

Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This study, Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects is a descriptive analysis that has relied on the use of secondary data as its source of information. The basic purpose of this study is to x-ray the relationship between good governance and democracy and to identify those factors that militate against good governance in Nigeria. The study highlights that after the return of civil rule in 1999, democracy has not achieved good governance in Nigeria. The country is beset with excessive corruption, acute unemployment, poverty, ethno-religious conflicts and lack of infrastructural facilities. Based on the above, it is concluded that the present democratic process in Nigeria is yet to produce good governance.

Keywords: *Democracy, Good governance, Institutions.*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is regarded as the most appropriate form of government in the modern times. In every society what matters is not which political system is the best but whether the society is democratic or not. That is why some scholars have established a nexus between democracy and good governance. These scholars believe that the development challenges in African countries and Nigeria in particular are due to absence of democracy. Nigeria has been grappling with governance crisis since independence. This has adversely affected economic and social transformation of the country. Some of the reasons attributed to crisis in governance are absence of democracy and prolonged military rule in Nigeria. Years of despotic and debilitating military rule rendered the country vulnerable to arbitrary and often poor governance, lack of transparency and accountability, lawlessness, underdevelopment, economic instability and human rights violations of severe magnitude (Igbokwe, 2012).

Nigeria obtained her independence from Britain in 1960 and practiced parliamentary system of government up to 1966 when it was interrupted by military coup. Nigeria was under military rule from 1966 to 1979, when the country returned to civil rule and embraced presidential system of government which was also cut short by military coup in 1983. This led to another tortuous period of military rule until May, 1999 when the country returned to civil rule and maintains presidential system of government (Gani, 2005). The implication of this is that the military has ruled Nigeria for almost 30 years out of the 52 years of her independence. When

the country came out of her 15 years of uninterrupted military dictatorships, there were high anticipation that democracy would engender good governance which would eventually results in rapid economic growth, improvements in the standard of living and restore political stability. It is a sad commentary that return of democratic governance in Nigeria has not yielded expected results. There have been increased ethno-religious and political conflicts which result in the emergence or ethnic militias, political assassination, kidnapping, acute unemployment, abject poverty and poor infrastructural facilities which have posed a serious threat to national security.

Onah (2006) rightly observes that all development visions and programmes fail in Nigeria because of poor handling by corrupt and poor hungry politicians/bureaucrats leading to growing poverty symptoms, including electoral frauds, untrue and inefficient representatives, violence, religious crisis, crisis in Middle Belt and Niger Delta regions, hostage taking, cultism, food insecurity, low agricultural production, illiteracy (that also weakens democracy), crime, high mortality and morbidity rates, prostitution and poor health and national image, low GDP and GNP, and high unemployment rate.

Corruption is a common phenomenon at all levels of government which has crippled infrastructural facilities such as safe drinking water, good roads, steady power supply and basic health and educational services. Good governance cannot be achieved where corruption is pervasive and persistent. As corruption is prevalent since the return of democracy in 1999, good governance is abused by self seeking political leaders and senior bureaucrats. Therefore, the main thrust of this work is to review relationship between good governance and democracy in Nigeria. It also attempts to highlight some challenges that militate against good governance in a nascent democracy and device appropriate strategies to address them.

Democracy and Good Governance

According to Sharma and Sadana (2011), good governance is a long dynamic concept encompassing fast changing political, social and economic milieu along with international environment and conditions for operational governance. The objective of good governance is to transform the social, economic and political life of the people within parliamentary democracy. The basic tenets of good governance are rule of law, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness and equity. Ogundiya (2010) observes that good governance “means accountability in all its ramifications. It also means the rule of law and unfettered judiciary; that is freedom of expression and choice in political association. Good governance means transparency, equity and honesty in public office. In the Nigerian context, good governance calls for constitutional rule and a true federal system. In the opinion of Moulaye (2006), there is a shift in the concept which now passes for a structuring generic term, encompassing not only how state institutions and structures are managed but also process of decision-making and policy formulation, the capacity

to execute these policies, resource allocation, information flow and efficiency of officials. Good governance is a balanced governance, having harmonious interrelationship between the government, private sector, NGOs and cooperatives. The interface between private sector and government will be instrumental in sharing the responsibility of governance and protecting interest of the people (Igbokwe, 2012). Therefore, good governance is the ability of the State to achieve its desired objectives in terms of equity, justice, protection of life and property, increased participation, observance of rule of law and improvement in the standard of living of the masses. Governance is assumed to be bad when it does not take aforementioned into consideration.

Democracy is based on some form of participation and/or representation. It is assumed that in a democratic political system, government derives legitimacy from the people. Government also exercises authority within a framework of body of supreme laws called constitution (Jega, 2007). The concept of democracy includes: justice, equality, freedom and liberty, rule of law, accountability, constitutionalism, openness and transparency. Abraham Lincoln rightly defined democracy as government of the people by the people and for the people (Igbokwe, 2012).

Challenges of Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

Democracy has emerged as the best accepted form of government in the contemporary world. It is recognized as the most appropriate mechanism through which any society should be governed. Thus, theoretically, scholars and international financial institutions like the World Bank have established an inextricable connection between democracy and good governance (Ogundiya, 2010). In his confession before the United Nations in October 1991, Thomas Pickering, the United States Ambassador declared “the bottom line of good governance is democracy itself (Ogundiya, 2010).

Many scholars are of the opinion that development challenges in African countries and Nigeria in particular is due to absence of democracy and prolonged military rule. It is worrisome that after the return of civil rule in Nigeria since 1999, democracy has not produced good governance. In Nigeria, political assassinations, ethno-religious conflicts, insecurity, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment and general economic and political decay have been the major dividend of democracy since 1999 when the country returned to democracy (Ogundiya, 2010). In recent times, hostage taking and destruction of lives and property by Boko Haram have reached a dangerous dimension. There is increasing global realization that credible elections constitute a major factor in democracy, democratization and good governance (Alemika, 2011). In Nigeria, elections have been ridden with conflicts. The campaigns preceding elections are invariably marred by pettiness, intolerance and violence (Jega, 2007). Reported incidences of Intra-party and inter-party

conflicts including kidnapping and political assassination are very common. The elections and their outcome have often been neither free nor fair, characterized by the violations of the process (both inadvertent and willful), corrupt conduct by officials, rigging of results among others (Jega, 2007). Credible leadership is a viable mechanism to enhance good governance in the on-going democratic process. It is a sad commentary that the inadequacy of the ruling political class in terms of lack of vision, competence, intellectual ability, democratic credentials and integrity further complicates the situation in the sense that elected leaders have become patently incapable of addressing economic crisis and perpetual instability in the system (Jega, 2007).

They simply act like the proverbial ostrich, oblivious of what is happening around them, and busily engaged in graft and advancement of selfish and parochial interest (Jega, 2007). Democratic practices and good governance flourish in an environment where elected and appointed government officials account for their actions and policies to the general population. They must demand regular meetings with their elected representatives at the constituency level. In Nigerian context, accountability is not feasible in democracy. Elaigwu (2005) observes that “most representatives in the executive and legislative branches, once elected become masters. They do not believe in accountability. Some elected officials, once elected, never visited their constituencies until next election”. Based on their performance, many of these elected officials are not worthy to return to power, but because of the power of incumbency, they force themselves on the people again. They did not really account for their mandate. A serious challenge to good governance in the present democratic process is lack of efficient and effective legislative branch of government.

According to Ogundiya (2010), the legislative arm of government that would have provided adequate checks on abuses of power by the executive and recklessness of opportunistic politicians is also inefficient and ineffective. It is a fact that effective legislature results in good governance. Nigeria’s legislature is not only expected to make laws but also prudently manage the financial resources for the interest of the citizenry. It is not out of place to state that the legislative branch of government has failed miserably to discharge its functions. This has deprived the people the benefits of good governance.

Instead of striving to achieve good governance through equitable distribution of resources, Nigeria’s legislature is busy on how to amass wealth at the detriment of the country. Another problem is that the legislature in Nigeria is being teleguided, threatened and regarded as rubber stamp by the executive branch. This was illustratively made manifest in the struggle of the federal legislature for its autonomy during the leadership of Senator Chuba Okadigbo and Alhaji Ghali Na’ Abba (Aondona, 2012). The use of ‘Ghana must go’ bags to influence honorable members of the 6th National Assembly in Nigeria to change their leadership through

impeachment by the executive branch is a fore pointer to this democratic deficit (Aondona, 2012). Central to democratic praxis and good governance is independence of the judiciary. In Nigeria, it is beyond doubt that the notion of independence of the judiciary is one that is yet to be fully imbibed by the political leaders. The judiciary in Nigeria is to a large extent, subject to the whims and caprices of the executive arm (Ogundiya, 2010). This is so because the judiciary is not only financially dependent on the executive but has also been excessively politicized (Ogundiya, 2010).

The net result of these is pervasive corruption among the judicial officers. It is no exaggeration that once the judiciary is financially dependent, it cannot have adequate freedom to dispense justice without fear and favour. Credible and conscientious media and media practitioners are indispensable for defence of democracy and good governance. Nigerian media houses have generally contributed to good governance and popular enlightenment. Nigeria has the most vigorous media in Africa (Jega, 2007). It has been observed that Nigerian media is being subjected to control and manipulation of the political elites. The prevailing tendency amongst the Nigerian media is to publish *faction*, which makes it increasingly difficult for the reader to separate facts from fiction (Jega, 2007).

CONSEQUENCES OF BAD GOVERNANCE

The consequence of bad governance in Nigeria is enormous. It has adversely affected all aspects of development. Corruption among the Nigerian leaders and top bureaucrats is one of the consequences of unaccountable governance in Nigeria. Corruption has been a pervasive social phenomenon, illicit misappropriation of privileges and opportunities in public and private sectors for personal aggrandizement particularly those in position of authority is sine quo-non to Nigeria. Both military and civilian governments have plundered the national treasury making the economy unattractive to both local and foreign investors (Olegbenla, 2007).

The most common of these include: bribes for budget approval by National Assembly, payment of huge sums of money for being confirmed as ministerial nominees by the legislators, classical cases of embezzlement and looting of public funds and use of excessive money during election campaigns (Olegbenla, 2007). The EFCC has revealed the names of 24 governors for corruptly enriching themselves with public money. The most contentious of these were the cases of Plateau and Bayelsa State Governors. Governor Jushua Dariye between 2001 and 2005 had looted billions of naira from the state's treasury (Olegbenla, 2007). The arrest of Diepreye Alamiyeseigha, the Bayelsa State Governor in London climaxed the classical cases of treasury looting by Nigerian political leaders. Alamiyeseigha starved away •1 million in his London home. This is in addition to the sum of •420,000 and •470,000 found in different accounts belonging to him as well as asset worth •10 million (Olegbenla, 2007).

Another consequence of bad governance is rising level of poverty. At present, majority of Nigerians are finding it very difficult to make a living and unemployment among the youth is rising (Iheanacho, 2012b). Out of the 130,000 graduates churned out from Nigeria's tertiary educational institutions annually, only 13,000 (10%) of them get employment leaving 90% roaming the streets seeking opportunities for legitimate jobs or social vices (Gyamfi, 2000). Poor infrastructural facilities are a clear evidence of bad governance. Nigeria is saddled with epileptic power supply, dilapidated road network and poor water supply. The recent World Bank report observes that it costs more to send goods from Lagos to Maiduguri than to send them to Europe because of bad condition of Nigerian roads. Similarly, Njoku (2006) opines that although, there is an overdose of natural water in Nigeria, citizens groan daily under the weight of lack of safe domestic water. The above mentioned problems are compounded by poor standard of education and deplorable condition of health sector.

Ethno-religious and communal conflicts have been a serious challenge to national development in Nigeria since past three decades but after the military handed over to the civilian administration in 1999, the ethno-religious conflicts have taken a dangerous proportion. A survey of ethno-religious conflicts between March 1999 and July 2012 indicates that the crises are worrisome development which threaten peaceful co-existence and jeopardize the unity and integrity of the country (Iheanacho 2012b). If ethno-religious conflicts are worrisome, the emergence of Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Movement for the Actualization of sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB), the Odua People's Congress have grievously hampered our peaceful co-existence in the polity (Iheanacho 2012b). The activities of the kidnappers and Boko Haram have also assumed dangerous dimensions.

Nigeria is experiencing a fundamental crisis in governance because of lack of national integration. Though the people of Nigeria share a collective identity as Nigerians, they are by no means united in their prism of Nigeria. The shared collective identity is merely a geographical descriptor of their location within a state in the international system, and does not reflect any concerned stratagem to mould a Nigerian (Natufe, 2006). Therefore, the citizens of Nigeria are more comfortable identifying themselves as Angas, Bini, Efik, Esan, Fulani, Hausa, Ibibio, Idoma, Igbo, Ijaw, Isoko, Itsekiri, Kanuri, Nupe, Okpe, Tiv, Urhobo Yoruba and the like. These are nations of Nigeria. They are hardly collaborative nations but intensely confrontational and hostile in their political discourse as a result of the failure of the Nigerian state to construct a viable strategy of national integration (Natufe, 2006). The above analysis, indicates that what Nigeria needs at the present democratic process is good governance, which is effective and efficient and can tackle the challenges which have grievously affected economic and social transformation of the country.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the challenges that militate against good governance in Nigeria's nascent democracy and identified appropriate strategies to address them. based on the findings of this work, it is concluded that the present democratic process is yet to produce good goernance in Nigeria. What is needed now is strong commitment on the part of the governing class to address these problems. The above mentioned suggestions would definitely help to realize the objectives of good governance in the on-going democratic process in Nigeria. The implementation of the above suggested measures would enable Nigeria to have good and effective governance that can tackle the challenges that have retarded the economic and social transformation of the country.

Notwithstanding the above mentioned challenges militating against good governance and democracy in Nigeria, it is significant to note that these are not insurmountable. It is imperative for Nigerians as a people to be conscious of their national problems and endeavour to find solutions to these problems. Hence, the prospects of promoting good governance in the on-going democratic process in Nigeria can be enhanced if the following measures are taken:

1. There is need to strengthen the electoral process. The election process must be free, fair and transperance devoid of violence and conflicts. The culture of stuffing ballot boxes with paper constitute a serious challenge to good governance because the outcome of the election contradicts the choice of the electorate. Therefore, the electoral process should be strengthened to avoid crisis in good governance.
2. It is imperative to strengthen the judiciary. Firstly, there is need to ensure adequate remuneration for judicial officers. Secondly, facilities in the administration and dispensation of justice should be improved. Finally, the judiciary should be given more autonomy in terms of finance and appointment to the bench.
3. The legislative and executive arms of government are expected to work together whereby one makes the laws and the other implements it according to the laid down procedures and processes (Aandona, 2012). Thereby giving the Nigerian presidential system opportunity to institutionalize the practice of checks and balances in upholding public trust and confidence in the working of government (Aandona, 2012). The present practice in which the executive branch "teleguide and rubber stamp the legislature" is not a healthy development for any democracy and good governance. The legislature should be very conscious of its responsibility and endeavour to protect it from the interference of the executive branch.
4. Political leaders must be accountable and transparent. Nigerian political leaders at all levels of governance should show exemplary leadership by

demonstrating respect for and faithfulness to the country's constitution by strictly observing the provisions of the sacred document (Iheanacho, 2012a). The Nigerian leaders should know that if they don't purge themselves of greed, indiscipline and corruption, they cannot serve as instrument of good governance.

5. It is imperative that appointment to political positions should be based on merit instead of Federal Character Principle. The Federal Character Principles can prevent appointment of credible and visionary leaders in favour of poor performers that may come from other zones. Therefore, in order to enhance good governance, it is necessary to lay emphasis on merit and competence while making appointments to political positions.
6. The Nigerian governing class should pay serious attention to the provision of infrastructural facilities such as good roads, safe drinking water and constant power supply. Adequate attention should also be given to improvement in the standard of education and health service delivery system.
7. Because of the rising level of poverty among Nigerians, the governing class should give priority to poverty alleviation programmes. This would help to address rural poverty and urban slums.
8. Democratic practices and good governance will be strengthened if the leaders are conscious of importance of national integration. The Nigerian leaders should strive to reconcile the demands of different ethnic and religious groups in the country. They should regard themselves as national leaders and endeavour to be impartial and neutral while carrying out their responsibilities. This will encourage national integration among the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.
9. Finally, the media has important role to play to bring about sustainable empowerment and good governance. But they can do this only if they remain credible, for it can be said that credible and conscientious media and media practitioners are the last line of defence for democracy and good governance (Jega, 2007).

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