

Good governance and economic development: The challenges of democratic sustainability in Nigeria

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Abstract

Perhaps the greatest problem facing Nigeria's post-colonial state is that of democratic sustainability. Having experienced transition from colonial autocracy to independence and civil rule in 1960, Nigeria was touted as one country in sub-Saharan Africa that would likely make steady progress towards democracy and good governance. But with military intervention in politics way back on 15 January 1966, truncating the progress of the First Republic, there has been both political and governmental instability. The country has experienced the woes of bad governance, massive corruption, human rights abuses and economic deprivation from greedy civilian political leaders and military dictators.

Good governance deals with the manner in which a country is governed; the process of selecting the leaders articulating national objectives; formulating policies; and the extent to which the government is performing the primary duty of advancing the welfare of its citizens. This paper examines the concept of governance and identifies the canons of good governance. It holds that poor governance manifests itself in corruption, political instability, civil strife and conflicts, and that these impact negatively on our development efforts. It thus argues that there can be no development without good governance and recommends certain steps to enthrone good governance and enhance the welfare of the citizens, which is the ultimate goal of economic development.

Keywords: democracy, good governance, economic development, corruption, democratic sustainability

Sumário

Talvez o maior problema que o estado Nigeriano pós-independência enfrentou é o de sustentação democrática. Tendo experimentado transição de autocracia colonial para independência e poder civil em 1960, Nigéria foi tido como um país na África Sub-Sahariana que vai provavelmente fazer progresso estável para democracia e boa governação. Entretanto, com a intervenção militar na política, no longínquo 15 de Janeiro de 1966, truncando o progresso da Primeira República, a história foi de tanta instabilidade política e governamental. O país experimentou as angústias de má governação, corrupção massiva, abusos dos direitos humanos e perdas pelos líderes políticos civis e ditadores militares.

A Boa Governação lida com a maneira e a forma como o país é governado: o processo de selecção de líderes articulando objectivos nacionais; formulação de políticas e a dimensão pela qual o governo desempenha o seu papel primário de promover o bem-estar para os seus cidadãos. O presente estudo examina o conceito de governação e identifica os cânones de Boa Governação. O mesmo, assegura que a má governação manifesta-se em corrupção, instabilidade

política, contenda civil e conflitos, e estes têm um impacto negativo nos nossos esforços de desenvolvimento. Deste modo, o autor, argumenta que não poderá haver desenvolvimento sem Boa Governança recomenda certos passos para entronizar boa governação e melhorar o bem-estar dos cidadãos, que é o fim último do desenvolvimento económico.

Palavras chave: democracia, boa governação, desenvolvimento económico, corrupção, sustentabilidade democrática

Introduction

Democracy is arguably the most popular form of government in the world today. Within the last two decades, it has emerged as the most sought-after political system across the planet. Although it is indisputable that democracy cannot solve all of mankind's problems, we must also admit that we cannot solve many of those problems without democracy thus necessitating its sustainability. Different scholars have conceptualised democracy in different forms; one of America's founding fathers, Abraham Lincoln defined it as *"the government of the people by the people and for the people"*. This presupposes that democracy is hinged on the active involvement and participation of the people in governance. The word democracy itself is a derivative of two Greek words, *'demos'* which means the 'people' and *'kratein'* which means 'rule of' or 'rule by'. This suggests that democracy means 'rule by the people', and it reinforces our conception of democracy as being anchored on popular participation (Babawale, 2007:7).

In the public realm, governance refers to the extent to which the government is running the affairs of the nation in the best interest of its citizens. There is political governance (how political power is acquired and exercised) and economic governance (how economic policies and programmes are initiated and executed). Another aspect of governance concerns businesses and here we talk of corporate governance (how corporations are managed for the interest of all the stakeholders). Good governance has become an issue of global importance. As country after country shamefully slid into avoidable debt traps and indescribable poverty, multilateral institutions started paying attention to government machineries, institutions and processes, believing that the answers might be found therein. Towards the end of the last century for instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) started paying more attention to governance issues like military spending, democracy, human rights, corruption, and crony-capitalism because it believed that addressing them would provide markets with better information, ensure greater transparency, and limit the irrational destructiveness of financial crises (Muo, 2007:420).

Public governance has two dimensions – political (how power is acquired and utilised) and economic (how economic policies and programmes are conceptualised, executed and evaluated). The issue of governance arises primarily from the social contract between political leaders and the followers. Followers hand over their sovereignty and resources to the leaders on the implied condition that they govern in the best interest of the governed. This best interest is ascertained through the constitution of the country, the manifesto of the leading party and other democratic



means of finding out what the people prefer. Governance then is an examination of how the government is fulfilling this all-important contract with the people.

In specific terms, governance has been defined as 'Policy making and policy execution regulated by systems of laws and guidelines which are segregated into specific operations to achieve specific national objectives, and it is achieved through good public policies with clear objectives. Good governance, which guides the country towards a desired goal, in this case development, which includes concepts of equity, social justice and effective exercise human rights (Muo, 2007:420), can also be a process that enables people to utilise collective power to manage their affairs in the most effective and efficient manner and in accordance with their collective needs and aspirations, cultures and traditions. It requires the development of skill and capability in utilising and managing the political power of government for maximisation of the welfare of the people. The state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes and implementation capacities, and the relationship between government officials and the public (UNDP Nigeria, 2003:15).

Todaro and Smith, (2003:712), argue that good governance goes beyond the absence of corruption to include the ability of the public sector to design and implement efficient and effective policies to realise development goals, government responsiveness and respect for citizens and institutions of society and mechanisms for peaceful transfer of power in accordance with popular will, including widespread participation. Ozigbo (2004:17) differentiates between mere governance (the capacities for exercising authority) and good governance which depends on the "extent to which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, committed to improving the public welfare and responsive to the needs of its citizens; competent to assure law and order and deliver public services; able to create an enabling policy environment for productive activities and equitable in its conduct, while Ovia (2005:14) emphasises its building blocks, which include public accountability, transparency, predictability of government behaviour, and adherence to the rule of law, equity and social justice.

Development, on the other hand, has been traditionally seen as significant increases in the levels of GNP/GDP and the resultant per capita income. These figures were eventually discounted for inflation. It was seen as a country's ability to expand its output faster than the population growth rate. These perspectives were mostly economic and quantitative; they provided average measures; there has never been an average citizen; and it did not reckon much with poverty, income distribution, employment and other social indicators of well-being. Measures of development have, however, gone beyond this level with more emphasis given to qualitative and human-interest issues including freedom and cultural liberalism (Muo, 2006b:6).

Successive administrations have performed woefully in terms of good governance. With the pervasive culture of poverty, Nigeria is not the best example of democratic sustainability. Therefore, this paper critically examines the concept and practice of good governance and tries to show the interconnection between it and economic development as a necessity for democratic sustainability.

Conceptualising governance and good governance

Governance is perhaps not a new expression in the extant political science literature; it generally refers to the task of running a government or any other organised entity. However, the attempt to make conceptual use of the expression was made popular in the literature on African development by the World Bank publication *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, (1989), which saw the African political and economic problem as a crisis of governance. Scholars have so far made a series of attempts, even though inconclusive; to define governance, but the attempt is only subject to individual perception, especially as it relates to their private social, economic and political endeavours.

Governance can be defined as “the fundamental process by which the lives and dreams of a people are jointly pursued through deliberate and systematic strategies and policies for the attainment of their maximum potential. It is the combination of responsible leadership and enlightened public participation” (Muo, 2006b:9). Governance, rather than being perceived in political terms as an institution, is construed as “the management of the lives of the people in a systematic, organized way for the best possible results, using the consensus of the people’s will, vision and wisdom” (Muo, 2006b:10).

With this definition, one is not restricting governance to a political institution as would have been envisaged, but to include all human collectivity. According to Bello-Imam: Governance entails:

the mechanisms whereby an institution or organization (be it family, the nation-state or elements of it) incorporates the participation of relevant interest groups in defining the scope and content of its work – including the capacity to mediate among these interests when they enter into conflict – and the means whereby it demonstrates accountability to those who support it. (Bello-Imam, 1997:13).

Coming back to national issues, a United Nations report actually defined governance as the existence of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs. According to the United Nations report, “it is the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences” (UN Report,1997:35).

Governance has also been referred to as the functions undertaken by a government in maintaining a unified state, defending the territorial integrity and running its economy, i.e. an effective and efficient functioning of government towards securing the well-being of its citizens. In short, governance is the sum total of the many ways individuals (citizens) and institutions, both public and private, manage their common affairs, that is, a continuing process through which conflicting and diverse interests and needs may be accommodated and co-operative actions taken (Muo, 2007:5).

If governance embraces all of the methods – good and bad – that societies use to distribute power and manage public resources and problems, good governance is therefore a sub-set of



governance wherein public resources and problems are managed effectively, efficiently and in response to critical needs of society. Effective democratic forms of governance ideally should rely on public participation, accountability and transparency. This implies a high level of organisational effectiveness in relation to policy formulation and the policies actually pursued, especially in the conduct of economic policy and its contribution to growth, stability and popular welfare. This good governance also includes openness and the rule of law.

As a necessary condition for development, a system of good governance in a limited administrative sense would consist of a set of rules and institutions (that is, a legal framework for development) and a system of public administration, which is open, transparent, efficient and accountable. Such a system would provide clarity, stability, and predictability for the private sector, which would constitute the essential engine of economic development and in turn, democratic sustainability in a 'market friendly' development strategy. In recent years, people have been much more concerned about good governance than anything else, especially as an attempt to sustain and consolidate hard-won democracy, which continues to gain ground. Good governance in this context involves a normative judgement, which indicates a preferred condition that should ideally govern the relationship between state and society and between a government and a people. According to Biyi Adegoye in a newspaper report *New Nigeria* (3 October 2000:8), "Good governance is the positive actions undertaken by a government to promote democracy and achieve social justice".

For governance to be considered good however, scholars like Muo, Babawale, Diamond and James, among others, have come out with the following attributes: accountability based on the notion of popular sovereignty and public choice; a legal framework that guarantees the rule of law and due process; popular participation in decision-making processes based on political and social pluralism and on freedom of association and expression; and bureaucratic accountability based on impersonality of office, uniform application of rules, and rationality of an organisational structure.

Using the UNDP (2003:13) report, characteristics of good governance include: participatory activities; sustainability; legitimacy and acceptability to the people; transparency; promotion of equity and equality; the ability to develop the resources and methods of governance; promotion of gender balance; toleration and acceptance of diverse perspectives; the ability to mobilise resources for social purposes; the strengthening of indigenous mechanisms; the operation by rule of law; efficient and effective use of resources; the engendering and commanding of respect and trust; accountability; the ability to define and take ownership of national issues; being enabling and facilitative; regulatory rather than controlling; being able to deal with temporal issues; and being service-oriented.

The nature and scope of economic development

Alkali (1997:45) citing Seers (1971:56) holds that in discussing development, three questions are critical: What has been happening to poverty; what has been happening to unemployment and what has been happening inequality? He then goes on to argue that development could not have taken place unless these three variables were declining. Mabogunje (1980:45) sees it as a dynamic process that involves quantitative growth and qualitative change, and must ultimately

lead to improved material welfare of the people. Rodney (1972:9), who criticises capitalist intellectuals for concentrating on economic development, takes it from the individual level as implying increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being and agrees that this is tied to the state of the society as a whole. Arnold, (1985:23) sees development as also including intangible elements like the way the political system is operated, the manner in which the social or ethnic groups work together and fit into the state structure, the social, scientific and cultural assumption upon which the society as a whole rests. Emmanuel (2005:4) posits that in addition to the improvement in the standards of living that encompass material consumption, education, health and environmental protection, development involves equal opportunities, political freedom and civil liberties.

New perspectives and measures of development have thus emerged over the years. Proponents of these new measures include A. Sen (1998 Nobel Laureate) who propounded the capabilities concept and the UNDP, which developed the *Human Development Index* (based on longevity, knowledge and standard of living). Concerns for poverty eradication, redistribution of income or elimination of inequality, the war against unemployment, levels of literacy, longevity, nutritional intake and cultural freedoms, are now critical issues in development. The World Bank articulated this new perspective when it stated in its 1990 report that “the challenge of economic development is to improve the quality of life. A better quality of life calls for higher incomes but it involves much more. It encompasses as ends in themselves, better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom and a richer cultural life”.

It is important to stress that development goes beyond economics and economic issues. Nevertheless, the fact remains that other aspects of development cannot materialise without stable economic fundamentals and indeed, the economic aspects cannot fare well without these aspects. Sandstorm (2005:24) deepens and widens the concept of development to include an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives; an inner dimension which incorporates the moral and spiritual angles – people becoming better people; and cultural liberty. He holds that development is a people’s movement, not a government-funded affair since development issues relate to values and relationships that cannot be bought with government funding, and that the ultimate goal of development is freeing the human being to become as good a human being as humanly possible. Korten (1990:2) brings in the issue of foreign support for development and reminds foreign agencies, donors and governments that their contributions would be measured in terms of the enhanced capacity of the people to determine their own future. From this new thinking, the following are generally accepted as the core values of development.

Sustenance is the *ability to meet basic needs of the people – food, shelter, health, security*. All economic policies should thus be geared at providing as many people as possible with the capability to overcome the misery and helplessness arising from the lack of these basics. *Self-esteem* (to be a person) involves enhancing the sense of worth and self-respect of individuals – a dignity, honour and a feeling of not being used as tools by others. *Freedom from servitude*



is to be able to choose. Freedom is defined as a sense of emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and from social servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions and dogmatic beliefs. In this case, it is important to note that while wealth does not increase happiness, it increases the range of human choice.

Good governance, corruption and development

Good governance, among other things, involves prioritising due process, constitutionalism, rule of law, transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs. The absence of good governance and its byproducts, automatically leads to two negative outcomes: massive corruption and political instability. None of these outcomes is conducive to development.

Corruption is a multiplex and hydra-headed phenomenon that defies a simple definition. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act of 29 September 2000 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, for instance, lists up to 18 corrupt practices. Two definitions underscore the complexity of corruption. Corruption means different things to different people: in ordinary parlance, corruption means any dishonest or illegal act, immoral behaviour, any conduct that smacks of cheating, indecency, and/or a violation of normative values of society like sexual abuse. From a jurisprudential angle, corruption has been defined as the abuse of public or entrusted power for personal gain or the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. Put differently, corruption means the use of public office or power or position for private benefit as when a public officer in the discharge of his official duties collects a bribe to enrich his own pocket, shows favour or even bends the operative rule to gratify him or confer an unfair advantage for a fee. Corruption manifests in various forms such as outright misappropriation of public resources for purely private or dishonest use, nepotism, or disregard for accountability in exercising discretion in a matter in which the officer is vested with monopolistic or entrusted power (Akanbi, 2004:13).

Corruption is the illegal, unethical and unauthorised exploitation of one's political or official position for personal gain or advantage; it is a means of influence. It includes payoffs, kickbacks, gifts and bribery, graft, nepotism, and misappropriation of public funds. These things do not mean the same thing. For instance, bribery means giving something to somebody in order to influence; graft means taking wrong advantage of connections in politics; nepotism involves people in high places giving special and undeserved favour to their relatives; misappropriation means to take and use someone else's money wrongly (Ujomu, 2004:32, Gyekye, 1997:193 and Goldstein, 1999:418).

Corruption is a universal phenomenon but in Nigeria, it has reached alarming levels. As the economy continued with its downward plunge, corruption worsened in proportion. The paradox of the present scenario is that no president of Nigeria has spoken on the need to fight corruption as Obasanjo has done, or has even established institutions and structures for that purpose. Yet Nigeria has the dubious honour of being the sixth most corrupt country in the world and this is an improvement on its previous position! Despite the Independent and Corrupt Practices Tribunal, the Due Process Office, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and thousands of sanctimonious presidential declarations, Nigeria is still regularly beset by corrupt deals in the

public sector (especially petroleum, politicians and the police), and National Assembly, with the Presidency being fingered as the most corrupt office in Nigeria. Of course, there is corruption in the private sector but since, government dominates all aspects of the economy, and corruption by its agents has more devastating impacts (Muo, 2004:6).

The tales of corruption coming out of Nigeria are so scandalously common that the nature, number and quantum of such reports no longer shock Nigerians. The most recent one includes the bribery-for-vote scandal in the Ekiti rerun election where the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials were alleged to have taken money from a political party. Unfortunately, the government also appears not to be serious about fighting corruption as can be deduced from the duplication of responsibilities, the under-funding of the agencies, and perceived selectivity in the operations of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC). This is generally due to the failure and virtual collapse of governance, the contamination of democratic values, the erosion of accountability and the prevalence of bad leadership. The erosion of public confidence in the country's political and economic institutions promoted a culture of contempt for the rule of law and ultimately and unfortunately, a social tolerance for a myriad of practices previously considered abominable (Obasanjo, 2004:29).

Democratic sustainability

Sustainability as in consolidation is the process by which democracies become so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down. It involves, according to Larry Diamond (1995:13), behavioural and institutional changes that normalise democratic politics and narrows its uncertainty. This normalisation requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training and other functions that civil society performs. However, most of all, and most urgently, it requires political institutionalisation. A democracy can best be sustained when the people have good reason to believe that it is capable of withstanding pressure or shocks (including dissent and opposition) without abandoning the electoral process or the political freedom on which it depends. Moreover, this will require a depth of institutionalisation reaching beyond the electoral process itself.

From these, however, a variety of different criteria have been proposed in the literature in order to identify a sustained democracy. According to J. Linz (1990:143-164), one of these is the two-election test, or more accurately, the transfer of power test. Democracy is consolidated when a government that has itself been elected in a free and fair contest is defeated in a subsequent election and accepts the result. The point of this criterion is that it is not winning office that matters, but losing it and accepting the verdict, because this demonstrates that powerful players and their social backers are prepared to put respect for the rules of the game above the continuation of their power. The second criterion favours a simple longevity or generation test. Approximately twenty years of regular, competitive elections are sufficient to judge a consolidated democracy, even without a change of ruling party, since habituation of the electoral process would make any alternative method for appointing rulers unthinkable.



Apart from these two criteria, democracies emerge and become sustained, not out of any principled commitment to democratic norms, but when the major political players recognise sufficient common interest in establishing electoral procedures and subsequently see that keeping to the rules of the game outweighs the costs of them being undermined. The foregoing has demonstrated that the sustainability of democracy is a product of many factors or conditions operating together. No one condition on its own will be either necessary or sufficient but an accumulation of facilitating conditions can be expected to enhance prospects for the survival of electoral democracy. The project is clearly more difficult in some circumstances than others, and faces much more formidable obstacles in some countries than others. It is a task in the social sciences to identify these circumstances and subject them to comparative analysis.

The concept of democratic sustainability has the problem of not being able to be classified correctly as its boundaries are fuzzy and fluid. For the purpose of this paper however, democratic sustainability means the capacity of the polity to nurture and consolidate democracy over a very long time with little or no threat to the abortion of democratic experiment in whatever form and pretence (Ibid, p. 166).

Challenges of good governance in Nigeria

Good governance has been an elusive challenge in Nigeria, as in most other African countries. The reasons are complex, but I have decided to classify them into legitimacy, leadership and popular participation. In Nigeria, the greatest threat to governmental legitimacy is the military, which has turned itself into a posse of political gladiators in the battle for the control of the state through incessant intervention in politics and government. For instance, on eleven different occasions, because of the military's desire to control the state, Nigeria went through endured coup d'états, which failed, aborted or succeeded. Between 1960 and 1999, Nigeria has had seven military Heads of State and many coup victims. At last count, over 117 people, both military and civilian, have been executed over coup charges. Military governments are harbingers of instability as while a bad civilian government can be voted out at the next election (even though uncommon in the Nigerian context), a military coup is the only way to remove a bad military government (Azeez, 2002:343).

Not only that, military rule is devoid of the legitimising role of popular participation in government and politics. Voting at elections, election campaigns, political rallies, public assemblies and procession on public issues and other forms of popular participation, are all part of the process for good governance; with all these banned under a military regime, the country reverts to being a colonial state. The people can therefore hardly be blamed if they continue to think of the government during military rule the same way as they did in colonial days.

On leadership, it was discovered that governance is a complex responsibility where even an honest, decent leader may not understand the intricacies of his undertakings and what it means to govern, and may not have or know what it takes to govern properly. The political history of Nigeria is replete with failed attempts at good governance, epitomised principally by the inability of the

leadership to forge a cohesive coalition of the different nationalities comprising the nation-state. Nigeria's segmented character is unique, with well over 250 ethnic-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of Africa. For instance, at the beginning of the 60s, there were 3 000 tribes or ethnic groups in the world. About 1000 were represented in the continent of Africa and over 30 of those are found in Nigeria today. This creates a problem unknown to the experience of other people in the world. No Western or Eastern civilization has ever evolved a political system that can cope with this gigantic problem of 'hyper-ethnic instability syndrome'. This is problematic in the sense that plural and segmented societies consider themselves biologically, culturally, linguistically and socially distinct from each other, and most often view their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms, (Azeez, 2002:344).

And because of mistrust and unhealthy rivalries among these different ethnic groups, the struggle for power, particularly at the federal level, has always been vicious and sometimes violent. Even when national political parties were formed, these always broke down along ethnic and regional lines (AC, APGA are good examples). Access to political power in terms of sharing political office, resource appropriation and revenue allocation at the federal level, is conceived as an advantage to appropriate federal resources in favour of the particular ethnic group(s) in power to the detriment of the ones that are left out, with every region claiming marginalisation. Consequently, ethnic, cultural and religious barriers were not harmonised through an equitable and impartial balance of interests. Disparities, rather than diminishing with independence, were deepened and widened. The results were lack of commitment to wards ensuring good governance, gross violations of human rights, and the repression of the energies of the people, which could have been constructively released for development and nation-building purposes.

Another problem of the leadership is that of corruption at all levels of governance. Corruption has always been an obstacle to the effective realisation of enduring democracy, good governance and protection of human rights. In all practical terms, "corruption makes nonsense of all fiscal planning and budgeting. It wastefully depletes the nation's inadequate resources. It also promotes inequality and renders it almost impossible for citizens to address the objectives of- equity and justice in their society," (Azeez, 2002:344b). The magnitude of corruption and the absence of probity, equity, accountability and patriotism that characterised the leadership and institutions over which the state presides can be regarded as a greater threat to a sustainable democracy from which the state must be rescued.

It needs be emphasised that the challenges of good governance have also been attributed to popular participation of the citizenry in the day-to-day running of government. Beyond the pervasive culture of poverty that renders African governments too weak to attain greater efficiency because of their limited resources, the available scarce resources are far from being judiciously used. Although corruption takes a large chunk of the scarce resources, wastages and palpable inefficiency makes alienates government from the citizenry. In an insightful piece, Femi Otubanjo, a political scientist, bemoaned the spate of civil uprisings against constituted authorities, which raised a fundamental question about the relationship between the Nigerian state and her citizenry.



The indication is that there was a simmering feeling of exasperation among many, which carried with it a readiness to renege on the obligation to obey the law or even take up arms against the state. This observation was made in 1989, but the deplorable living conditions of the average Nigerian of all strata of the society then is nothing when juxtaposed with the present state of poverty and squalour.

Compounding the problems of the citizenry is the civil society in Nigeria, which unlike other African countries exhibits clear traits of weakness. The civil society suffers from some limitations in its capacity to serve as vanguard for democratic sustainability and the promotion of popular participation. It is beleaguered by an authoritarian state and has to contend with a very strong state either under military autocracy or one-party rule. The civil society is rather segmentary and non-inclusive because it contends also with regional and religious factionalism, with membership dominated by a particular ethnic group. This segmentation usually undermines national alliances around common demands. In some cases, the ruling elite skew issues to their own advantage and at the expense of the nascent democratic culture and its sustainability; they exacerbate the divisive tendencies of the civil society.

Another problem of the Nigerian civil society is that it is non-combative in its struggle for democracy, whereas democracy is never handed down arbitrarily; it is always fought for. The embarrassing level of illiteracy and general mediocrity limits the mobilisation of the civil society in its perennial democratic struggle and consolidation. Lastly, there is a growing impatience with what democracy and constitutionalism have to offer to the nation, and the undue expectation on immediate material gains to the detriment of democratic and constitutional ideals maturing to a reasonable extent. The overbearing problems of ignorance have consequently resulted into frequent invitations to the military to intervene. The calls have practically proven to devastate attempts at good governance, which would guarantee a sustainable democratic polity (Azeez, 2002: 345-347).

Suggestions on the improvement of good governance and sustainability of democracy

Democracy can be sustained if the military (and other agents of violence) are made subordinate to elected civilian control. Obviously, the military need to renounce political activities to be restructured, professionalised and reoriented for it to be able to defend democracy. This is because civilian control of the armed services is an essential aspect of government of, by and for the people. In a democracy, the majority decides public policy, and citizens are subject to the rule of law instead of brute force. There is the need also to depoliticise the armed forces, redefine military priorities, programmes and commitments, reassert civilian supremacy, and institute strong and effective mechanisms for achieving democratic control. In fact, it was one of the first problems tackled by President Obasanjo's government, given the sectional and tyrannical use to which the military was put under the Babangida and the Abacha administration. Military restructuring was part of the larger question of political restructuring and was aimed at ensuring a regionally balanced and ethnically representative force meant for an enduring democracy.

Democratic stability presupposes that a people have, at a given time, the government that they prefer and that this government will be one that pursues their interest. This is a condition for stable government. An amoral milieu, as under military regimes, debilitates the effectiveness of the state as it renders it incapable of enforcing its policies, making it a rather soft state.

Governance in Nigeria, although frustrating, demanding and only occasionally gratifying, obviously requires commitment for it to be effective. The call for military intervention as a solution to civilian negligence in governance is totally misplaced. Equally, for democracy to be sustained, people must continue to identify with the chosen unit of democratic decision-making.

If democracy is understood to mean equality, there is little likelihood of continuing support for a regime that leaves the gross inequality of wealth unattended and continues to entrench impoverished daily living conditions or retards the economy through inefficiency and/or corruption. Thus, sustained economic development and equitable distribution of wealth are prerequisites for good governance and democratic sustainability. It is argued that peace promotes development, but only equitable development can promote peace. In an atmosphere of peace and promotion of social justice and economic development, democracy continues to thrive and is subsequently sustained.

In the extant literature on democracy and good governance, with regards to sustainability generally, there seems to be a kind of consensus that without accountability, probity and transparency in the conduct of public affairs, democratic sustainability will be a mirage. By United Nation's standards, accountability is:

the ability to hold public officials and their representatives to a standard of conduct that is clearly in the public interest. This requires rules of conduct that are transparent, straight forward and broadly accepted in society, as well as administrative and legal processes to discipline or remove officials who do not respect such rules (UN Report, 2007:30).

Weak accountability mechanisms tend to facilitate corruption and other abuses of office and thereby undermine governance. Therefore, for governance to be considered good, it must be open, which suggests that policies are generally subject to prior consultation and public discussion and that there is a legally enforceable right of public access to government records, the publishing of government functions and the right of the public to attend meetings of various government bodies. Through transparency, government procedures are to be widely understood and decisions concerning the use of public resources are to be subject to scrutiny.

Moreover, another guarantee that a government will remain democratic is the existence of a strong opposition; no political system can be considered democratic in the absence of countervailing centres of power. A system of governance where there is a healthy competition between opposing political parties and where voters cast their votes for the candidates of their choice remains the best way of forestalling authoritarianism and ensuring good governance. The role of the civil society – various non-governmental organisations, human rights and pro-democracy organisations, the media, religious assemblages, cooperative unions and professional associations – as facilitators and defenders of democracy and good governance, is widely acknowledged to the extent that they are seen as important instruments that can force the country to be more



transparent and accountable. However, an opposition party or civil society that fails to live up to their democratic potential – those that are often fragmented into a many factions beset by personal and/or communal ambitions, poorly organised, shallowly rooted, personalistic vehicles engaged in clientelistic and/or communal appeals – will not inspire respect and can in no way sustain democracy.

However, Nigeria does not yet possess a well-developed civil society. Existing groups played a major role in forcing the military out of power and enabling civilian rule. Certainly, vigilance will prove vital for defending the new democracy. This calls for a programme of empowerment that supports the emergence of a strong non-governmental component of civil society, able to participate in public debate on defence and security policy, with the sole aim of curtailing military incursion into politics.

The putative role of the independent media in sustaining democracy is that of providing the public space for a wide range of societal opinion to be expressed, and supplying the population with objective information about government performance. The press needs to help create a feeling of nationhood among people traditionally divided by tribal loyalties to explain the objectives of a new society and to obtain co-operation in communal and national projects. It was the press, which, defying all odds held the torch to battle the military oligarchy and their attendant usurped disposition.

An important challenge facing most democracies is enhancing the position of women in decision-making at all levels, because no country can afford to limit the potential and creativity of half of its population. History has shown that, although women have all the skills needed for development, these have unfortunately been confined too long to the home environment. Women's experience in conflict resolution is very appropriate training for leadership. However, women who attain leadership positions are subject to much more scrutiny than men, as if they are expected to fail. More often than not, the failure of women is seen as evidence against women in general rather than the case of a particular individual.

Conclusion

In retrospect, it is clear that development challenges arise from bad governance and that promotion of good governance at all levels of authority remains the greatest antidote to the problem of democratic sustainability in Nigeria. Once good governance is established as a permanent system, it will be easier for to focus all energies and resources on meeting the challenges of development growth, security and a good, creative existence for all.

The first few years of this new dispensation should be regarded as a period for politicians to re-engage in self-education, achieve some consensus about building relevant political and civil institutions that can ensure transparency and accountability, and foster democratic values and culture as discussed, to promote good governance. No doubt, the quest will be an ongoing learning process. While there are bound to be several ups and downs along the way, it is important that mistakes are learnt from and appropriate measures to forestall making further mistakes and put in place, rather than calling for military intervention.

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