

Leadership, Participatory Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Like all other nations Nigeria aspires to greatness but over five decades after Independence still ranks very low on all parameters of good governance. The objective of the paper is to examine the concepts of leadership, participatory democracy and good governance, evaluate their significance as components of the development process and articulate the implications of their absence from the administration of public institutions. The paper argues that all three elements are missing from the development process in Nigeria. Systems Analysis or systems theory as enunciated by David Easton is adopted as the theoretical framework. Methodologically the study relies mainly on secondary historical sources of data collection. The paper is significant for its identification of the need for these concepts as guiding principles of the development process in Nigeria. The scope of the paper is Nigeria as a whole from Independence in 1960 till date. It draws the conclusion that Nigerians must insist on good leadership, participatory or inclusive democracy and good governance from their leaders at all levels.

Keywords: Leadership, Governance, Participation, Democracy, Development, Patriotism

Introduction

Administration in Nigeria is constantly under severe pressure not only to deliver on the myriad promises made to the citizens but also to realise the international benchmarks for developmental progress in pace with global trends. Three key areas where this pressure is most seriously exerted are leadership, democracy and good governance. Under the Mo Ibrahim Index for the assessment of good governance in Africa for year 2011 Nigeria ranked as low as 41 out of 53 countries captured. In 2010 it ranked 40th, 35th in 2009 and 39th in 2008 out of 48 countries assessed. The four categories of governance scrutinised were Safety and Rule of Law, Participation and Human Rights, Sustainable Economic Opportunity and Human Development. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation, an organisation that supports good governance and great leadership was established in 2007. Also in West Africa Nigeria occupied the unenviable 13th position out of 16 nations assessed, scoring 41, which was lower than the regional average of 51 and the continental average of 50. The 2011 Ibrahim Index included new indicators such as Physical and Telecommunications Infrastructure, Gender, Health, Welfare Service Provision and Economic Management (Akosile, Thisday Newspaper, October 11, 2011).

This is Nigeria's grim governance record that we have set out to address in this paper. It is a clear demonstration that the abundance of resources - natural, material and human - does not make a great nation or reflect good governance. The crucial role played by culture is to reinvent the unique identity of a nation in the developmental revolution or transformation. National development actually begins from the realisation of the unique cultural identity of a nation from all others and it is this realisation that creates the unique path to national greatness but it takes great leadership to identify this path and take the nation through it. Nigeria has experienced civil war, coups and counter-coups (successful and unsuccessful), religious riots, militancy, terrorism, disputed elections, ethnic clashes, etc., but the greatest tragedy that has befallen the country is the failure of leadership. It could be said that no nation has achieved greatness without experiencing similar national crises. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln (USA), Oliver Cromwell (England), Otto von Bismarck (Germany), V.I. Lenin (USSR), Mao TseTung (China) were all products of national crises. Such national tragedies have usually revealed the fetter that the old ways have become and pointed in the direction leading to modernity.

Barrington Moore Jr. (1966) identified various revolutionary routes that the leading nations of the world followed to modernity - "*revolution from above*" leading to capitalist fascism (Germany, Italy, Japan), "*revolution from the middle*" leading to liberal democracy (England, France) and "*revolution from below*" leading to the modern socialist state (Russia, China). In India there was neither a capitalist revolution from above or middle, nor a peasant one from below. Nonetheless a flourishing parliamentary democracy effectively coalesced with agrarian bureaucracy to produce a unique type of modern society. Native chieftaincy combining with the enduring Mogul bureaucratic system and Hinduism were the defining cultural peculiarities, but these various elements of Indian society were woven together by Nehru and Ghandi leadership (Barrington Moore Jr., 1966: 315-410).

However, the story is different in Nigeria, where the national leadership appears to have learned nothing from the lessons of history. Leadership obtuseness assumes the image of a national colossus threading down every unique opportunity for societal transformation and engender a stronger nation, such opportunities are simply frittered away, leaving the people confused, traumatised and even more divided. The colonial experience

and the nationalist struggle only succeeded in producing ethnic champions constantly bickering against each other, against the people's expectation of a strong national leadership (Nnoli, 1978). The Civil War and the rising profile of oil revenues provided another opportunity that was, regrettably, frittered away through unbridled corruption, mismanagement and misapplication of funds. Consequently, since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been afflicted with developmental paralysis. As Chinua Achebe (1983:1) correctly concluded:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

Nigeria's inability to achieve greatness is not because anything natural has been wrong with the nation, but simply because leadership has failed. Nigeria has been left creeping miserably behind several nations that were at par with her at independence, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Not many nations could claim a better resource endowment, materially, physically, naturally and humanly, than Nigeria. However, harnessing these resources for the progressive transformation of the nation to an enviable position among the comity of nations has remained an enduring challenge to the nation's political leadership. Rather than progress on the path of development Nigerians are daily treated to one form of leadership embarrassment or the other across the globe.

Virtually all the development strategies, such as import substitution, Green Revolution, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), NEPAD, NEEDS, privatisation, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Vision 2010/2020-20, SURE-P, etc., have failed. On paper they appeared fantastic and inspiring, but the same leaders that introduced them consistently turned out to be the greatest obstacles to their effective implementation. Mediocrity has been enthroned above merit and hard work. Those appointed into positions of authority and given national responsibility, but who ran down viable public institutions, are rewarded with national honours and higher positions and responsibilities. Bad leadership in Nigeria manifests in all governance institutions. In virtually every office where people are entrusted with little power and resources bad leadership is displayed in stark and ignoble reality. Reversing it would involve an ethical revolution.

Leadership, participatory democracy and good governance are, arguably, the three most critical challenges that have been haunting Nigeria since Independence in 1960. Other national challenges like corruption, ethnicity and poverty could be subsumed under the above three. These issues have assumed the character of a national malignancy that has defied all cures. With effective national leadership corruption, ethnicity and poverty would have been brought under control.

The Concept of Leadership

Leadership in Nigeria has left the nation spinning in the same position and in some cases caused national retrogression. What then is leadership? Leadership could, at the risk of oversimplification, be defined as the process of a person in position of authority inspiring an organised group of people to set and accomplish great and lofty goals in a dynamic social milieu to resolve continually emerging challenges confronting the group or community. National leadership could then be defined as the process of people in positions of authority inspiring the citizens to set and accomplish or resolve set national developmental goals and challenges. From this definition it could be gleaned that leadership is dynamic, a continuous process of inspiring, guiding and directing people and the deployment of national resources toward realising national objectives and emerging challenges. Weber's traditional, charismatic and legal/rational/bureaucratic authority also serve as leadership conferment methods that bestow not only legitimacy and obedience (Nnamdi et al, 2009: 108-124).

The possibility of a good leader becoming a bad one is a constant reality. It is the accomplishment of the set goals that determines the success or failure of leadership. As Aristotle (As cited in Curtis, 1981: 81) would argue, it is natural for a monarch, defined as the best man ruling on behalf of the entire society, to degenerate into a tyrant, just as an aristocracy – rule by the best few in the interest of the entire society – could degenerate into oligarchy, rule in the interest of the few (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aris-pol.htm>).

Thus, good national leadership must be consistent, otherwise the gains recorded by one good leader would be wiped out and the wheel of progress turned back, by a succeeding bad leader. Good leadership should be developed into a national culture and cut across every layer and segment of society, but this could only be achieved through exemplary leadership at the top. Secondly, the influence exercised by a leader over his followers must be a positive one, geared towards attaining set goals and carrying them along in the process. If the influence creates divisions, factions and disagreeable sub-groups among the followers, obviously national goals would not be realised.

Nigeria's goals and aspirations as a nation have been clearly enunciated under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in the 1999 Constitution. Accordingly, any influence exerted by a leader on the citizens should be in the direction of attaining these national objectives. Individuals and subgroups would naturally exist, but their personal and subgroup desires and aspirations must not override those of the nation. For instance, there are French-Americans, English-Americans, Russian-Americans, Irish-

Americans, Hispanic-Americans, etc. but a conflict between them is unheard of. This is because all Americans have been acculturated or indoctrinated to put America above everything else and this was achieved through national leadership that has been consistently exemplary. No leader has ruled America as an Irish-American or French-American to provide a rallying point for people of those subcultures but rather simply as an American carrying the burdens of all Americans. This is why Achebe emphasises “personal example” in his definition of leadership. In Nigeria leaders have ruled as Hausa, Igbo, Ijaw, Yoruba, etc. making national integration, unity and cohesion very difficult as the people could only follow the path created for them by their leaders.

Fourthly, the issue of accomplishment of set goals denotes the existence of great national goals. These goals must be well defined, articulated and internalised by the people as a national ideology backed up by the virtues of patriotism, hard work and team-spirit. In Nigeria the national objectives and aspirations enshrined in the Constitution have been largely jettisoned or ignored in favour of goals that are not nationalistic. It is important that national goals and aspirations are set by the national leadership with an unshakable commitment to accomplish them. External plans, strategies and support, though welcome, should be subsumed under our national goals. This is very crucial, because where the wrong goals are set the nation would derail from the path of national greatness. Great nations produce great leaders who in turn make their nations great. Stiglitz (2002: 186)

One attribute of the success cases is that they are “home-grown,” designed by people within each country, sensitive to the needs and concerns of their country. There was no cookie-cutter approach in China or Poland or Hungary. These and all the other successful transitioning countries were pragmatic – they never let ideology and simple textbook models determine policy.

The Crisis of National Leadership in Nigeria

Nigeria, has, for long been saddled with poor national leadership. Leaders, at various levels always assume office with inspiring speeches laced with great promises arousing the people’s enthusiasm and confidence. However, before long the people’s confidence would fizzle out as the leaders begin to renege on their promises and eventually end up worse than their predecessors. This is the cycle of frustration to which Nigerians are constantly, and regrettably, treated by their leaders. Scholars keep wondering what could be the source of this leadership failure. Is it genetic or the socio-political environment or the historical background or the climate?

The colonial experience obviously is a major contributory factor to leadership failure in Nigeria. The colonial state, having been created and established by force, had to continually rely of force in its relations with the colonised. While leadership in the home of the coloniser was based on consensus, tolerance, participation, democracy, etc., in the colony the relationship between the coloniser and colonised was anything but consensual. It was rather defined by attitudes of superiority and inferiority, master and servant, foreigner and local, white and black, etc. Leadership was therefore estranged and alienated from the rest of the population. These sharp differences also reflected in the residential patterns between the Government Reserved Areas (GRA) and the slums.

This attitude or sense of superiority of the leader over his followers was bequeathed to the nationalist leaders who ended up simply substituting the colonial masters in their offices, positions, attitudes and residences. Consequently leadership in Nigeria has never been positively oriented towards the people. (Maier, 2000: xxi) defines the character and narrow base of Nigerian leadership thus:

Since winning independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed at least one million deaths in Africa’s biggest civil war, the assassination of two government leaders, six successful coups and four failed ones and thirty years of army rule. Yet somehow the country has stayed together, despite decades of government by a clique of military and civilian elite who have behaved . . . like “pirates in power”. They are modern equivalents of the African warlords of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who built up wealthy kingdoms by selling millions of their people to the Europeans in the Atlantic slave trade. In their current incarnation, they sell their resources – oil in the case of Nigeria – instead of human beings.

The same resources also built and sustained the American and European empires. However, currently Africans are not sold into slavery but are rather enslaved by their leaders or willingly do so to earn a living abroad on account of toxic leadership in Africa. The structures of governance which the colonial administrators instituted and which represented force and alienation still subsist. This sense of superiority over the people has remained an enduring legacy of colonial rule to African leaders. In fact, the citizens are viewed as being troublesome, too demanding, an unnecessary distraction and a burden, rather than an asset, partners in leadership and agents of development. Thus the wide gulf between leadership and the people still persists in Nigeria and the whole of Africa.

Several theories have been advanced by scholars to identify and explain leadership, such as the Great Man, trait, behavioural theory, etc. Great Man theory is based on the belief that men are born great. At some

historical stages in the evolution of states some great leaders naturally emerge, most probably divinely ordained and inspired to direct the destiny of that nation. Such men include Moses among the Israelites, Washington of the United States, Lenin in Russia, Mao in China, Nehru in India, etc. The question that arises is whether such divine manifestation has been experienced in Nigeria. Are there leaders in the history of Nigeria that could be identified as possessing such natural qualities and what impact did they make in transforming Nigeria into a great nation? Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe has often been so identified, and in the course of the nationalist struggle was actually positioned to play that role. But how successful was he in that endeavour still remains a subject of debate.

His petty quarrel with Ernest Ikoli, who was backed by Obafemi Awolowo, over newspaper business and politics within the Nigerian Youth Movement, had introduced ethnic politics in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1978: 142-143; Coleman, 1958:227). His later emergence as the President of Igbo State Union in 1948 (Coleman, 1958: 347; Sklar, 1963: 70-71) and his displacement of Eyo Ita as Parliamentary Leader in the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953 and the ethnic squabbles it generated (Sklar, 1963: 119-123) eclipsed his chances of emerging as a great leader and a rallying point for the aspirations of Nigerians to build a great, virile and prosperous nation and that vacuum has remained open till date. All others having failed, President Goodluck Jonathan now has a unique opportunity to fill it. What he makes of this opportunity will be judged in retrospect after his tenure.

Another Nigerian leader that almost succeeded in filling that vacuum was General Murtala Mohammed, but quite unfortunately he did not live long enough to accomplish his dreams of transforming Nigeria into a great nation. A similar fate of early termination visited the Muhammadu Buhari/Tunde Idiagbon Regime. Does nature also have a hand in the ill-fate that Nigeria has experienced in its struggle to produce great leaders that would transform her into a great nation or has it been a mere accident of history? Scholars can only conjecture and speculate, but the vacuum still implores Nigeria's contemporary leaders. The emerging facts are anything but propitious, not with the fuel subsidy crisis and the startling petroleum industry revelations already threatening to put them on the negative side of history.

Trait theory is closely related to the Great Man theory. It is based on the belief that some individuals naturally possess some identifiable leadership qualities that are absent in others. It is easier to train such people into great leaders. This is where education plays a major role, but, here again, the systematic destruction of the educational and value systems in Nigeria, the ignoble roles of god-fatherism, nepotism and corruption, militate against the emergence of great national leaders that could transform Nigeria into a great nation. Both Plato and Aristotle were in favour of training already endowed men into great leaders.

Various styles of leadership have also been identified. Among these the most popular in Nigeria has been the authoritarian (master-servant) style of leadership, discussed above. The democratic or participatory style of leadership is, perhaps, the least popular in Nigeria, but, ironically, is always on the lips of Nigerian leaders, always promising but never really consulting or including the people in the decision-making process. The Machiavellian (manipulative, deceptive, wily, and cruel) style of leadership has also been closely associated with some Nigerian leaders. The result of all this, has been the failure of leadership and the long, frustrating wait for a great leader to emerge in Nigeria.

Vision, Leadership and Underdevelopment in Nigeria

Vision is an integral part of great leadership. No great leader has ever emerged who possesses no vision. However, the relationship between leadership and vision in Nigeria has been a particularly unhealthy one. Leadership without vision is like embarking on a chartless journey. Without vision the inspiration stirred by the leader would only create confusion. It is with vision that he guides and channels that influence in the desired direction to achieve the set national goals. Akinyemi affirms that "*vision is not just the statement on the wall. It's the leader's thoughts and ideas translated into action, and imprinted in the minds and eyes of everyone that qualifies as its people.*" (<http://www.deoluakinyemi.com/2007/08/28/dubai-002-vision>). Professor Anya O. Anya said:

A vision, by its very nature, is the projection of a desired future, anchored on a desirable and desired outcome, for a set of national objectives canvassed by the leadership class. To become the national vision, it must enjoy broad acceptance within the population. Because the evolution of a vision depends on the interactive dynamics first within the leadership and later in the wider population; consensus building is an essential ingredient. Ideally, national consensus should be subject to legitimization by the democratic process. (Guardian Newspaper, 25/04/08)

It would be wrong to argue that Nigerian leaders lack vision. The vision of the Nigerian leadership is clearly stated in the Vision 2010 and Vision 20/20-20 documents. Before the year 2000 Nigerian leaders promised everything on earth. The mass media was awash with jingles and placements with assurances that there would be houses, education, food, jobs, roads, electricity, health, etc. for all by the year 2000. By that year,

however, Nigerians experienced more destitution, starvation, joblessness, darkness, illiteracy, etc. rather the promises being fulfilled. On realising the impossibility of fulfilment of the 2000 dream the date was shifted to 2010. The experience remained the same and the date was again shifted to 2020. The truth is that vision is more than public sloganeering. In fact with the new 2020 date the Nigerian leaders are only making a mockery of themselves as the people no longer trust or believe them. Vision is about trust, the people's confidence and effective planning.

Late American President J.F. Kennedy had a vision that an American space vessel would land on the moon within the space of ten years. A year later he was assassinated but the vision remained and was eventually accomplished. Its success could be attributed to its being internalised by the people. Here, in Nigeria, the story is different, as the same leaders providing the vision are corruptly transferring the same resources with which the vision would be realised, abroad and creating poverty, misery and frustration among the population. An impoverished people, well aware of the mismanagement of the national resources cannot be mobilised to follow the vision of their leaders. The result is further underdevelopment rather than national greatness.

The Concept of Participatory Democracy

Western liberal democracy is basically anchored on the concept of representation where participation is limited mainly to elections. Scholars such as Barber (1984) consider representative democracy as being authoritarian, relying essentially on the deployment of power from a centralised executive in the name of national security, peace and order. He argues further that representative democracy violates the principles of equality, freedom and social justice, which are indispensable to democracy. In response to these flaws in liberal democracy the concept of participatory democracy was revived. From an Aristotlean point of view, participation is indispensable to democracy and indeed was one of the defining characteristics of Athenian democracy. It is essentially an attempt to modernise a classical concept. Barber distinguishes between thin democracy and strong democracy which he equates with participatory democracy.

Strong democracy is a distinctively modern form of participatory democracy. It rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogenous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature. (Barber, 1984: 117)

Strong democracy or participatory democracy therefore “*challenges the politics of elites and masses that masquerades as democracy in the West and in doing so offers a relevant alternative to what we have called thin democracy - that is, to instrumental, representative, liberal democracy*” (Barber, 1984: 117). Participatory democracy attempts to reinstate man into his original nature as *homo politicus*. It also emphasises citizens' participation in local self-government, involving the citizens living within a community identifying their problems, setting their priorities and formulating policies to address these problems, rather than a central or state government formulating policies and even setting out to implement these policies on behalf of the local communities, as is the practice in Nigeria.

Liberal democracy has realised the problem of alienation of the citizens from the decision-making process. Participatory democracy involves so many elements including information gathering and sharing, consultation, citizen monitoring programmes, community planning processes, participatory appraisals and beneficiary assessments, community budgeting, collaborative decision-making and policy formulation, agenda setting, citizen juries, etc. The emphasis is on democratic governance at the local level. It also involves devolution of decision-making to communities, participation of civil society organisations in the management of local development. The expected result is people-centred development which enables people to realise their potential, build self-confidence and live in dignity and fulfilment; people freed from poverty, ignorance, deprivation and exploitation and seek to correct existing economic, social and political injustices and oppression.

The Ecology of Participatory Democracy

Democracy operates within a social environment, which constitutes its ecology. There is a constant interaction between democracy, in its various forms, including participatory democracy and the social environment in which it functions and they mutually affect each other. The nature of the environment in which participatory democracy is made to function is therefore of very crucial importance. Like any other organism, participatory democracy would experience difficulties in a strange environment. This is the context in which any discussion on participatory democracy should proceed, particularly in Nigeria. Nigerian leaders are expert at formulating or coining enticing phrases such as participatory democracy that may have been successfully practised elsewhere. More often than not, these catch-phrases are coined by United Nations agencies and dispensed to the Third World countries like Nigeria, which then receive and operationalise them, at least in their official development documents such as NEPAD, NEEDS, AGOA, Peer Review Mechanism, etc. Local people are completely alienated from the preparation of such documents. The following sections will be committed to discussing the

environmental factors with which participatory democracy would have to contend.

Participatory Democracy and Poverty Eradication

Nigeria is a nation where a vast majority of the population is poor. The NEEDS Document acknowledges that 7 out of every 10 Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day. This means that over seventy per cent of the population live in abject poverty. It is envisaged that participatory democracy would eradicate poverty by economically empowering people. Obtaining food and other essentials of life such as water and shelter, on a daily basis, is a serious problem for most Nigerians. The poverty eradication programmes and strategies, rather than eradicate poverty are actually creating more. The question, in the context of this paper is what participatory democracy could possibly mean to people struggling with the basic necessities of life and who are also well aware that their leaders are actually responsible for their misery? Participate in what? It has been very difficult for even representative democracy to take root in Nigeria. People actually hope to get as much as they can from the politicians during elections. Their poor economic condition also makes them vulnerable to manipulation with money during elections.

The very high level of poverty in Nigeria would seriously mitigate participatory democracy. The practice of participatory democracy is not only political but also economic and it is only after some economic justice has been stimulated that people would be willing to participate in political affairs. Poverty reduction is therefore indispensable to participatory democracy.

Women and Participatory Democracy in Nigeria

As noted earlier, participatory democracy involves some measure of socio-economic equality, which should include a programme of gender equality. Any form of deprivation, particularly against women would hamper the introduction of participatory democracy in Nigeria. This is because women are usually at the receiving end of economic hardship. They are the backbone of the local economy, producing many essential products needed daily in families. Any economic or political reform that neglects the participation of women would be doomed right from the beginning. Women have proved to be highly productive and hardworking, currently delving into areas hitherto monopolised by men.

However, in Nigeria the culture of depriving and oppressing women, derived from cultural practices in several indigenous communities, still persists. In the Northern part of Nigeria the franchise was extended to women only recently. In several parts of Nigeria women who participate actively in public affairs are regarded as being wayward and unfaithful. Consequently, many Nigerian husbands would not encourage their wives to participate actively in public affairs. Such stigma also discourages many women from getting involved in politics. These are all impediments to participatory democracy and until the challenge of women empowerment is addressed participatory democracy would be difficult to thrive in Nigeria.

Corruption and Participatory Democracy in Nigeria

Corruption is one cankerworm that is eating away the fabric of the Nigerian society. Corruption has become so pervasive that it has effectively become the norm rather than the exception. Corrupt politicians and businessmen/women are so powerful that it is easier for a carmel to pass through the eye of a needle than convict one of them. In most cases when found guilty they are given sentences so light that others become emboldened to steal public funds with greater impunity. If participatory democracy involves the mobilisation of resources at the local level and also the devolution of funds from higher levels of government for management at the local/communal level, transparency and accountability would be difficult to achieve. Local chiefs and community leaders are known to have defrauded their people. Participatory democracy would appear to be the antidote to corruption in Nigeria, but like many other strategies before it, the problem of implementation is where the challenge lies.

Democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself . . . It is a name for a life of free and enriching communion.” (John Dewey, quoted in Barber, 1984: 117)

It should be noted that participatory democracy is not only a system of government but also a complete way of life in the community. It is a form of culture internalised by the citizens and expressed in their daily lives. It is a society in which people are not forced by the law to be law-abiding, accommodating, transparent, trustworthy, accountable, tolerant, etc. Such a culture should also cut across the entire society. Participatory democracy is therefore a development strategy that would be difficult to achieve given the current level of moral decay in Nigeria.

The Concept of Good Governance

The concept of good governance is fast gaining prominence within academic and official circles. In particular the United Nations has shown great interest in the issue of governance as it relates to economic development and the

eradication of poverty using governmental institutions with the active participation of the citizenry. The rising incidence of poverty and the inability of Third World countries to check the trend has given cause for the United Nations to get involved in generating awareness as well as mapping out strategies to combat it. It has generated questions concerning how governments utilise their resources to meet the needs of their citizens. Areas to focus include transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equity, etc.

Defining Good Governance

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has defined good governance as “*the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.*” Good governance therefore involves popular participation, transparency in handling public affairs, accountability in the utilisation of public finances, equity in the distribution of resources, promotion of the rule of law to check impunity and abuse of power, etc. It has been observed by the global institutions that these, more often than not, are the sources of wastage and mismanagement of resources leading to mass poverty in the developing countries. It is therefore hoped that calling the attention of governments to these issues and also providing the framework for addressing them would help solve the problem of poverty, particularly in the developing countries. This is what the concept of good governance has been articulated to address, the crisis of poverty, mismanagement of resources, corruption, infrastructural decay, etc, in the developing countries.

The Commission on Global Governance (1995: 2) defined governance as:

The sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest.

Thus good governance encourages inclusiveness and the participation of various segments of the society to address questions of their common welfare, the appropriate strategies for realising such common societal goals. It involves co-operative action by de-emphasising cross-cultural, ethnic and class differences with a view to solving problems common to all. However, the participatory and inclusive conceptualisations constitute just one dimension of good governance. From this perspective good governance is pictured from below. The emphasis here is the participation of the citizens in generating economic and general societal development and actually benefiting from the process. However, good governance has also been viewed from above. For Molomo (in Salih, ed, 2003: 294) good governance simply means “*sound political and economic management in a polity*”. Here emphasis is placed on leadership, the ability of the managers of state affairs to formulate and implement sound political and economic policies for the benefit of all. Governance is therefore measured in terms of the impact of such public and private sector policies on the citizens who may not necessarily participate in the process. What matters is that the quality of life of the generality of the populace enjoys both qualitative and quantitative improvement.

Scholars have however begun to question the substitution of democracy for leadership. Is governance a substitute for democracy? The importance attached to leadership as opposed to democratic participation has come under intellectual scrutiny. Scholars like Rita Abrahamsen are very critical of the direction of the discourse on good governance.

The governance discourse of the past decade and a half was predominantly neoliberal, implying that the emphasis on good governance was coupled with an emphasis on economic liberalisation policies and the reduction of the role of the state in the economy. This focus implied that other concerns, such as poverty reduction, were effectively regarded as less important policy objectives. The consequence of this is that a redistribution of wealth is effectively prevented . . . and this ensures that the victors . . . are those who already possess power and wealth (Hout, in Salih, ed., 2003:262-263).

There need not arise any contradiction between leadership and participation or between good governance and poverty reduction. If anything there is a strong thematic correlation between them. Poverty reduction is one of the key elements of World Bank neo-liberal development strategies in the Third World. Leadership, governance and participation only serve as the vehicles for its realisation.

Good Governance as a Development Strategy

At face value good governance would appear to brook no ideological affiliation. It has been packaged as though no matter the system of government adopted by a country these issues enumerated above provide a common denominator for addressing the most fundamental problems facing the human race across the globe. Whether a government is socialist or capitalist or mixed, it must be concerned with effective resource management, transparency, participation, inclusiveness, accountability, minimising corruption, etc. Any government that fails

to address itself to these issues is most likely to fail, the political system notwithstanding. Together, these elements of good governance have been constituted into a development strategy for nations all over the world, which if adopted and effectively implemented would not only generate development but also ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of development. These problems are more acute in the developing countries and it is in that context that good governance will be examined in Nigeria.

Two World Bank reports in 1998 tied good governance to development assistance, arguing that development assistance is more effective in aid-receiving developing countries with good institutions for the implementation of good policies. Hout (in Salih ed., 2003: 260) has identified two quite divergent interpretations of the role of governance in development. One is the technocratic interpretation which focuses on how the public sector is managed and the other is the political interpretation which gives attention to the organisation of the political and legal systems of developing countries. The first involves issues of accountability on the part of public office holders, legality of public sector actions and activities, availability of information on public institutions and transparency. The second places emphasis on a functional legal system that guarantees the rights and freedoms of citizens, the presence of democratic rules and procedures and a vibrant civil society.

Leadership and Good Governance in Nigeria

The concept of good governance is closely related to leadership since it involves the exercise of administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, particularly on the issues of transparency, accountability, resource management, participation, corruption, impunity, etc. These are some of the most acute problems confronting Nigeria. Government activities, at all levels, are devoid of transparency. There is so much secrecy with the people making no input into the budgetary process. Consequently, in most cases people are not aware of projects budgeted for implementation in their communities and therefore cannot raise questions on non-implementation or abandonment. Secrecy is a strategy adopted by corrupt officials to conceal their activities that are inimical to the development process.

In Nigeria local people are not consulted before projects are sited in their communities. Government decides for them what projects they would need, as a result of which many projects sited are irrelevant to the people of the communities. Leaders give no account to the people on how their resources are being managed. That is why corruption has almost become a culture in Nigeria. Absence of consensus-building has resulted in incessant inter-ethnic, inter-communal, inter-religious conflicts and rivalry across Nigeria. The judiciary has also not been very independent and honest. The rich are known to have been able to influence court decisions. This is a very serious affront on the rule of law in Nigeria. Good governance, as a development strategy appears to be capable of addressing the developmental and social issues confronting Nigeria, but the political will to face the challenge is lacking.

Elements of Good Governance

The definition of good governance contains several elements that when woven together do highlight some of the most crucial challenges confronting the developing countries.

Participation

It is difficult to imagine how a government that has completely alienated its people would succeed. The practice whereby government officials, based in the capital city take decisions on behalf of people at the local level, in remote areas and possibly in a unique environment, is clearly unworkable. Participation is very important because government is about the people. Government officials are only acting on behalf of the people. The people, at various levels are also highly knowledgeable, particular on issues that concern them. Mobilising them and utilising their knowledge of their unique environment is a better approach to governance than thinking for them. Participation should not be limited to voting in elections, but also sustained activity in public affairs between elections. When people are alienated from the decision-making process they tend to become disgruntled and apathetic. The purpose of good governance cannot be realised without the active participation of the people.

In Nigeria, policy formulation is done mainly at the capital city without any input from the rural people even on matters concerning them. That is why implementation is always difficult. Without being involved in policy formulation it is difficult to get the people involved in policy implementation. The result is a very high level of project failure. Sometimes contractors are paid without the project being implemented. Abandoned projects litter every part of Nigeria occasioned by the non-participation of the people in the decision-making process. If development should be people-focused and people-centred popular participation in decision-making is simply indispensable.

Rule of Law

In any modern society it is the law that rules. Any society where this is not the case cannot claim to be a modern state. The era of the divine right of kings to rule is long gone with history. That means equality of all citizens

before the law, uniform application of the law, all citizens being subject to the same law. Without the rule of law there could be no citizens but rather masters and their modern slaves, who have little or no protection under the law. If the law could easily be manipulated by the wealthy then it would be a society or government by and for the wealthy rather than a democracy.

In Nigeria, under military rule, managers of the state decided how laws should be made through decrees, took decisions and prevented the courts from deciding on cases arising from them. The government decided which court verdicts to obey or otherwise. The Constitution, which provided the fundamental law, was suspended and law began to depend on their whims and caprices. This attitude of acting with impunity was bequeathed to the civilian leaders and particularly under former President Obasanjo the situation was so bad that his successor, late President Yar'Adua made the rule of law one of his major state policies. Such a situation is particularly bad for democracy and development. Rule of law strengthens accountability. The weakness of rule of law has made it possible for corrupt politicians to evade punishment and with corruption reigning so supreme any talk of good governance becomes a mere academic exercise.

Transparency

A good government must be transparent in all its activities. This enables the people to develop a proper perception or assessment of the government. The absence of transparency in governance encourages rumour-mongering, which often leads to conflicts and crises in society. People are left to speculate on issues since they cannot receive the right information and tend to act based on conjecture. For example, it was rumour that women would be made to pay tax that resulted in the Aba Women Riots of 1929 in which about fifty women were killed and about the same number sustained serious injuries (Coleman, 1958: 174). Late President Yar'Adua's sickness, treatment and eventual death were all shrouded in secrecy so much that even the Vice President was kept in the dark. The result was a serious constitutional crisis that would have consumed the nation but for the wisdom and timely intervention of the National Assembly.

Transparency in governmental activities is a very scarce commodity in Nigeria. Probably owing to the high level of corruption many government officials keep their decisions and actions secret and away from the public, particularly the press. Even with the recent enactment of the Freedom of Information Act public information still remains largely secret. For this reason good governance still has a long way to go in Nigeria, if at all it has already set foot on Nigerian soil.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the ability of a government to respond positively and quickly to situations and needs, particularly as they affect the lives of the people. A responsive government acts swiftly to fresh or emerging issues in defence of the people, but this is made possible by proper planning and the establishment of institutions through which the citizens could articulate their interests and express their desires. This is one of the crucial elements of good governance as an irresponsible government is indicative of failure and could create social strife.

In Nigeria governments are not responsive to the needs of the people. In fact governments are so insensitive that demands made by the people are viewed as an affront on the government. Public utilities, such as electricity and water are available only in government houses, official quarters and homes of the rich. Government officials send their children abroad for education as they fail to respond to the educational needs of the people. They travel abroad for treatment of all manner of ailments as health facilities in the country remain in shambles. Responsiveness, as an element of good governance poses a serious challenge to Nigeria.

Consensus Orientation

Consensus orientation of government involves building bridges across several rivers in a nation. These rivers could be ethnic, communal, religious, racial, class and other aspects of the social divide. Modern nations are hardly homogenous in any respect. Social divisions constitute an integral aspect of modern nationhood and must be respected, accommodated and tolerated. Consensus building should begin with the elite, who could actually lead their people either towards or away from conflicts.

The Civil War in Nigeria would have been avoided if the elite on both sides had mobilised their people against it. The same thing could be said about the series of religious riots in the North. A consensus oriented government does not wait until a minor issue develops into a serious national crisis. Former President Obasanjo caused an escalation of militancy in the Niger Delta with his policy of military force against the militants, but Yar'Adua was able to resolve the problem through dialogue with the militants. The absence of national consensus has created several crises in Nigeria.

Equity

The problem of equitable distribution of national resources is one of the most serious challenges facing governance in Nigerian. This has manifested in terms of the distribution of projects, employment, appointments,

oil revenue allocation, etc. To underscore the seriousness of the problem of equity the federal character principle was included in the 1999 Constitution. In a plural society it is usually difficult to satisfy all segments of the society. However the disparity in the authoritative allocation of values between various segments of the society should not be too glaring to create a crisis. No segment of the society should be neglected or denied in the distribution of national resources, particularly the minorities, women and the physically challenged.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Any good government must be effective and efficient in taking decisions and managing the resources of the nation. Inefficiency in the management of public institutions has adversely affected the development process. Valuable time is usually wasted in the public service. Ethnic and religious relationships most times form the basis of patronage in the public service. Unnecessary delays in decision-making have a chain of effects that bog down government operations. For example, annual budgets are never fully implemented because of inefficiency in the budgetary process. Each year only between 40 – 60 per cent of the annual budgets are implemented and in the process much of the budgeted funds simply disappear.

Strategic Vision

The role of vision in national leadership and governance has already been discussed. It is simply an undeniable fact in good governance and its absence or poor management has adversely affected the development process in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, it is clear that leadership, participatory democracy and good governance, which have been identified as having the ability to transform Nigeria positively, are yet to make a strong statement in Nigeria. If these are indeed prerequisites to development in Nigeria, then a long and tortuous road lies ahead of the nation. Nigerians in the civil society, as stakeholders in the Nigeria project, must therefore get organised and insist on good leadership, participatory democracy and good governance. The rest of the world is not waiting for Nigeria. Therefore no effort should be spared to nudge Nigeria on the path of greatness.

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