



DIALOGUE AS AN INTERACTIVE STRATEGY TOWARDS THE SUSTENANCE OF DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines dialogue as an interactive strategy towards the sustenance of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. Good governance has been seen as the promotion of accountability, efficiency, rule of law, and the fight against corruption. It also involves participation, transparency, and equitability during the exercise of authority in a country. Providing good governance cannot be left to government alone. Dialogue as an interactive strategy which span through free, fair, credible elections, economic development, agriculture, health, security, education, legal system (independent judiciary and rule of law), media freedom, fight against corruption, human rights, job creation, rural development, infrastructural development etc have been revealed for the sustenance of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. It was discussed that it is pertinent for Nigerians to embrace attitudinal change from the usual nonchalant and sometimes corrupt mindset to help restore the country on the path of good governance. It is recommended that, transparency, accountability and efficiency in government should be executed to allow good governance to be sustained in the country. It is basic that, for good governance to prevail, Nigerians should also develop the right attitudes, values and ideas for the greatness of their country.

Keywords: Dialogue, Interactive strategy, Sustenance, Democracy, Good governance.

Introduction

Nigeria is presently under democratic rule which came on board on May 29, 1999, about a decade ago. Ordinarily speaking, democracy should lay the foundation for good governance to strive in any nation. Neither democracy nor good governance can be said to be on strong grounds in Nigeria today. A particular disgruntled Nigerian recently declared that, "Nigerians have never experienced any good governance since 1999, and that for the citizen to have any sense of belonging, there should be provision for social amenities and infrastructure, employment, health, security and constant power supply" (Akosile, 2010). This statement establishes the current need for good governance in Nigeria. This is expected in any democratic polity working to succeed.

The study believes that, ours is a nascent democracy that can evolve adequate strategies to bring good governance to the citizenry in a progressive manner. The situation in Nigeria today does not indicate that, the leadership is on the path to

deliver good governance and gains of democracy to the people. This is true, judging from the recent damning reports about Nigeria from reputable organizations. The Africa Governance Survey of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2009) indicates that Nigeria ranks 35 out of 53 other African countries and 11 out of 16 West African countries on assessment of the quality of governance. To support this, the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI), ranks Nigeria 158 among the 182 countries that were assessed based on life expectancy, literacy, school enrolment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), etc. The paper argues that democracy and good governance are pre-requisites for growth and development to occur in any nation, particularly in Nigeria. It sees the concepts as necessary ingredients for the actualization of socio-economic progress of Nigeria. The thrust of this study is to examine dialogue as an interactive strategy towards the sustenance of democracy and good governance in Ogun State, Nigeria.



Concept of Democracy

The idea of democracy, or government by the people, is very old, dating back to ancient Greece. The word itself comes from the Greek words: *demos*, meaning “the people”, and *kratos*, meaning “authority”. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005) defines democracy as “a system of government in which everyone in the country can vote to elect its members, a country that has a government which has been elected by the people of the country, a situation or system in which everyone is equal and has the right to vote, make decisions etc. Macdonis in Akindele (2002) simply defines democracy as “a type of political system that gives to the people as a whole”. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1995), has a broader definition of democracy as “a system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elect, thought as allowing freedom of speech, religion and political opinion...” Abraham Lincoln, one time president of United States of America (U.S.A) gave a classic definition of democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. This definition of democracy has remained popular to date and is seen by the author as a very simple and direct picture of what democracy implies and therefore the preferable definition of democracy for this paper. This is because it captures the real essence of the practice of democracy as a kind of government that has popular power in which the people are free, happy, duly represented and people decide what happens through their representatives, and the government is continually focusing on the general will of the people.

Calhoun et al (2007), describe democracy as a system in which “the law guarantees extensive civil liberties, including the freedom to associate with whoever one chooses, freedom of speech and the press, and freedom from unreasonable search and seizure”. A democracy does not claim exclusive, unquestioning loyalty from its people; in fact, if those in power overstep their authority, the people have the right, even a duty, to vote them out of office or impeach them through their representatives. Democracy is increasingly getting attention globally and with globalization it is not losing momentum in popularity. However, democracy in Nigeria is relatively young with a lot of challenges facing its survival and growth.

Good Governance

Governance means different thing to politicians, the citizens, the media, academics, etc. Asian Development Bank in Akindele (2002) see governance as the legitimate power to manage the human and material resources of a country for

development. Governance is a two-way thing. It involves the government as well as the people. According to Bene & Neiland in Adediran (2022) “governance is the exercise of legitimate authority in transacting affairs, and is broadly understood to refer to the maintenance of social order through endogenously evolved and externally imposed rules sets, (while) government by contrast can be defined as the exercise of influence and control, through law and coercion, over a political community, constituted into a state within a defined territory”.

Bradway and Shah in Adediran (2022) submitted that, “governance connotes the formation and execution of collective action at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighbourhood associations in pursuing collective actions”. “Governance refers to the interaction between civil society and government in determining governmental actions”. Governance explains how resources are allocated with good intentions to the public, and the creation of authoritative rule for collective actions (Al-Habil, 2011). Bracking (2010) believes that good governance will most often than not make reference to rationality as regards the maximization of social welfare and common good. According to Bracking, good governance is an antithesis of clientalism, nepotism, patrimonialism and patronage. Good governance stands opposed to particularism.

According to United Nations (2007); there is a significant relationship between good governance and human rights. Good governance, according to Ali in Adediran (2023) involves efficiency and effectiveness, consensus orientation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitability and inclusiveness, rule of law as well as participation. Governance is expected to be based on institutionalized rule systems. It is about performance and conformance. Good governance is needed in the eradication of poverty and promotion of development (United Nations University, 2002; Vries, 2013).

The Synergy between Democracy and Good Governance

There is a raging controversy among political analysts and social scientists on what form of political system best supports and reinforces good governance. Many researchers believe that a democracy may be more equipped to deliver good governance. This brings us to exploring the connection between democracy and good governance. Literally speaking, these concepts are sort of “twins” in practice. They are linked to one

another in the sense that democracy can provide an enabling environment for the provision of good governance. Conversely, good governance can be a precondition for the realization of democratic rule because only by meeting the people's will in terms of their needs, can a democracy claim some degree of effectiveness. Put simply, these are elements that mutually reinforce each other and therefore neither of them can be adequate or realizable in the absence of the other. They have common features and values: political representativeness, enthronement of civil and political rights, public accountability, rule of law, and the notion of formal equality, social justice etc.

Charlick (2011) stated that “indeed, the key properties of the governance realm are believed to emphasis and reinforce democratic norms and practices. These are authority, reciprocity, exchange, trust and accountability”. Moreover, authority seeks expression in the legitimate use of power in which the people elect and control their leaders. Accountability is the degree to which the people can hold their elected leaders or public servants responsible for their actions. Reciprocity refers to the nature and quality of the social interactions among members of a political community, and its major indicator in the public realm is the degree to which individual's fundamental human rights are upheld. The fact is that the political values of governance such as elections, political control and representativeness, freedom of expression and plural politics are equally the pronounced ethos of democracy. Professor Wole Soyinka, Nobel laurel winner for literature, recently stated that electoral integrity begets governance integrity.

Factors Militating Against Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

Bad Leadership: The leadership in Nigeria has the bulk of the blame for the state of democracy and good governance in the country. At the federal, state and local government levels, many officials of government have lost sense of duty and are engaging in all sorts of illegal action. The local governments in some states are said to be “conduits” for heavy looting of public funds. Adegboyega (2009) was so disturbed by the quality of leadership in Nigeria and he declared “this is one huge joke of a country that needs deliverance.

Corruption: This is one factor that strongly inhibits the growth of democracy and prevalence of good governance in Nigeria. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. Corrupt leadership can only beget corrupt followership and vice – versa.

Electoral Reforms: Nigeria is seen by some individuals as a country with very faulty electoral system that has failed to conduct true, free, fair and acceptable elections. Most elections held in Nigeria have been marred by irregularities and sharp practices thereby resulting to the election of some unpopular and dubious individuals. These individuals get into positions of authority and perpetuate different forms of unethical and illegal acts that directly undermine the growth of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. The country needs electoral reforms that can ensure credible elections.

Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB): This bill is presently being considered by the National Assembly. In many advanced democracies such as the U.S.A, Britain and Canada etc, there is high degree of freedom of speech, expression and press. Citizens can get information about government activities very easily. The FOI bill can encourage the free flow of information which is vital for the growth of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

Impartial/Strong Judiciary: The judiciary is a very important arm of government that acts like a “stabilizer” in a democracy. The judiciary interprets the law (constitution) of the nation and must endeavour to use its power to guide our collective interests through balanced, fair and acceptable judgements for democracy to thrive in Nigeria.

Faulty Constitution: Many well-meaning Nigerians have continued to call for constitutional reform. They argue that the Nigerian constitution requires a thorough review and that some part of it should either be expunged or altered to suit the demands of most Nigerians. For instance, there has been a call for the removal of the “immunity clause”, which protects some top government officials from prosecution while in office. The advocates of this claim that it allows these officials to amass so much wealth with which they bribe their way out when they are out of office.

Poor/Sluggish Legislative System: The legislative system and the legislators in Nigeria are undermining the role of the legislature as a prominent arm of government. They are not playing their oversight functions effectively and they are less active in enforcing democratic principles and good governance in Nigeria.

Non-Conformity to Rule of Law: Failure of many Nigerians to live and act in accordance with the rule of law remains a clog in the wheel of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

Forms of Abuse: The non-observance and lack of respect for human rights exemplified in unlawful detention of people, extra –judicial killings by the police, child trafficking, women marginalization etc. are all contributing to weakening democracy in Nigeria.

Illiteracy: Human development, particularly in terms of acquisition of skills and knowledge is very vital for the growth and sustenance of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. Doing away with illiteracy by at least improving basic education for the citizens should be government's first priority. This can go a long way to engender democracy in Nigeria.

Strategies for the Sustenance of Democracy and Good governance in Nigeria

Dialogue as interactive strategy means methods of interpersonal, intra- and intergroup interaction, which ensure high motivation of people, the strength of knowledge, creativity and imagination, sociability, active life position, team spirit, individuality value, freedom of expression, emphasis on activity, mutual respect and democracy in the learning process (World Bank, 2007). As was known, governance is the exercise of control of resources (both human and material), management for rapid economic, political and social development. Achieving these in a well-deserved manner and approach is what constitutes good governance. Therefore, in order to fast-track good governance in Nigeria, the government must place priority to the following interactive strategy:

- i. **Free, fair and credible elections:** Elections should not be based on political torment. The masses should be given freedom to choose from a list of aspirants, who their representative(s) should be. There should be no influence from political parties, or any other force (within or outside the country)
- ii. **Economic development:** There should be conscious efforts by the government to improve the economic well-being and the quality of life of the masses. It should adopt new technologies and speed up the transmission process from agrarian to industrialized economy.
- iii. **Agriculture:** There should be provision for industrialized agriculture, i.e large-scale monoculture. Government should also make available fertilizers, pesticides and other farming instruments in view of the attainment of food security in the country.
- iv. **Health:** It is the responsibility of the government to influence the health of its population by making mandatory health insurance, free medical checkups, cheap hospital bills, etc available and

accessibly to the masses.

- v. **Security:** The government has a duty to protect all its citizens from external aggression and internal disturbance. According to Etim, Duke and Ogbinyi (2017), providing security for the lives and properties of the masses is the core essence of governance and any government that fails in this has failed in all. Security cuts across every sphere of human endeavours ranging from physical, food, health, etc.
- vi. **Education:** Education is the bed rock of every nation. For a country to progress, it must invest enough resources in education and human resource development. There should also be adequate research and development in every sector of the economy. In order to fast track development in Nigeria, the government must provide a favourable condition for academic pursuit and learning of all manners.
- vii. **Legal system (Independent Judiciary and rule of law):** Till date, it is hard to believe that the Nigerian Judiciary has gained full independence from executive control. This is because of the several issues (both of the past and present) that have hindered the enablement of law to take its full course on culprits who are affiliated, in one way or the other, to people in authority.
- viii. **Media freedom:** Press freedom is a necessary item in democracy. Where this is not the case, then lots of questions arise concerning good governance.
- ix. **Fight against corruption:** Corruption has been an issue which affects the Nigerian society. From when Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 till date, successive government have claimed to make efforts to fight against the ugly face of corruption, but in the real sense, these governments and representatives have reaped the country of its glory and made living unbearable to the poor masses. For good governance to be achieved the issues of corruption should be made an history and transparency and accountability should be watchwords for public office holders.
- x. **Human rights:** Human right promotion is also a necessary element of good governance. It is in an attempt to promote these rights that the government will make provisions for the eradication of every threat to the well-being and liberty of its people
- xi. **Job creation:** Good governance makes available gainful employments for its citizens. The creation of jobs is vital to the sustenance of peace and nation building. National development and



integration can only be achieved when there is a drastic reduction in the rate of unemployed persons in the economy

xii. Rural development: Rural development in itself is potent enough to reduce brain-drain. Therefore, for government to reduce the high rate of rural-urban migration, there is need to engage in massive rural development projects like the creation of roads, factories and industries and the decentralization of the urban centres.

xiii. Infrastructural Development: The government should prove or make available good roads, portable water, electricity, etc in the interest of its people. This is itself is good governance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, good governance has been seen as the promotion of accountability, efficiency, rule of law, and the fight against corruption. It also involves participation, transparency, and equitability during the exercise of authority in a country. Good governance if ensured in a democracy will in turn engender socio-economic development. But providing good governance cannot be left to government alone. Several dialogue interactive strategies such as free, fair and credible elections, economic development, agriculture, health, security, education, legal system (independent judiciary and rule of law), media freedom, fight against corruption, human rights, job creation, rural development, infrastructural development etc have been revealed for the sustenance of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. It also recommends transparency, accountability and efficiency in government. Further, corruption should be denied a place in governance in the country.
- ii. It is basic that for good governance to prevail in Nigeria, it will require that Nigerians embrace attitudinal change from the usual nonchalant and sometimes corrupt mindset to help restore the country on the path of good governance. Nigerians must develop the right attitudes, values and ideas for her greatness to come.
- iii. There should also be a sort of institutional or structural change at all levels of government, and eschewing of the "Nigerian factor" to help ensure the gains of good governance, and rapid socio-economic development for Nigerians. This is the

time for all Nigerians to come together as one indivisible society and make positive change in the country.

- iv. A constitutional reform is very imperative if Nigeria is to properly focus on her priorities and for the leadership and all the stake holders in the "Nigerian project" to put attention on improving education, plugging all corruption loopholes, and building the capacity to continually improve the living standard of the people. Infact the constitutional amendment is imperative for Nigeria now.
- v. To achieve good governance and secure socio-economic development in Nigeria, some Nigerians believe that Local Government officials should be accountable and transparent in the discharge of their duty. They must learn to see themselves as the servants of the people at the grassroot level. The local governments are the closest government to the people and are expected to deliver the much-vaunted dividends of democracy to the long-suffering masses of Nigeria.
- vi. It is also necessary to incorporate into our educational curriculum at all levels, what can be described as anti-corruption education. This will help to combat corruption and engage young Nigerians in the promotion of responsible governance.

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