, free, respectable and most importantly happy with themselves and their government. The bane of the democratic rule in Nigeria is its failure to adopt good governance and ensure the delivery of socio-economic development for the nation.

Conclusion

It is my belief that good governance is attainable in Nigeria. Good governance which is about equity, justice, fairness and proper implementation of people-centered policies can be promoted by a true democratic government. This paper concludes that good governance if ensured in a democracy will in turn engender socio-economic development. But providing good governance cannot be left to government alone. The civil society and the private sector have a duty to monitor governance processes to ensure the 'good' is met for the benefit of all citizens. It is worthy to note that the promoters of bad governance are the enemies of Nigeria and must be checked by applying the rule of law (which is a basic principle of democracy and good governance). The most important ingredients that can ensure socio-economic development of Nigeria remains true democracy and good governance exemplified in a leadership (government) with the political will to effect positive change for the good of all Nigerians. Nigeria is at the crossroads, only good governance can deliver her.

Recommendations

It is basic that for good governance to prevail in Nigeria, it will require that Nigerians embrace attitudinal change from the usual nonchalant and sometimes corrupt mindset to help restore the country on the path of good governance. Nigerians must develop the right attitudes, values and ideas for her greatness to come.

There should also be a sort of institutional or structural change at all levels of government, and eschewing of the 'Nigerian factor' to help ensure the gains of good governance, and rapid socio-economic development for Nigerians. This is the time for all Nigerians to come together as one indivisible society and make positive change in the country.

A constitutional reform is very imperative if Nigeria is to properly focus on her priorities and for the leadership and all the stake holders in the 'Nigerian project' to put attention on improving education, plugging all corruption loopholes, and building the capacity to continually improve the living standard of the people. Infact the constitutional amendment is imperative for Nigeria now.

To achieve good governance and secure socio-economic development in Nigeria, some Nigerians believe that Local Government officials should be accountable and transparent in the discharge of their duty. They must learn to see themselves as the servants of the people at the grassroot level. The local governments are the closest government to the people and are expected to deliver the much óvaunted dividends of democracy to the long suffering masses of Nigeria.

It is also necessary to incorporate into our educational curriculum at all levels, what can be described as anti corruption education. This will help to combat corruption and engage young Nigerians in the promotion of responsible governance.

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