

## **DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Since the attainment of flag independence in 1960, Nigeria has been embarking upon the gargantuan task of nation-building to launch the country into socio-economic security and prosperity. This has not been possible due to combined factors of long military dominance in power, poor economic planning and irresponsible democratic leadership. This article established a nexus between democracy and development and maintained that democracy had not been able to deliver the much anticipated development dividends. This paper asked two questions: is democracy merely the conduct of elections by hooks or crooks that lack international credibility? Or does democracy demonstrate the notion of popular power where the citizens would not be mere repository of power in the society but actually participate in everyday policies and authoritative allocation of values? This article answered these questions and posited that there should be organic linkage between democracy and development so as to enthrone a society of political and socio economic indicators of modernization and development.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Democracy and development are undoubtedly two most contested concepts in social and political discourse. There are different perspectives on the concepts influenced by history, ideology, discipline and experience. It is common place knowledge that Nigeria has been enjoying democratic bliss since 1999, which is indeed remarkable for many reasons: first, it marked the first time of transition from military to civilian rule after many years of military dictatorship. Secondly, it delineates the first time in the history of this country that there was a successful transition of power from civilian to civilian administration without military incursion, even though the elections were seriously criticized for massive irregularities.

In an unmistakable tone, we subscribe to the view that "democracy is a government of the people by the people and for the people" as postulated by a renowned former American president, Abraham Lincoln. In this way, democracy can be representative or participatory. Democracy, however, establishes a social contract between the citizens and the representatives. According to Anyim (2002) democracy is not a self fulfilling system for it contains certain innate limitations, which must be addressed for democracy to have a meaningful and positive impact on the society. To Anyim (2002), the test of every institution's policy or programme

is whether it enhances or threatens human dignity and indeed human life itself. Also, Ahmed (2002), in a lecture presented at the Third Democracy Day, in Abuja said inter alia, "democratic governance refers to a political, socio-economic framework in which every individual and every community becomes an equal member of society, and is provided with a space of engagement in shaping the destiny of society..." This implies that democracy is a dynamic process that is expected to bring about the growth and evolution of a society. Democracy therefore, if fairly practised should bring about a reduction in poverty, socio-economic empowerment and other quantitative and qualitative indices of development of man and the society he lives in.

Despite the fact that democracy is stabilizing in Nigeria, it is yet to be reflected in all manner of development indicators-strict application of the rule of law, allowing the electorates to elect their leaders (and not democracy by arrangement), fundamental freedoms and its full enjoyment (and not its mere expression in our constitutions), reduction of unemployment and rapid industrialization. It is because development is not progressing alongside democracy in Nigeria that induced Ake (2001) to state that the gross domestic product of the whole of Africa is less than that of one of the smallest countries of Europe, which is Belgium. For those of us who are aware, it is an act of desperation.

Democratization does not solely depend on the creation of the basic institutions of democracy but to a large extent on the creation of the right environment for the institutions to function. We reiterate that democracy and development co-habit and inactivity of the former destroys the later. Some of the issues that will be discussed in this article are the concept of rule of law, democracy and development, shortcomings of democracy and development in Nigeria. Factors that will drive democracy as a vehicle for genuine national development will also be discussed.

## **THE RULE OF LAW, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT**

Democracy and rule of law are inseparable and interwoven. Without the rule of law, democracy becomes toothless bulldog that barks without biting. Anyaele (2005) stated that the rule of law is the absolute supremacy or predominance of law over everybody, both the rulers and ruled and all decisions taken in a country. The main principles of the rule of law are equality before the law, impartiality and the rights of the individual. The rights of the individual and individual freedom are paramount in any democratic society. Any society that does not guarantee individual freedom in her constitution and not mere expression of it, is very far from democracy. Conversely, democracy is a value-laden concept with many of the definitions given by scholars having ideological underpinnings. There is thus the problem of correspondence in political discourse about the definition of democracy. Even though scholars do not agree on what democracy is, but there seems to be unanimity on what it is not. That democracy is not autocracy, authoritarianism or despotism is widely accepted. Notwithstanding, we shall provide five definitions here for the

purpose of clarification, but we do not intend to go into arguments about the conceptual clarifications of democracy.

Democracy to Appadorai (1975) is a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. According to Ununu (2005) democracy is essentially a method of organizing the society politically. He suggested five basic elements without which no community can call itself truly democratic. These elements are equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law and liberty of the individual. To Giddens (1996) democracy is a political system that allows the citizens to participate in political decision making, or to elect representatives to government bodies. What then is democracy as a concept? According to Ntalaja (2005) democracy is a universal form of rule with specific manifestations in time and space.

Indeed, democracy according J.S Mill quoted by Agena and Odoh (2005) is superior to other forms of government because the rights of every person are secure from being disregarded only when the person interested is himself able and habitually disposed to stand up for them; and is more widely diffused, in proportion to the amount and variety of the personal energies enlisted in promoting it. The participation in governmental affairs lifts the individual above the narrow circles of his egoism and broadens his interest.

Democracy is accepted the world over as refined system of government as it places much premium on human personality and rule of law. It is because of the role which democracy plays in development and modernization that scholars and public commentators clamour for its enthronement as the best leadership option to move a society forward. Where it is religiously practised, the representatives and electorates are equal stakeholders. That is why any slightest abuse of power forces the representatives to resign. For instance, the contract scam in the Nigeria House of Representatives against the former speaker Mrs. Patricia Eteeh, forced her to resign on 30-10-2007. Democracy is a veritable tool for national integration, socio-economic cohesion and all other developmental indicators. It should generate property and eliminate corruption. It is in this regard that Enahoro (2005) lamented that when we achieved independence, we began the process of modernization, but so far we have failed to achieve democracy. The need to have a genuine and lasting democracy in Nigeria is a task which must be achieved if Nigeria is to be categorized in the committee of developed nations. Democracy with moral imperatives is a vehicle for genuine development.

Development and its usage in contemporary social science disciplines is not only vague and nebulous, but also polemical. For example, such terms as "growth" "change", and sometimes "industrialization" often used interchangeably with development complicates the problem of providing a generally acceptable definition for the concept. Logically, however, in explaining and defining development we will look at the liberal and Marxist perspectives.

To the liberalists, development means change which results due to

maximization of the growth of GNP through capital accumulation and industrialization. Todaro (1979) saw development as the capacity of a national economy, whose initial economic conditions have been more static, to generate and sustain an annual increase in its Gross National Product (GNP) at rate of 5 or 7%.

This conception of development is defective as it represents thinking of the dark days in history of society. The inability of most Third World countries to overcome the persistent problem of poverty irrespective of bold attempts at industrialization illustrates the futility of approaching development through economic growth. Economic growth through industrialization is not development. It is in this regard that Meier (1989) observed that development is more than just the acquisition of industries, but includes such ideals of modernization as, rise in productivity, social and economic equalization, modern technical know-how, improved institutions and attitudes as well as rationally coordinated policy apparatus. Development is more than financial and material resources of people's lives, though part of it.

On the other hand, the Maxists otherwise known as the radicalists, view development differently. To them, development is above economic progress and encompasses multidimensional processes. It is beyond economic variables and focuses on man and his well being. Taking a hard look at development, Rodney (1972) posited that development in human society is many sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being... At the level of the society groups, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations... In the past development has always meant the increased ability to guard the independence of social group. Rodney's view on development sets the ground for the understanding of the concept from the Marxist perspective. His view is on three levels - the individual, group and mode of production. It is the Marxists opinion that development starts at the individual level of the society and therefore, for real development to emerge the Marxists advocate the following:

- (i) Free, compulsory and universal basic education.
- (ii) Improvement in the education and training of the working population.
- (iii) Raising the standard of living of the people
- (iv) Improvement in the health of the people, by all round provision of health facilities.
- (v) Making sure that level of consumption of material, social and spiritual goods and services are raised.

It is their argument, which is of course true, that if these conditions are met, it will engender all round individual with the capacity to contribute to development.

### **Shortcomings of Democracy for Development in Nigeria**

Looking at development from a broad perspective, one will recall that at the international conference on Human Rights held in Teheran, Iran in 1968, very important decisions was reached. Accordingly, UNO (1980:XVII) pointed out 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.*

Momentarily, let us reflect on the state of Nigeria at the time of the Teheran conference in 1968. Firstly, the country was just eight years old as independent state. Secondly, it was completely immersed in fratricidal 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 thirty 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 stopped to proclaim that Nigeria at the threshold of the third millennium had relapsed into the Hobbesian state of nature where life is "brutish, nasty and short". In other words, from the very inception of Nigeria's nationhood, there were clear signs that the country's march to "democracy and development" was definitely going to be an uphill task. As he 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 well being of the entire population on the basis of its full participation in the process of development and fair distribution of the benefits there from.*

In all fairness, with the benefits of these international guidelines to democracy, human rights and development, we need no seer to reveal to us that we have not done well

in Nigeria. Indeed, Nigeria has done very badly over the past forty nine years. Democracy has serious shortcomings in this country, and accounts for the reality of wide-spread poverty, increased crime, sectarian violence and prebendalism.

Nigeria is a dismal state, for 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 WILL DRIVE DEMOCRACY AS A VEHICLE FOR GENUINE NATIONAL 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. Let no individual make mistake about this. 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 4th 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.

## CONCLUDING REMARK

From our discussion on democracy and development in Nigeria, evidence abounds to show that there is a link between the two concepts. Our submission therefore, is that for change to occur in any society, it requires the presence of objective and subjective conditions. Objective conditions exist when situations are evidently abnormal with huge contradictions which can only be resolved by change. The subjective conditions are the organizational preparations required to bring about change. The objective condition is ripe in Nigeria.

Unarguably, there is poverty in the midst of plenty. There are huge contradictions and gap between the poor and the rich. The country cannot continue in the way it is presently being run. Unfortunately, the subjective conditions are absent. There is no virile political party or movement that is committed to change neither is there a vanguard revolutionary organization to guide that change. There are no well organized democratic and popular organizations to support a change process. Although, there are individuals, and NGO's committed to and are driving change, the organizational support required for sustainability and great impact is lacking. The challenge is to build the organizations with dynamic and visionary leadership as well as a committed followership that is dedicated to change. That stage is what is desirable in Nigeria today to enable us to be politically, democratically and economically developed.

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