



National Development, a Function of Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Most of the world's nations no longer dwell in the era of thrones and kingdoms where people could directly run to their ordained leaders for solutions. The 21st century has ushered in the spirit of democracy whereby the people choose who to rule them directly or through their elected representatives. In a democratic state, the people and the government are intertwined, meant to strive together. This means that there must be a connection, some forms of communication, and a tete a tete chain that holds the two together and it is mostly through this medium that development can be ensured in a nation. National development can be well achieved in democratic state not in tyranny. That is why the third world countries like Nigeria should embrace democracy in order to rise to an applaud-able standard. Hence, this paper has its focus on national development as a solid function of democracy, pointing out the defects and loopholes of its ugly practices in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Democracy, National Development.*

INTRODUCTION

National development simply connotes the gradual growth of a sovereign state, the occurrence of a positive change that elevates the inhabitants of a state. The state is a society larger than a tribe, a society large enough to form a state in the sense of a government. This means that a state consists of a people and mandated individuals who run their affairs in form of a government.

The concept of national development is said to bring with it valuable and positive changes that improve the living standards of the people as it creates employment opportunities and reduces poverty amongst other things. The growth, changes and improvements occurring in a given economy with the aim of promoting the quality of life among the populace can also be referred to as national development. Therefore, it should be noted that the key focus is on the citizens, the populace, the masses, and the people who handed over power to the government to rule them.

National development is also the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people by providing social amenities like quality education, portable water, infrastructure, medical care, power supply e.t.c for the well being of the people.

No nation develops above the quality of its citizens. It is the lifestyle of the citizens that determines if a nation is doing well or not. It is the citizens that make things happen; bring about positive changes and consequently contribute to the foundation on which national development revolves. Hence, it is incumbent upon the government of a given state to harness resources

handed over to them by the people efficiently in order to bring about progress. However, different forms of government used to organize a state and rule citizens have emerged over time. They include:

Monarchy: A monarchy consists of rule by a king or queen. It is a government where there is one head of state. Sometimes a king is called an ‘emperor,’ especially if there is a large empire, such as China before 1911. The crown is usually inherited by the first born of the family. There are no large monarchies today. The United Kingdom which has a queen is really not a republican because the queen has virtually no political power. Things work well here if the King or Queen is amiable.

Aristocracy: Aristocracy is a rule by the aristocrats. Aristocrats are typically wealthy and educated people. Many monarchies have really been ruled by aristocrats. Today, typically, the term ‘aristocracy’ is used negatively to accuse a republic of being dominated by rich people, such as saying, “The United States has become an aristocracy.”

Dictatorship: Dictatorship consists of rule by one person or a group of people. Power is usually ceased by force. Very few dictators admit they are dictators, they almost always claim to be powerful leaders of democracies. The dictator may be just one person such as Fidel Castro in Cuba or Adolf Hitler in Germany or a group of people such as the Communist Party in China. Many people are unhappy in this system.

Totalitarian: This is a system of government where a group of individuals take control of power. It is like a dictatorship by a party instead of an individual. The regime maintains complete control of the country by not allowing any other people form a political party. It is like having same individuals, tenure after tenure.

Republic: In a republic, the people elect representatives to make and enforce laws. It is a democratic model where people are elected to government office by voters. Some nations like USA are republics headed by the president.

Democratic Republic: Usually, a ‘democratic republic’ is not a republic. A government that officially calls itself a democratic republic is usually a dictatorship. Communist dictatorships have been especially prone to use this term. For example, the official name of North Vietnam was ‘The Democratic Republic of Vietnam’. China uses a variant, ‘The People’s Republic of China.’

Democracy: The word democracy literally means ‘rule by the people.’ In democracy, the people govern. The people nominate the person who best represents their interests. In democracy, the people enjoy freedom.

DEMOCRACY

According to The Dictionary of Political Science, Democracy is a process of social economic and political change usually associated with the third world or so called ‘developing nations’ often based upon a specifically western model of development. It signifies the emergence of industrial capitalism and a competitive political system. Democracy is a term derived from two

Greek words. 'demos' and 'cratia.' 'Demos' means the people and 'cratia' means power; put together, power of the people. However, democracy has come to mean so many different things, some very hostile to each other that the words need careful analysis if misunderstood and idle controversies are to be avoided and if possible quite legitimate differences of connotation and its very varied institution arrangement are to be revealed.

In democracy, citizens share the power and civic responsibility to make decisions on how they are. The word "democracy" is Greek in origin and literally translated means "power to the people." Under a democratic form of government, which is based on the principle of "rule by law," people have the power to enact laws and decide how they will be enforced. Not every democracy is alike, as culture and society influence people's democratic ideals. However, the fundamental principles remain consistent in every form of democracy, and true democracies share essential characteristics. Citizens rule and make these decisions through the voting process, which they become eligible to participate in at the age of 18. The American form of federal government is an indirect democracy, which means voters elect representatives to speak for them on decisions involving government. Indirect democracy also is practiced in most states and municipalities. However, many Western states, such as California, Arizona and Oregon, and several municipalities in the New England states practice direct democracy.

When the government of a country has its focus on the people, making policies and executing goals that bring happiness to them, what is going on is certainly democracy. Therefore, it is in the light of an uncompromised, pure and living democracy that the sectors of any country can grow limitlessly.

Democracy as a Social Philosophy

The most important aspect of the social theory of democracy is the problem of the public opinion. A test of the effectiveness of democratic government should be the ease with which opinion secures recognition and the permanent attainment of government action to that recognition. Secondly, modern democracy must admit that the conflicts of public opinion are fundamental and not mere differences as to the nature of common interests of all individuals. Individuals and groups have ends which they desire the state to sanction. There are struggles within the state with a view to bend the state to the social aims of organized interests, (Dictionary of Political Science, 2006).

Democracy is built on the equality of citizens, the freedom of these citizens to associate with one another for the realization of their ideals and the defense and promotion of their interests as well as the freedom of these citizens to choose between the different political platforms of various political parties and candidates and see to the actualization of the platforms they have voted for.

NIGERIA AND DEMOCRACY

On October 1st, Nigeria added to its list of vital statistics a new status as the world's fourth largest democracy. The list was already impressive as the Giant of Africa. One African in four is a Nigerian; with a population of 160 million or more, Nigeria is larger than any country in Europe. It is also the world's eighth largest producer of crude oil and has been the United States'

second largest supplier for six years. Any voluntary handover of government from military to civilian rule is quiet unusual. Nigeria was arguably unique, meticulously planned and including civilians at all stages of the four-year process. It culminated in a change of government as smooth as in a western democracy.

Hence, Nigeria set a precedent in breaking from their colonial constitutional heritage rejecting Britain's parliamentary form of democracy which they had continued after their independence in 1960, they chose in their first wholly Nigerian-made constitution to follow the American model instead. Nigeria's government looks remarkably familiar to an American government with the newly elected President having a four-year term with the possibility of a second term thereafter.

After gaining independence in 1960 from Great Britain, Nigeria fell prey to civil war and the first of many military coups in 1966. Democracy was briefly restored from 1979 to 1983 but for most of its independent history, Nigeria was ruled by a series of military juntas. The last military ruler, Gen. Sani Abacha died suddenly in 1998. His successor, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar promised a transition to democracy and accordingly, a new constitution was adopted on May 5th, 1999. Elections were held and retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo who had previously governed Nigeria as a military ruler was elected the new President. The end of military rule brought about a new era of regular elections as well as the return of civil liberties, free press and an end to arbitrary arrests and torture, although human rights violations still occur regularly. Nigeria also began a long campaign against the bureaucratic and military corruption that had paralyzed its economy and severely tarnished its international reputation.

And just for the records, Nigeria celebrates what is called Democracy Day to still remind us that we are a democratic nation.

Democracy Day, Nigeria.

Democracy Day is a public holiday in Nigeria. It is held annually on May 29. This public holiday commemorates the restoration of democracy in the Federal Republic of Nigeria when the newly elected Olusengun Obasanjo took office as the President of Nigeria ending the multiple decades of military rule that began in 1966 and has been interrupted only by a brief period of democracy from 1979 to 1983.

The above ceremony annually states that we as a nation is no longer in the then military times when decrees, curfews and arms were the order of the day, that we are in the era where the people rule or ought to rule as the case may be yet Nigeria is rapidly approaching a situation where democracy is being practiced without democrats and elections are being conducted with scant regard for the electorate. The ballot is not respected by the government and the price of protecting it is too high for the people to pay but the bullet once universally feared is now generally out of fashion(Ado, 2015).

Features of a Democratic State

People Govern- This is the ingredient that makes it Democracy; citizens' rule. The recognition of the people as the source of state power. The power of the people implies that it forms the state

power by elections and directly participates in its implementation with the help of referenda, local authorities as well as representative bodies.

The Constitution- The constitution is the supreme law governing a state and every democratic state must abide by it to ensure impartiality and equity in leadership. It involves real implementation of principles and rules of the state including separation of powers principle.

The Rule of Law- This rule states that nobody is above the law. Both the government and the governed are equal in the helms of the law and any violations of laid down rules and regulations in the state should be punished accordingly without compromise.

The Principle of Protection- A true democracy upholds the basic human rights of its citizens as outlined in its laws, agreements or constitution. These rights include: elective franchise, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, equal protection under the law, the right to a fair trial and a right to privacy without unwarranted intrusion by the government. Citizens also have other rights, such as the right to an education, the right to assemble and the right to publish their opinions in print. American citizens are also protected from discrimination based on their sex, race, religion or a disability.

Limiting the Lawmakers- In order to ensure that a democracy's central government does not have a concentration of power in one area, powers are separated and shared among different branches and agencies. These different sectors of government have a process by which they can check and balance one another. Government officials holding posts in the different branches of government are subject to term limits. Elections are held on a regular basis and citizens have the opportunity to elect new people to government posts. Citizens are guaranteed that these elections will be fair and everyone who is eligible to vote will have that opportunity.

Modern democracy has uncountable merits that are particularly important for the majority of modern states. Democracy supports civil society, i.e. under democracy any state cares about the rights and responsibilities of all the citizens and gives each citizen a chance to break into the top echelons of power. Democracy ensures relative state stability at this stage of history and accords respect to both Majorities and Minorities. Within a democracy, the majority rules but not to the exclusion of the minorities' rights. In enacting laws, a democratic government strikes the balance between majority and minority interests. If a legitimate decision is made by a majority of the people, but that decision negatively affects the fundamental rights of a minority of the people, then the decision must be adjusted to reflect what is fair and equitable to all citizens. The several tiers of government - federal, state and local ensure that every citizen is represented.

Examining the Practice of Democracy in Nigeria.

Nigeria's increasing democratization profile is more of a product of external factors much as it is a product of internal factors. This increasing profile is amply demonstrated in Nigeria's current democratic experience which began in May, 1999 but while the democratization wave was blowing over the country, it was caught up in what has been described as the victory and crises of democracy in Nigeria (Muhammad, 2006).

Appropriately, Nigeria is made up of political parties in which citizens can access judgmentally and cast their votes for their own personal interests. Political parties are a product of specific environments which often influence their structures, functions and operations. They are very sacrosanct in that they form a whole team ready to serve the people and they are expected as elsewhere to serve as lubricating agent for a sustainable democratic rule.

Prior to independence, political parties in Nigeria emerged within the context of nationalist struggles for independence. The common desire to put an end to colonial rule and achieve self government therefore reduced the preponderant tendency of any segmental cleavage (Yaqub, 2002). The certainty and approach of independence however brought about a total change in the operating context of the parties and since new set of leaders are to emerge from among Nigerians, party activities assumed a new dimension which till date has continued to characterize Nigerian political parties.

Presently, there is an intense and obnoxious struggle for power among the political parties and this is as a result the centrality of political power in the country access to which determines access to other resources. Consequently, competition becomes so intense that the ruling party will always want to maintain its hold on power just as the other parties in opposition are ready to wrestle power.

The situation in the Nigerian polity where new mediums of personalizing power and of creating the appearance of popularity and ubiquity have taken hold bears an uncanny resemblance to what I call 'democratic totalitarianism.'

What must be noted at this point is that while the need to capture power by all means and personal idiosyncrasies of parties in Nigeria, the situation has nonetheless been compounded by a self-serving and pathological perception of politics and democratic practice by the politicians. Hence, politics is seen as a means of amassing wealth and power for personal advantage and playing by the rules becomes an uncomfortable restraint. The point here is that party politics in Nigeria has not undergone any genuine transformation that is capable of strengthening the democratic project (Saliu and Muhammed, 2014.)

A country bearing the trademark of democracy is not suppose to be visualize from this angle and the last election of 2015 proved most of the points above. Just like the saying when two elephants fight, the grass will suffer, various political parties displayed their escapades on how to wield power and so many citizens were affected. More than 58 people were killed in pre-election violence talk of during the election process. Political parties hire thugs and intimidate opponents and dissenting members of the public and without shame most of the political icons decamp from one party to the other in pursuit of power.

Elected officials have been building little armies of cohesion and most recently, they have resorted to the use of blackmail employing state resources and state funded programs to force obedience and conformity. This recent addition to the behavioral repertoire of Nigerian political leaders has serious implications for how citizens now engage in power (Ochonu, 2004).

When the agent of democracy in the Nigeria has found pleasure in capturing power in order to control the treasures of the land for their own benefits, then there must be a hamper in the gradual growth of the country.

The Nigeria's Economy Today

Nigeria's economy is struggling to leverage the country's vast wealth in fossil fuels in order to displace the poverty that affects about 67% of its population. Economists refer to the coexistence of vast wealth in natural resources and extreme personal poverty in developing countries like Nigeria as the "resource curse", although "resource curse" is more widely understood to mean an abundance of natural resources which fuels official corruption resulting in a violent competition for the resource by the political gods of the nation.

Nigeria's exports of oil and natural gas—at a time of peak prices—have enabled the country to post merchandise trade and current account surpluses in recent years. Reportedly, 80% of Nigeria's energy revenues flow to the government, 16% covers operational costs, and the remaining 4% go to investors. However, the World Bank has estimated that as a result of corruption 80% of energy revenues benefit only 1% of the population.

In 2005, Nigeria achieved a milestone agreement with the Paris Club of lending nations to eliminate all of its bilateral external debt. Under the agreement, the lenders will forgive most of the debt, and Nigeria will pay off the remainder with a portion of its energy revenues. Outside of the energy sector, Nigeria's economy is highly inefficient. Moreover, human capital is underdeveloped—Nigeria ranked 151 out of countries in the United Nations Development Index in 2004—and non-energy-related infrastructure is inadequate.

From 2003 to 2007, Nigeria attempted to implement an economic reform program called the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). The purpose of the NEEDS was to raise the country's standard of living through a variety of reforms, including macroeconomic stability, deregulation, liberalization, privatization, transparency, and accountability.

The NEEDS addressed basic deficiencies, such as the lack of freshwater for household use and irrigation, unreliable power supplies, decaying infrastructure, impediments to private enterprise, and corruption. The government hoped that the NEEDS would create 7 million new jobs, diversify the economy, boost non-energy exports, increase industrial capacity utilization, and improve agricultural productivity. A related initiative on the state level is the State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS).

A longer-term economic development program is the United Nations (UN)-sponsored National Millennium Goals for Nigeria. Under the program, which covers the years from 2000 to 2015, Nigeria was committed to achieve a wide range of ambitious objectives involving poverty reduction, education, gender equality, health, the environment, and international development cooperation. In an update released in 2004, the UN found that Nigeria was making progress toward achieving several goals but was falling short on others.

Specifically, Nigeria had advanced efforts to provide universal primary education, protect the environment, and develop a global development partnership. However, the country lagged behind on the goals of eliminating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality, and combating diseases such as Human Immune Deficiency virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and malaria.

A prerequisite for achieving many of these worthwhile objectives is curtailing endemic corruption, which stymies development and taints Nigeria's business environment. President Olusegun Obasanjo's campaign against corruption, which includes the arrest of officials accused of misdeeds and recovering stolen funds, has won praise from the World Bank. In September 2005, Nigeria, with the assistance of the World Bank, began to recover US\$458 million of illicit funds that had been deposited in Swiss banks by the late military dictator Sani Abacha, who ruled Nigeria from 1993 to 1998. However, while broad-based progress has been slow, these efforts have begun to become evident in international surveys of corruption. In fact, Nigeria's ranking has consistently improved since 2001 ranking 147 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Nigeria has pursued economic reforms to enhance management of public finance and make business regulations more efficient. However, the oil sector continues to dominate the economy, and the structural changes needed for broad-based development have not been forthcoming. Progress on privatization has been limited.

Economic Freedom Snapshot

- 2016 Economic Freedom Score: 57.5 (up 1.9 points)
- Economic Freedom Status: Mostly 'Unfree'
- Global Ranking: 116th
- Regional Ranking: 20th in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Notable Successes: Trade Freedom and Management of Public Finance
- Concerns: Rule of Law, Open Markets, and Regulatory Efficiency
- Overall Score Change Since 2012: +1. (The Heritage Foundation, 2016).

In May 2015, in Nigeria's first peaceful transfer of power among parties, former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari defeated incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan at the polls. Critical challenges include an Islamist insurgency and budgetary shortfalls due to plunging oil prices. Before the May election, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon pushed the terrorist group Boko Haram out of its major strongholds. However, Boko Haram attacks have continued, primarily in northeast Nigeria, and further instability in the oil-rich Niger Delta region is likely. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and leading oil producer, has Sub-Saharan Africa's second-largest natural gas reserves. Despite efforts to diversify, the economy remains heavily dependent on oil. In 2014, Nigeria surpassed South Africa as Africa's largest economy, but an estimated 61 percent of Nigerians live in extreme poverty.

The government also said that it would conduct a forensic audit of state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation after allegations that \$20 billion in oil revenue had gone missing in recent years. Corruption remains pervasive, and efforts to reduce graft have been inadequate. The judiciary has some independence but is hobbled by political interference, corruption, and inadequate funding. Protection of property rights is weak. Recent economic growth has not translated into real gains for most Nigerians. Job creation has been impeded by bureaucratic rigidity and corruption in the economy, causing increased frustration among underemployed youths. With the judicial system susceptible to political interference, the rule of law is weak.

CONCLUSION

For developing countries like Nigeria, democracy is a major issue because national development tremendously depends on it. The protection of human rights and the equitable distribution of social wealth to the people can only take place in democracy. A renowned Nigerian artist, Fashek while performing in his show soloed that Nigeria can never move forward if they don't stoop to equip the masses.

Sadly enough, in many African states, democracy is mistaken for elective government, multi-party politics and longevities of regime (Ogoloma and Nyege, 2015). The unfolding democratic experience in Nigeria provides a template for examining the way in which power supposedly alien to democracy and how intrinsic to autocracy are being craftily deployed along with other performances of power has landed in reinvent ways of performing power that are a depressing throwback to military rule and one party dictatorship.

Abraham Lincoln left us with the simplest definition of democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. A definition always recited in classrooms and not in the minds of our Leaders. Only democracy can bring about the much needed CHANGE.

RECOMMENDATION

There is a need for politicians to exercise restraint in the way politics is played and allow party structures to develop according to the established rules. This would ensure internal cohesion and party discipline.

“No army is stronger than the people. No police is stronger than our people....” Were the words of the governor of Rivers state, Nyeso Eziwon Wike at the 2015 rerun due to the hassle of political leaders trying to wield power at all costs which is very detrimental to election, the foundation of democracy.

Democracy generally will usher in good governance which will bring about national development and the prosecuting of democracy should not lead to spending more than 70 percent of the country's revenue on itself and 30 percent for the people (Nyege and Ogoloma, 2015).

Education remains the most fundamental force for advancing development in any country. Educational systems should be improved in order to raise more responsible, eligible and patriotic youths because ‘the people rule the people’ and if the government is bad then the people are bad.

The government was chosen from among the people. They are citizens of the country. Thus, education from primary to tertiary institutions should be reviewed, personal development inclusive.

Measures to improve access to finance for local small and medium-sized companies that has been introduced should remain stable and maintain services to qualified citizens. Again, the greatness of a nation is not in the government of the nation but in the people of the nation. National development is unending and requires every generation to be properly improved. Therefore, the spirit of entrepreneurship that builds and transforms nations should be recalled into the minds of the people.

Also, Speaking at The Platform , a yearly public policy forum currently holding in Abuja covered by the Premium Times, Oby Ezekwesili former minister of education commended that the Buhari's current economic policies are similar to those he promulgated during the military regime he led in the 1980s.

According to Ezekwesili, Buhari's "archaic and opaque," economic principles are not only encouraging massive corruption and abuse of power, but also hurting the poor they were intended to help.

She said, "During the first coming of this our new president, a command and control economic system was adopted. During that era, inflation spiraled. During that era, jobs were lost. During that era, the economic growth level dipped. That era wasn't the best of eras in economic progress. What did not work in 1984 cannot possibly be a solution in a global economy that's much more integrated. In over one year, the president is still holding to the premise that command and control is the only way out. In a year we have lost the single digits inflation status we maintained in past administrations".

The former Minister further recommended that the President and his team should consider the effects of their policies on the nation. "The President should sit with his team and look at the economic evidence that speaks loudly. It's time to sit back and review the well-intended idea of command and control economic principle."

Certainly, the present situation in Nigeria was not what our founding fathers dreamt of. It is high time we returned to the terrains of freedom in democracy.

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