

## DEMOCRACY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

The paper examined the issues of Democracy and its contributions to socio- economic development in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and the way forward. The objective of the paper is to examine and explore whether within the period of 16 years, since the return of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria, political leaders contributed immensely to the socio-economic and reduced poverty to an appreciable levels. The paper contends that with the enormous resources the Country has, it is still enmeshed deeply in political instability, decayed infrastructure and moral decadence. This situation hold doubts as to whether development is achievable under the present democratic dispensation due to growing insecurity, poverty, corruption and unemployment when the country's income from the sale of crude reserve is increasingly in leaps and bounds. The paper also argues that being one of the world's largest democracy with a population of over 160 million people and worlds sixth largest oil producer and supplier, still live in abject and devastating poverty which thus undermines government efforts in transforming the socio-economic situation of the country. The paper further contended that development is fundamentally a political matter and that it is illusory to conceive of good governance as independent of the forms of politics and type of state which alone can generate, sustain and protect. Materials for the paper was drawn mainly from secondary sources and presented using content analysis. It is recommended that for the Government to arrest this ugly trend, should develop and priorities its program with very strong commitment, curb corruption and look inward rather than depend solely on mineral resources alone.

**Keywords:** Development, Democratization, Growth, Sustainability, Well-being,

### Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War and the re-emergence of the New World Order, there was general and significant interest on democracy as a system of government ending the struggle for supremacy as to which system of government is best. As a process and institution of governance, democracy has been adopted globally due to its ability to provide good governance, freedom of association, equal opportunities and enabling climate for socio-economic development. Nigeria as a sovereign nation state was not an exception to this course on the wave of democratic change blowing across the globe largely due to internal and external pressures exerted on it. Such optimism could be the realization that, democracy stimulates socio-economic and political development Ntalaja (2005). The march for this Constitutional civil rule however has been a tortuous experience, characterized by moments of hope raised and hope dashed. The process since independence was particularly daunting and cumbersome. It begun with the setting up of Political Bureau in 1986, reputed as the most ambitious, imaginative, complex and expensive transition ever experienced; but however ended in fiasco. With the eventual return to democratic governance in 1999, the Country enjoys an uninterrupted democratic rule and smooth transfer of political power from civilian to civilian and from ruling party to opposition party in the recent past, for the first time ever in the history of the Country's body politics since independence.

But despite the grip and hold on power since the return of the Country to civil rule in the past sixteen years, the hope of Nigerians is dashed, as the contrary is still enmeshed deeply in political instability, decayed infrastructure and moral decadence. This has made the populace hold doubts on whether development is achievable under the present democratic dispensation due to growing insecurity, poverty, corruption and unemployment when the country's income from the sale of crude reserve is increasingly in leaps and bounds.

Being one of the world's largest democracy with a population of over 160 million people (National population 2006) and world sixth largest oil producer and supplier, endowed with rich economic potentials, majority of the population still live in abject and devastating poverty, dilapidated infrastructure and dysfunctional bureaucracy which has undermine government efforts in transforming the socio-economic situation of the country, Abdullateef (2010). Regrettably, the practice of this democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria is intrinsically characterized by political instability, social conflicts, cultural degeneration, economic paralyses, resulting in massive unemployment of all forms, leading to starvation and hunger, disease, malnutrition, ethno-religious upheavals, terrorism and indescribable poverty. The attendant implications of this unfortunate predicament are practical existence of all manners of crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, sexual slavery, pen-robbery and electioneering bickering and hooliganism. This thinking can thus be explained in terms of failure of development paradigm to address problems of human advancement within the context of parallel liberal democracy. The paper therefore, examines the issues of Democracy and socio-economic development in Nigeria: the way forward as to whether it really impacted on both the society and the social well-being of the people or otherwise.

### *Conceptual Definitions, Democracy*

According to Huntington (1991) the modern usage of the term democracy as a form of government is defined in terms of sources of authority of government, purpose served by government, and procedures for constituting government. The central procedure of democracy for Huntington is selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern. According to Przeworski et al (2000), sees democracy is a system where political office is filled through regular, free, and fair election between competing parties with the possibility of a winner freely assuming office. From his discourse on oligarchy, Robert (1971) conception of democracy comprises of components such as: voting equality, freedom of expression and association, effective participation and right to run for office. These democratic criteria Dahl wrote are necessary because when violated, the members of such democratic community will not be politically equal. While the minimalist conception of democracy gives us a procedural understanding of democracy, there is also a liberal notion of democracy which pays attention to political and civic pluralism, individual rights, group freedoms and civil liberties against the tyranny of the majority to ensure political equality. Diamond (2004) opines that the liberal notion of democracy requires the horizontal accountability of the office holder to one another in order to constrain executive power, protect constitutionalism, legality, and the deliberative process.

According to Siegel et al (2005) democracy means governance system in which h leaders are selected through free and fair elections, with institutions that foster a shared distribution of power, and citizens have extrusive opportunities to participate in political life. This they argue explicitly requires a high degree of basic political freedoms, civil liberties and political rights. The Economist Intelligence Unit index of democracy view democracy as a set of practices and principles that institutionalize and thus ultimately protect freedom. For them at best, the fundamental features of a democracy include governance based on majority rule and sovereignty derived from the consent of the governed, periodic free and fair elections, minority and human rights. Democracy also involves equality before the law, due process and political pluralism as well as strong institutions. Democratic institutions- constitution, laws, values, rules of the game and practices, formal accountability mechanisms and sanctions are also central to a democratic polity. The foundation of democracy therefore, is institutions. Strong institutions free from executive or political interference that guide political action and inaction of both the ruling class and the ruled.

### *Development*

Development means different things to different people. For some, it means making a better life for all. To others, development means economic growth (increase in GDP). Development is also equated with progress and modernity (Willis, 2005). The various concepts of development include economic growth, increased welfare and human development, modernization, elimination of dependency, dialectical transformation and capacity building. In its strong sense, development means using the productive resources of society to improve the living conditions of the poorest people (Peet and Hartwick, 1999). The origin of development is disputed, but for many writers on this subject, its intellectual roots lie with the European enlightenment of the eighteenth century. In its contemporary guise, development

emerged more conspicuously after the Second World War with the creation of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and IMF) designed to drive post-war reconstruction and international economic stability. In strict economic terms, development has traditionally meant achieving sustained rates of growth of income per capita to enable a nation expand its output at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population. Emphasis is often on increase output measured by gross domestic product (GDP) Todaro and Smith, (2011). Generally, the higher the per capita, the more developed a country's people are conventionally said to be, and the higher the annual growth rate per capita, the more rapidly a country is said to be developing (Peet and Hartwick, 2009).

Development according to Sen. (1999) can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. The freedom that determines such a social and economic arrangements like facilities of education and health care as well political and civil rights like the liberty to participate in government scrutiny provide. Development requires the removal of major sources of un-freedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as a systematic social deprivation, neglect of social facilities as well as intolerance or over-activity of repressive states. The thoughts of Sen. were in line with the Human Development Index (HDI) which bring to fore an increased awareness that the commonly used economic measures of development are too limited. The emphasis for Human Development Index (HDI) is that people and their capabilities should be ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country and not economic growth levels alone. For Seers (1969) when we talk about development, we must answer the question of what has liaise poverty, unemployment and inequality. For Seers, understanding how a country is fairing in these three indices can help us answer the question of how developed a country is. Seers (1969) questions are still crucially relevant today in development discuss and in understanding how emerging democratic states like Nigeria are tackling the socio-economic and political challenges they face.

### *Good Governance*

Governance portray the connection between the civil society and the state over issues of problems of national interest and of common concern Barten et al (2002) Issues of governance have emerged so strongly in recent times with focus on a participatory approach to development by scholars Diamond (2005), Barten et al (2002). The United Nations Development Program says that governance has three core dimensions: economic, participatory and administrative governance. It makes a lot of sense to think of economic governance in terms of public decision-making processes on the economy and how such processes affect economic activities of citizens and a country's external relations. In essence economic governance has large scale implications for welfare of citizens. Political governance refers to the processes of formulating policies, such as whether it is participatory or not. In contrast, administrative governance points to processes or mode of implementing public policies.

Good governance then means all three dimensions to governance in terms of structure and processes that define the socio-economic and political relationships (UNDP, 1997; Diamond 2005: 4; Barten et al, 2002). Indeed the UNDP insist that good governance should be understood in terms of participation, transparency and accountability and emphasis on process. For. Diamond, good governance entails several dimensions, such as for example, the capacity of the state to provide the public good; commitment to the public good; transparency; accountability; rule of law and mechanisms for conflict resolution (Diamond 2005). To be sure, Habib (2000) has added credence to the argument that principles of good governance include: decentralizing responsibilities and resources to local authorities and encouraging the participation of the civil society.

Following from the above, democracy and good governance facilitate economic development. This assumption is problematic when drawn into the experience of African countries where often scholars decry and explain poor living conditions of citizens with the lack of quality democracy and good governance. Apparently a working democracy where the ruled actually wield the power to control the ruler through voting and other accountability mechanisms and freedoms inspire a logic of an embedded good governance where participation and consultation with citizens over pertinent issues and policies are the defining characteristics. The ruler not only be powerless to stop citizens over the exercise of their rights but will respect the outcome of such processes.

From the foregoing, it is clear that democracy is said to possess the ability, through good governance, to improve citizens' quality of life. A growing theoretical literature is replete with optimism on the relationship between democracy and improvement of the quality of life of citizens (Diamond 2005; Gyimah-Boadi 2004). Ironically, a corresponding volume of empirical literature is skeptical of the reality of this relationship in most of Africa. (Ake 1996; Sind zing 2006; Carter and Stokes 2002; Ufo and Fidelis, 2005; Drung, Kriechnaus and Lutzig 2006). This thinking has been explained in terms failure of Eurocentric development paradigm to address problems of human advancement within the context of

parallel liberal democracy for most of Africa and the third world (Ake, 1996). As Ake has argued, politics within the context of liberal democracy has prevented social progress in Nigeria, as much as in other countries of Africa. Ideally, the whole idea of addressing the welfare of citizens is linked directly to the overall development of a country in all sectors. In that sense, a rising economic profile of a country ought to, by logical extension translate into improvement in the living conditions of citizens.

### *Democracy and Development*

Przeworski (1990); and Przeworski and Lamungi (2007) used cross national study to compare regimes (both democracies and dictators) on their effect on development; while Pel (1990) study compared Human Right Development Index (HRDI), per capita income, and gross domestic product (GDP) as indicators for measuring development among countries. Of course the studies have exposed some issues relevant to development in countries, however there is little evidence of study with focus on poverty, unemployment, revenue and government expenditure, GDP growth and human development index, foreign exchange rate (Naira per US dollar) and health performance. This work will fill this gap. Among the debated issues in recent years is whether link exists between democracy and development. Considerable number of scholars including, (Pel, 1999; Campos 1994; Jamo 2010) maintain the view that, there is casual link between democracy and development, while others including Sirowy and Linkels (1991); Bardhan (2002); Przeworski and Lamongi (2007) on the contrary maintained the opposite view.

Two approaches according to Somolakae (2007) were observed, the first approach utilizes by the scholars is the normative approach by exploring the possible link on the basis of what they know about democracy and development, and try to establish possible linkages between them. While the other approach is the use of case studies by trying to operationalize the concept of democracy and development, and examining the rate and character of development within the area under study and try to establish conclusion whether relationship or linear association exist between the two variables. Duncan et al (2009 as cited in Olarimoye, 2010) maintained that there is a clear relationship between political and economic change. However, there is limited hard evidence on the direction of causality, and the basic mechanisms through which politics affects growth and vice versa. Chan (2009) in her study on democracy and development in Japan and some Asian newly industrialized countries, examined whether developing countries need to adopt democracy or western model to achieve economic success. The study argues that, economic and social freedoms are necessary, but not western style institution or culture. The study is of the view that, liberal democracy is not a prerequisite to development, what is important for development is social and economic rights rather than the western ideology. To her, development can be achieved irrespective of the type of regime, so far social and economic freedoms are available. This view is also consistent with that of Sirowy and Linkels (1991); Bardhan (2002); Przeworski and Lamongi (2007) that there is negative relationship between democracy and development. They further opined that, regimes do not differ in their impact on the growth of per capita income.

On the contrary, Barrow as cited in Pel (1999) suggests that, the relationship between democracy and growth is likely to be slowest in the most politically repressed societies. But improvement in political rights and civil liberties in such societies tend to produce higher growth. Research in addition shows that, growth tend to peak when the level of democracy is in the middle-range and gradually taper off as the level of democracy rises. The study also supported the notion that, Positive linkages exist between democracy and development depending on the level of political and civil rights available, therefore the study maintained that, the higher the level of political and civil rights the higher the development, vice versa.

In similar study, Pel (1999) argued that, the question whether democracy promotes development rests on the central idea that, political institutions critical to promote development rests on the central idea that, political institutions critical to economic development are more likely to exist and function effectively under democratic rule. These institutions include the rule of law which protects property rights, individual liberty which foster creativity and entrepreneurship, the freedom of expression which ensures the production and unimpeded flow of information, and institutional checks and balances that prevent massive theft of public wealth often observed in democracies.

In similar opinion, Przeworski (1990) study observed that, democratic government may be less capable of managing development. The reasoning here according to him is that, development involved changes and that change may effect some voters negatively, while at the same time benefiting others. To this extent, the study concluded that, because of this reality, governments seeking reelection could be more inclined to avoid making tough economic choices out of fear of losing support of some groups. This would either slow down development or hinder it. This dilemma may not be faced by an authoritarian regime. From this view, Przeworski is of the view that, there is little evidence of correlation



between democracy and development. Przeworski (2007) in another study refined his earlier findings and examined the mutual relationship between political regimes and economic development. His analysis of political regimes shows that while the path to democracy are varied, once established for whatever reasons, democracy survive in developed countries. Contrary to long existing arguments, political regimes do not affect the rate of investment and of the growth of total income. But

### ***Democracy and the Challenge (s) of Development in Nigeria***

Looking at development from a broader perspective, one will recall that at the international conference on Human Rights held in Teheran, Iran in 1968, very important decisions were reached. Accordingly, UNO (1980) pointed that'

*“The enjoyment of economic and social rights is inherently linked with any meaningful enjoyment of civil and political rights and that there is a profound inter-connection between the realization of human rights and economic development. The conference noted that “the vast majority of mankind continues to live in poverty, suffer from squalor, disease and illiteracy and this leads to subhuman existence, constituting in itself a denial of human dignity. The Teheran conference resolution also recognized that there was “an ever widening gap between the standards of living in the economically developed and developing countries” and that universal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms would remain a pious hope unless the international community succeeds in narrowing this gap.”*

Reflecting on the state of Nigeria at the time of Teheran conference in 1968; Firstly, the country was just eight years old as independent state. Secondly, it was completely immersed in civil war and thirdly, it was groaning under the beginnings of military dictatorship. In effect, its democratization was put on hold as it were, while the structures for social and economic development were being wasted away by the destructions of the war which broke out in 1967. It is, indeed, a matter for deep regret that after forty nine years, following the end of the Nigerian civil war and the restoration of democratic civil rule in 1999, the country is still ranked among the poorest states in the world and our democratic institutions still being jettisoned in international rating. Indeed, the former president Chief Olusegun Obasanjo lamented thus:

*“As I surveyed the canvas of our national life, I saw little more than confusion, greed, corruption in high and low places, selfishness, pervasive lawlessness and cynicism. The very state itself to which we are all required to be loyal, had become a state full of malice and meanness. Public officials appeared to have forgotten what selfless service meant. Private Citizens felt a profound distrust of it not hatred for the state. Obasanjo, (1999).”*

In another international dimension, UNO (1980), the General Assembly adopted International Development Strategy for the third United Nations Development Decade which it noted that “the stark reality confronting mankind today is that close to 850 million people in the developing world are living at the margin of existence enduring hunger, sickness, homelessness and absence of meaningful employment” and expressed the view that”

*“The development process must promote dignity. The ultimate aim of development is the constant improvement of the wellbeing of the entire population on the basis of its full participation in the process of development and fair distribution of the benefits the from.”*

In all fairness, with the benefits of these international guidelines to democracy, human rights and development, we don't need a seer to reveal to us that we have not done well in Nigeria. Indeed, Nigeria has done very badly over the past fifty nine years. UNDP (2002) index report had it that Nigeria is still trapped in poverty and underdevelopment. In the said report, Nigeria painfully and sadly was ranked as 148 out of 173 countries surveyed for the yearly Human Development Index. It now behooves all lovers of our common heritage, Nigeria, based on the above helpless and factual situation, for all round self-appraisal, collective re-examination and national re-awakening.

### ***Factors that drives Democracy for Socio economic Development***

Taking into consideration the fragile nature of our nascent democracy and perhaps the skewed nature of our federation, in structure and in concept, it is our belief that the greatest challenges of development in our nation are the twin issues of democratization and national unity. The challenges of national unity are very critical to our national progress. The very substance and essence of national unity is that short of national unity, our country stands to

disintegrate and when there is no country there cannot be democracy or development. Moreover, in a situation of cosmetic unity, it becomes impossible to achieve a nation-state, national consciousness or patriotism. These we can agree are essential ingredients for setting national goals and the determined pursuit of these goals for the purpose of achieving them in the national interest. The realization of these goals constitutes national development.

In nurturing a federation like ours for development, it is no gain saying that the rule of the game must be anchored on justice, fairness and equity. To actualize these virtues, the rule of law becomes imperative, the promotion and enjoyment of fundamental freedom becomes indispensable; and accountability, transparency and due process must be the guiding principles in the conduct of public affairs. It is our position that no other form of governance can guarantee these virtues except democratic governance.

In May 1999, the 4<sup>th</sup> republic was born in Nigeria with the echoes of a presidential system of democracy. By this fact our challenges for development is no longer the actualization of democratic system of governance but the sustenance of democracy and the quick pursuit of democratization. May we remind us that democratization does not only imply the creation of the basic institutions of democracy, rather it involves the creating of the right environment for the institutions to thrive.

### Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it is my candid view that since the return of democracy way back in 1999 not much has been achieved. This therefore underscores the commitments of successive government in transforming the socio-economic fortune of the country as reflected in the majority of the populace still living in penury and abject poverty without appreciable impact on the socio-economic lives and development of the Country.

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