DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Democracy is fast spreading in the world over. The ideology is among the forms of government that ensures good governance and development. Unfortunately, the African continent continues to maintain its leading poor record in this sphere of human development despite pressure and encouragement by the international communities. For Nigeria, the danger is real since when the country opted for democratic rule on 29th May 1999. The country which assumes the leading position in Africa continues to face series of challenges, ranging from corruption, mismanagement, political, economic and ethno-religious crises and others. The work is an attempt to highlight issues that continue to cripple the country's effort to sustainable development. The work adopts qualitative approach relying basically on secondary data. Our research findings revealed that, the contemporary Nigeria's predicaments are largely due to bad leadership. It is recommended that, only credible people should be allowed to contest for political offices in the country.

Introduction

The world over, democracy is fasst spreading, this is perhaps due to the fact that, democracy is considered among the forms of government that provides the basic requirements for good governance and development,(Ardo,2000).Regrettably, however, up to date, the African continent holds a very poor record in this sphere of human development. The norm was sit-tight syndrome in virtually all the African states of the continent. Indeed some neo-colonial and Eurocentric scholars even express doubts as to the ability of the African people to provide themselves with good governments based on democracy and popular will, (Abubakar,2000). Therefore for Africa, one of the major problems facing the continent in the 21st century is her ability to enthrone and sustain democracy and development.

However, Nigeria in the African context has always been regarded both by Nigerians and other nations as the first among equals. This perception is informed by very obvious qualities Nigeria is endowed with. For example Nigeria is considered as the most populous state in Africa, and 8th of the world's most populous country with huge abundant natural resources. This endowment gave Nigeria its leadership role in Africa. It is based on this perceived leadership role in Africa that we expect that prospect of democratisation in Nigeria will affect Africa's socio-economic and political development, (Omojuwa,2005).

In fact, despite this important position in which Nigeria is placed in the African politics, the country is facing serious challenges as opted for new democratic rule, after 16 years of military dictatorship on 29th May 1999, the day was a significant day in the history of Nigerian politics. Many Nigerians celebrated the day because of their expectation that, the return to democracy will usher in development after series of military dictatorship. To many Nigerians,

democracy is sine qua none to good governance and development. Albeit, the country now celebrated her eleven years of uninterrupted democratic rule, within the same period the country also witnessed transfer of political power from civilian to civilian government, for the first time ever in the history of the Nigerian body politics since independence. The expectation of people is turning to a mirage, as the country is bedevilled by excessive corruption, mismanagement, poverty, ethno-religious crises and bad leadership which continues to pose serious challenges to Nigeria's quest for sustainable democracy and development. In consequence our economy is paralysed by bad leadership despite abundant human and natural resources. The psychology of our people has been disorganised. In fact this situation is unacceptable. This article is designed to find out if there is any relationship between democracy and development? Can the two concepts exist independent from one another or not? What are the problems bedevilling Nigeria's quest for effective realisation of democracy and development? These problematic questions among others will serve as basis for this article. Finally, recommendations will be made with the hope that, it will provide new path for Nigeria's odyssey for sustainable democracy and development, in this present global financial crises.

The study cover a period of ten years of this democratic dispensation (i.e. between1999-2009).The work adopts qualitative approach to address research problems identified .Existing literatures were explored to enable us analyse our results.

The paper is divided into four sections; the first contains the introduction, while section two is the literature review, theoretical framework and definition of concepts. Section three analyses and presents the data, and section four concludes the paper and offer possible recommendations.

Elite theory of democracy

This theory is a reinterpretation of the liberal theory of democracy in a strictly empirical direction. The elite theorists like Pareto Mosca, Michaels, C. Wright Mills and Harold Lasswell stress on the point that, what is known as the rule of the people, in a practical sense, is the rule of the elites. It discards normative expressions like "voice of the people" or "rule of the general will" and instead stands for the "rule of the chosen few" with the consent or acquiescence of the many. To elitists, inequality is a universal fact, making all political system "oligarch cal" though in varying degrees. Even if all men are equal, some are more equal than others with the result that few have the position of advantage over the many. To this extent, democracy is the government of the people in theory, in practice it is the "government of an elite sprung from the people" it is the body of the very few that takes all important decisions and plays its parts in the political process in the country. The thing is that they may participate in political process but in reality their influence is largely confined to elections. At the centre of power there is a social elite which wield considerable influence (Johari,2007).

Although the theory applies to most democracies of the world, however in Nigeria, those who control power use it to their advantage at the detriment of the public. That is to say, those who decides who gets what, when and how (i.e. the elites) formulates and implement policies to serve their interests, rather than the majority. The implication of this to the economy is retrogression instead of progression. The supposed beneficiary of democracy is the peasant who has no good food, no good health care services etc. This has engendered abuse of principles of democracy in order to satisfy various interest groups within the polity. This also explains the reason why Nigeria has long been (11 years) under democratic rule, yet it failed to usher in development. To this extent, one can conclude that, if all the principles of democracy have been

put in place, it would have bring about development;since,democracy in its context evolved to bring about good life, this good life can be enhanced when democratic principles are strictly adhered to. Therefore, failure to adhere with these principles resulted in the present situation.

Literature reviews

Is there relationship between democracy and development?

Numerous scholars have written extensively on democracy and development, this work will narrowly focus on relationship between the two, emphasis will also be made on factors that are bedevilling effective realisation of democracy and development in Nigeria.

Studies (Pel, 1999; Chan, 2009) revealed that, there is positive relationship between democracy and development. For instance, Adam Przeworski and Fernando Lumangi in their study as cited in Pel (1999) points out that, wealth has a measurable effect on the survival of democracy but not on the emergence rate of democracy. Their study established that, poor democracies are more likely to collapse than wealthy democracies. To them, rising wealth did not increase democracy, for the fact that, certain wealthy autocracies remain autocratic despite rising wealth.

In the same vein, John Bondregan and Keith Poole in their study, as cited in Pel (1999) reports that, doubling per capita income has a large effect on moderately authoritarian countries. To them, the law of diminishing returns applies here; doubling per capita income only marginally increases the degree of democracy in relatively open societies. Their studies also show that, economic development is more likely to exist and function effectively under democratic rule. These institutions include rule of law which protect property rights, individual liberty and foster creativity and entrepreneurship, the freedom of expression which ensures the production and unimpeded flow of information, and institutional check and balance that prevent

massive theft of public wealth often observed in democracies. The study also shows that, the growth data of 115 countries from 1960 to 1980 claim that, countries with high degrees of political openness achieve an average annual real per capita growth rate of 2.53%, compared with 1.41% in more closed political systems. This implies that, more democratic countries may develop 80% faster than less democratic countries.

Barrow in his study 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. His data 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.

Chan (2009) in her study of democracy and development in Japan and some Asian newly industrialised countries, examine 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.

Ake (2005) in his study, on democracy and development in Africa, (which Nigeria is part) developed a model because of the inability of standard theory to explain, predict or prevent current African development crises. Having discarded modernisation and neo-Marxist and new-liberal paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s opined that, African government (of which Nigeria is part) need governments led by people more seriously committed to economic progress and more democratically accountable to their citizens. He asserts that, self reliance, self sufficiency, and popular participation in setting policy agendas must take priority, while institutional mechanism that moderate destructive political competition most be devised.

Are there factors bedevilling realisation of effective democracy and development in Nigeria?.

Idowo (2008), in his investigation examined that, the main problems bedevilling realisation of effective democracy and development in Nigeria are military intervention in the Nigerian politics, illiteracy, and poverty. He further recommended the restoration and guaranteeing of human rights and freedoms to the Nigerians and concerted efforts toward eradication of poverty, illiteracy and bad leadership.

Odo (2008), in his studies reveals that, corruption in Nigeria is the most serious threat to democracy and development as it led to the collapse of the first and second republics as cited by the military. He further recommended the improvement of transparency, accountability and strict application of the principles of democracy.

Basil (2007), in the same vein posits that, corruption continues to threaten Nigeria's quest for democracy and development since the attainment of independence till date. He submitted that, failure of the political gladiators and military insatiable appetite for greed and power which resulted in crippling democratic and developmental foundation across the country. He suggested that, democracy and development will only succeed if all and sundry are involved in the crusade to obliterate the menace.

Baguda (2004), in his research, pointed out that, the main obstacle to Nigeria's quest for effective democracy and development is monetisation of the electoral process which reduced Nigerian politics to business venture where one will invest and reap his profit when he ascend to power. This to him has led to clientsm and God fathersm.

Igbuzor (2005), in his study observes that, there is nexus between democracy and development. He further mentioned that, democracy to average Nigerian is only meaningful

when it delivers what is known as democracy dividends i.e. socio-economic development. He further concluded that, Nigeria will only witness genuine development if it gets dynamic and visionary leadership as well as committed fellowship that is dedicated to change.

Omojuwa (2005), in his assessment of 2003 elections observes that, failure of the country to conduct free and fair elections is the main reason for failure of effective democracy and development in Nigeria. He further described Nigerian democracy as empty of its liberal contents, and erect a shell which is democratic in name only but authoritarian in content.

To Eze (2000), three factors can be attributed to the failure of most African states (which Nigeria is included) to in vive lasting democracy and development. According to him, the internal dynamics of her socio-economic development have been subverted largely due to, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and unequal trade than by colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Gambo and Adakai (2003), in their assessment of factors that led to failure of the realisation of effective democracy and development in Nigeria posited that, failure of the successive governments in the country to ensure good governance, transparency, and capacity building in the country were among the factors that continued to place serious havoc toward ensuring effective democracy and development in the country. Their study recommended the ensuring of these principles in the Nigerian polity.

Definition of concepts

What is development?

Development according to seers (1969), opined that, the questions to ask about a country's development are therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the

country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if precipitate income doubled.

In the view, Sen (1999),defined development as "collective activities by any human society directed at reducing the totality of perceived obstacles to a higher standard of living, thus maximising the quality of life of its citizens.

Rogers(1969), defines development as a type of social change which new ideas are introduce into a social system in order to produce a higher precipitate income and levels of living through modern production methods and improved social organisation.

While Rodney (1972), defines development at deferent level, at individual level, it implies increase skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships.

What is democracy?

The word democracy is coined from two Greek words: Demos (the people) and Cratos (rule) which simply means people's rule. In its Greek perception means rights of the citizens of the Greek city states to participate directly in an act of governance (Lanquer, 1973).

According to Ardo (2000) there is no universally acceptable definition of the word democracy. In the same vein, chambers encyclopaedia (1970) also maintained that, there are different conceptions of democracy and no agreement as to its true nature." Dahl (1956) in the same vein maintained that, there is nothing like democracy but there are democracies. Nwokeji went further to conclude that not just is there no universal definition of democracy, but none may emerge. However, Jega (2002) observed that, if there is any consensus about what democracy

means it is perhaps in relation to the understanding that, it is not personal rule, and that, it is different from authoritarians/dictatorial rule. Also it can be said that democracy is based on some forms of perception and or representation.

According to Powell (1992) democratic government have the following characteristics.

- The legitimacy of the government rests on a claim to represent the desires of its citizens. That is the claim of government assertion to be doing what the people want it to do.
- The organisation arrangement that regulates this bargain of legitimacy is the competitive political election. Leaders are elected at regular intervals, and voters can choose among alternative candidates in practice, at least two political parties that have a chance of wining are needed to make such choices meaning full.
- Most adults can participate in the electoral process, both as voters and as candidate for important political offices.
- Citizens and leaders enjoy basic freedom of speech, press, assembly and organisation. Both established parties and new ones can work to gain members and whenever democracy exists, political disagreements subsist.
- Democracy therefore promises among several others popular participation in the process of governance, equality among citizens, sovereignty of the people, promotion and protection of human rights and essential freedoms, limited government and supremacy of the rule of law. Embodied in the concept of democracy is separation of powers between the three arms of government.

Results and Discussion

It is quite clear that, development is about improvement in the quality of life of the people while democracy provides a vehicle for achieving such a good life. It is based on this fact

that, countries strive to put principles of democracy in place so as to achieve sustainable development.

It is also observed that, democracy is among the forms of government that ensures transparency, accountability and good governance, which if properly implemented, it will facilities development. This also revealed that, democratic countries that enjoy civil liberty and freedoms have the advantage of economic advancement than less democratic states, since democratic institutions promotes economic development. It follows that, democratic regimes sustain development than autocratic regimes.

Democratic government possess some elements that facilitate economic development. Such elements include rule of law which ensures supremacy of the law and fundamental freedoms of which property rights is part. Other important elements include transparency and accountability which ensures prudency in the affairs of government.

Apart from that, the study shows that, there is a relationship between undemocratic governments and corruption, because of the fact that, their powers do not derived from the legitimacy of the people, as their government provide conducive atmosphere for corrupction,since,un democratic governments lacks transparency and accountability. Corruption in turn leads to mismanagement of resources, which results in economic retardations and poverty. On the other hand, democracy offers a possible institution of government that derives its legitimacy from the people, it is therefore expected to be transparent accountable to the electorates, which in turn promotes development.

Indeed the reality is the fact that, democracy has not ensured development in Nigeria; rather, it engendered political contests that took the form of ethnic and religious rivalries which in turn retard the country's quest for sustainable development.

Again, democracy in Nigeria does not always reflect the interest of the majority. In fact, it is the interest of the political elites that always takes precedence; this in turn resulted in mis-prioritizing interest.

Not only that, although, Nigeria has been under democratic rule for eleven years, but the reality is that, Nigerians lack political culture, which in turn resulted in commoditizing their votes and mandates for material benefits. This also led to lack of accountability between the government and the governed. This has negative consequence for our quest for sustainable development, despite the fact that, we claim to be practicing democracy.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that, the issue whether there is relationship between democracy and development, have attracted arguments among scholars. In fact some are of the view that, democratic institutions facilitate economic development. While others have cited examples of countries like China to support their point that, democracy is not prerequisite to development. However, our research findings revealed that, there is significant relationship between democracy and development, but not causal relationship.However,the study is of the view that, if democracy is properly implemented it will facilitate economic development, since it posses some of the basic requirements for development. These requirements includes, rule of law, transparency and accountability.

However, in some countries democracy serve as a vehicle for achieving sustainable development, but in the Nigerian situation, the reverse is the case despite the claim that our democracy is still nascent. It is the fact that, in proper adherence to the principles of democracy is among the factors responsible for the presence sluggish development in the country.

In view of the above, we recommend the following:

First, establishment and consolidation of institutions that have direct impact on our economic growth, must be put in place, these include; ensuring maximum security of lives and property as necessary step to ensuring development. Improvement of infrastructural facilities most especially electricity is very important for economic development.

Second, ensuring that, only credible candidates should be allowed to holds political offices in the country. This to a large extent will reduce the occurrence of bad leadership in the country.

Third, principles of democracy like rule of law and check and balances must be put in place if the country is to witness genuine democracy and economic development.

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