

## Good Governance and Accountability in Nigeria's Developmental Dilemma

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### Abstract

*This paper examines good governance and accountability as a sine qua non for ensuring effective development and social order, with special reference to the Nigerian nation state. Development, which has to do with both quantitative and qualitative changes in the structure and performance of forces of production through eradication of poverty, disease, hunger, inequality, unemployment among other social problems can not meaningfully take place without good governance in place. The concept of good governance encompasses general values and basic freedoms that include accountability, competence, the reign of the rule of law and absence of human right abuse. The paper gives an overview of governance with focus on the democratic dispensation with a view to determining how it has, over the years, contributed to the current level of development of the nation and it also reviews the failures of the national developmental efforts as a result of some deficits in the national leadership either from the intellectual, moral, or ideological point of view as well as the attempt to run a democratic polity without genuine commitment to the principles of accountability. The paper ends by showing the responsibility of governance in ensuring political stability, provision of sound institutions, sound macro economic policies, conducive investment climate, good management of natural resources, accountability, welfare schemes, and a climate free of corruption all of which are essential ingredients for development.*

**Key words:** Development, Governance, Leadership, Accountability, Corruption.

### Introduction

Citizens of various nations often engage in issues relating to choice of leaders to govern them at whatever level of government. The zeal, enthusiasm and passion attached to their efforts indicate a level of trust and expectation that after installing the leaders, the said leaders are automatically granted power and access to state resources that should be harmonized and utilized to provide certain benefits for the masses. The process of harnessing and allocating the available resources to the citizens is referred to as governance. Recently the terms "governance" and "good governance" are being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of backwardness within some societies. Major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure "good governance" are undertaken. In Nigeria, good governance has become a challenge and a common denomination in discourses relating to the development of the Nigerian nation.

The question then is, to what extent are the expectations of the people being met in terms of good governance in Nigeria? This paper tries to examine the implied contractual relationship and obligation that exists in governance with special focus on the Nigerian society.

### Conceptual clarification:

**Governance:** Olowu and Akinola (1995) define governance as the art of governing; involving the making of rules in a society and such rules should be accepted as legitimate and should be in consonance with the values that are held by individuals and groups within the society. We can however see a problem in this definition. Defining good governance as the art of governing is circular. Moreover when defined in terms of law making, it becomes limited to an aspect of government which is not even the dominant aspect. What happens when good laws are badly implemented, would that still amount to good governance? Olowu and Akinola (1995) provide some parameters for measuring good governance.

These include managerial and organizational efficiency, accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness to the public, transparency in decision-making and pluralism in policy options and choices. This list is not exhaustive as issues such as rule of law, equity, and justice and so on.

The concept of good governance according to Nwagbara (2003) encompasses general values and basic freedoms that include accountability, competence, the reign of the rule of law and absence of human rights abuse. According to the UNDP (2000), governance is the legitimate exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage national affairs. A related definition is provided by the World Bank (2000) stating that governance consists of 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development'. Governance is all encompassing and as Getu (2000) observes 'it often consists of a complex arrays of processes, organizations and institutions that act as channels for citizens to exercise their legal rights, attempt to resolve differences, fulfill their obligations to the society and express their concerns and interests.'

**Accountability:** accountability is the requirement that those who hold public trust account for the use of that trust to the citizens or their representatives. The concept underscores the obligation of an office holder to fulfill the expectations of his office. It is understood to be a measure for the results of an office holder's actions. Public accountability is a *sine qua non* for any regime that would refrain from corruption and ensure public service delivery to the citizenry.

**Development:** Some of the core assumptions in the dominant conception of development according to Trainer (2005) include the idea that development, progress and improving human welfare are essentially about increasing the amount of goods and services people can buy. The more that can be produced and sold, the more wealth there is. To the proponent of this idea, development is basically about increasing the volume of business turnover.

The extreme narrowness of this assumption is not only identifying development as a predominantly economic business, but of assuming that of all the important elements of an economy, the only thing that matters is whether or not sales are increasing. Using economic indices such as the Gross National Product, reduction in the level of inflation, reduction in budget deficit and so on, without a positive impact on the masses amounts to an empty concept. Abudu (2003) noted that part of the problem of productive development in Africa is that even when such objectives are claimed to have been fulfilled, they do not yield any improvement on the citizens' quality of life.

The Modernization Theorists of development posited that there is the need to replicate and or stimulate an enabling environment similar to the one existing in the developed nations in developing nations before development can take place in those nations. This assumption according to Tucker (1999) is perceived to be Eurocentric in that development is seen to be a process whereby other countries are dominated and their destinies tied and are shaped according to an essentially western way.

Based on these views and arguments, development in the real sense of it is expected to be all embracing by taking place across dimensions: physical, ecological, social, emotional, mental, political, historical, and even moral. To Omobowale (2006), development has to do with how individuals and societies interact with their social and physical environments to develop their culture with which they overcome the challenges to their existence and bring noticeable improvement to their lives. In other words, development should be about improving all aspects of a society, including the quality of food and water and health services, the opportunities for leisure and cultural activities, the process of government and administration, the moral standards, social cohesion, equality, concern for the privileged and the unfortunate, the quality of life, security, ecological sustainability, and especially improving the conditions of the poorest (Pieterse 1999; Abudu 2003 and trainer 2005).

The primary task that development seeks to accomplish is to eliminate poverty. Development is concerned with improving the well being of people. Raising living standards and improving education, health and equality of opportunity are among the essential components of economic development goal. Insuring political and civil rights is a broader development goal. Economic growth is an essential means for enhancing development, but in itself is highly imperfect proxy for progress.

### Theoretical framework: Network theory.

This theoretical framework is being adopted to give a proper perspective for this work. According to this theory, the society is stratified into different groups with each group dependent on one another thus leading to stability. In a bid to enjoy basic necessities, different groups network so as to obtain what they need and in return give what they have but can not translate to economic activity on their own. In the process a sense of reciprocity is created. This theory focuses on the objective patterns of ties linking the members of society as well as on a wide range of micro to macro structures.

To these theorists, the actors may be people (Wellman and Wortley 1990), but also may be groups, corporations and societies (Clawson, Neustadt and Bearden 1986, Mizuchi and Koenig 1986, Baker 1990). Links occur at the large scale social cultural level as well as at more microscopic levels. Granovetter (1985) describes such micro level links as actions embedded in the concrete personal relations and structures of such relations.

Applying the theory to this paper, it could be seen that a collection of individuals and groups that have to network to access what they need. Whereas such individuals may have something of value they possess, there may be something else they need from others. To have it, they will have to network. By networking, they give what they have in exchange for what they do not have, whether directly or indirectly, they participate in a process, which sustains the social structure. As regards the political system vis a vis governance, electorates possess some sort of value which can give political group the power that it desires. Whereas the electorates have no power to formulate policies which they earnestly desire, they however have voting right with which they can negotiate with political actors for development and their voice to be heard. The electorates' power is not just the voting right but also the selection of candidates that will represent them. Having given their votes to give power to a particular party and particular individuals, the party and the elected representatives are expected to implement the developmental needs for the voters i.e. the masses. This framework shows the relationship between the government, political parties and the citizenry. It is a major responsibility of national leaders to provide rules of governance and the coercive forces to keep them in order to sustain the social system while the values which individuals desire include justice, equity, security, economic empowerment and employment opportunities. As the electorates grant their supports for a party to gain power over state resources including the coercive forces thereby stating the rules of the games, such a party on assumption of power is expected to grant the values of the electorates. By so doing, the social structure gains consciousness of a process imbued with justice, fairness and equity and as this happens, the social structure experiences development. This therefore makes development a core responsibility of those providing governance. Development, which has to do with both quantitative and qualitative changes in the structure and performance of forces of production through eradication of poverty, disease, hunger, inequality, unemployment among other social problems can not meaningfully take place without good governance in place.

The question therefore is, how well has the government of Nigeria fared in carrying out this responsibility to the masses?

### **Nigeria's developmental efforts**

According to Babawale and Odukoya (2005), when the colonial administrators departed, Nigeria was to a great extent an underdeveloped country: It had a largely unproductive and weak ruling class, a distorted economy, a poverty stricken population, a political and economic system structured to respond to the dictates of international capitalists and so on. In a similar vein, Onibokun (2000) says that almost 50 years after independence, Nigeria has remained a classic case of underdeveloped country, characterized by a totally distorted and disarticulated economy, low life expectancy, a high maternal mortality ratio, high adult illiteracy level. While the impact of colonialism was disastrous, our leaders over the years have not helped matters in any way.

Practitioners and scholars of development have provided empirical evidence to show the harmful effect of lack of good governance especially on the issue of poverty. Benefits of good governance include: Political stability; provision of sound institutions; sound macro economic policies; conducive investment climate; good management of natural resources; accountability; welfare schemes; a climate free of corruption; justice and equality etc All these are essential ingredients for development. Thus good governance is an indispensable imperative for the management of a country's resources. Good governance is still a far cry in Nigeria. Corruptions, lack of accountability, lack of transparency and so on have been the thorns in the flesh of development in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the whole idea of NEPAD is based on "commitment to good governance, zero tolerance for corruption..." (Vanguard, October 1 2002)

The questions to ask about Nigeria's developmental dilemma include: 'to what extent have leaders at various levels fared in good governance which they swore to provide for the masses?' Having networked with the electorates to provide governance in exchange for the electorates' mandate and votes, to what extent have they (governments) fulfilled their own part of the obligation?

A careful assessment of all the sectors of the Nigeria economy under different administration over the years will reveal cans of worms and a great extent to which past and present leaders have succeeded in waste of the nation's resources. This view is amply supported by Nduka (2006), who said that 'apparently, there have been deficits in the national leadership either from the intellectual, moral, ideological or other points of view'. He continues, 'in my view, the weakest link in the chain of development efforts remains the weak value base which adversely affects both our individual

and collective attempts at development, including those of the leaders who are either born, selected, rigged into positions of leadership or assume the leadership of the country through the barrel of the gun'.

Looking at the issue of good governance over the past years, according to Nwagbara (2003) African leaders are yet to provide good governance necessary for effective and meaningful development. The importance of good governance in this regard can not be overemphasized. The concept of good governance, though not yet precisely defined, encompasses general values and basic freedoms that include accountability, competence, the reign of the rule of law, and absence of human rights abuse. Governance is all encompassing and it often consists of complex arrays of processes, organizations and institutions that act as channels for citizens to exercise their legal rights, attempt to resolve their differences, fulfill their obligations to the society, and express their concerns and interests. Unfortunately, good governance is still a far cry in Africa: Corruption, lack of accountability, lack of transparency and others have been a thorn in the flesh of African political development.

How come those Nigerian leaders over the years have placed their personal interests over and above the interests of the masses and the nations? The answers to this are not far fetched. One answer could be lack of understanding of the demands of public office. We can also see it in a weak and under-developed sense of citizenship and national interests. Both lead to mistaken belief that national government is a superstructure designed to control and exploit, separate and disconnected from the governed. If we accept the above, then the reasonable conclusion is that leadership manifesting in poor governance is a missing link in Nigeria's developmental process.

Taking governance as the problematic of this paper, the political memorization showcased by Nigerian political leaders comes very handy. The Nigerian polity and their office holders have come short of expectations. There seems to be no administration or regime that has not handed the citizenry a bowl full of hardship. While no human government is perfect, imperfection has become a legacy handed down from one administration to another in Nigeria.

Political office holders are known for treasury looting under the protection of 'immunity clause' while in office. The elections of many of the winners of 2007 elections in Nigeria have been subjected to scrutiny over allegations of mass rigging and disenfranchisement. Summing all these together to include political evils perpetrated by Nigerian past leaders such as disrespect for the rule of law, treasury looting running into billions of naira, political manipulation and contract sum inflation by some contemporary politicians, one may be quick to conclude that the future of this country and Africa in general is sold out and jeopardized.

Revelations from the recent probes of the power and energy sectors are serious pointers in the weak chain of poor accountability and transparency of certain leaders over the years. Why should national leaders who expended several billions of naira on various projects be unwilling to come out and explain to the masses what such expenditure achieved? Why are they not accountable for their actions and deeds when state's resources are involved? A basic answer will be found in the issue of corruption, poor accountability and weak moral chain.

**Corruption:** According to Ikeyani & Imhanlahimi (2006), corruption, manifesting in fraud, embezzlement and diversion of public funds has become a cankerworm that militates against the success of government policies and programmes. In 2005, Nigeria was ranked the sixth most corrupt nation in the world in the estimation of the Transparency International (Babawale and Odukoya 2005). Various policies have been formulated over the years to address one developmental project or the other in Nigeria, and there are evidences of diversion of funds for such projects into private pockets thereby dooming such well intended projects. For example, to enhance the supply and availability of food, a basic necessity to life, governments put in place policies for importation of fertilizer. This has later been found to have been bedeviled with over-invoicing, diversion, outright loss and so on. Similarly distribution of such to farmers has been bedeviled with various problems such as nepotism, diversion and at times total disappearance of consignments. There have been instances of where State governments procure tractors and distribute to the Local Governments for onward release to individual members of the Farmers Congress on lease, but unfortunately such tractors are never available for the intended beneficiaries. Revelations at the recent probes into the Power Sector, Energy sector (NNPC) are indications of the rotteness in our governance and if such efforts are extended to other sectors such as agriculture, similar revelations will no doubt be the result. For example, in the Punch newspaper of Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2008, a top official of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture claimed that Nigeria lost 22.2 billion naira in Fertilizer scam between 2001 and 2007.

**Public Policy and Accountability** Public policies often form the bedrock upon which developmental processes are based. Anderson (2003) defines public policy as a 'relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern.' Anderson admits that policies do not always achieve their goals but they must be designed to produce specific results in terms of providing certain benefits to the masses. According to Okoli and Onah (2002:235), 'the best way to understand the concept of public policy is to highlight some of

its basic features. To them, the basic elements upon which public policy is defined include that the policy makers usually choose specific socio-economic problems demanding attention on the basis of priorities and that solutions to the problems are so designed in such a way as to meet the desired goals.' They further outlined some characteristics to include complexity, because of the large number of institutions and interests that a public policy seeks to harmonize; the uncertainty surrounding the objective which a policy seeks to achieve; the need to define standard operation procedures which serve as a guide to the implementing agents or the evaluators, and more importantly the need for the policy to be in the interest of the public.

In a country like Nigeria, a lot of factors are responsible for failure of public policies over the years. The necessary consequences of failure of policies are that the masses are denied the benefits inherent in the policy. However the focus of this paper is not on assessing the reasons for failure of policies but to bring to the fore the role of governance in engendering an enabling environment on which public policy can survive and be profitable. Public policy is basically a process for provision of services and benefits to the citizenry, and its failure or success is dependent on the sense of accountability of the public officers.

**Accountability:** This is one of the specific areas corruption has upturned in Nigeria. Olowu (2002) defines accountability as the requirement that those who hold public trust account for the use of that trust to the citizens or their representatives. The concept underscores the obligation of an office holder to fulfill the expectations of his office. It is understood to be a measure for the results of an office holder's actions. Public accountability is a *sine qua non* for any regime that would cut out corruption and ensure public service delivery to the citizenry. Political office holders should ensure that funds meant for public use are judiciously used as such and meticulously accounted for to keep the records straight for the future.

According to Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi (2006), accountability in a democratic government is achieved in two major ways vis: the bureaucracy or government administrative machinery which is central to government administration should be answerable to the elected political officials and secondly politically elected officials should be answerable to the electorates to whom the power of governance ultimately belongs. This therefore brings to the fore the fact that elected officials are under obligation to be accountable to the electorates. To Laxmikanth (2001:193), 'the concept of accountability connotes the obligation of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their performance and the manner in which they have exercised powers conferred on them. Its main aim is to check wrong and arbitrary actions and increase efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes'.

Good governance has become so important in the contemporary world that the World Bank had begun to include it as part of the conditionality for providing soft loans and other aids to developing countries. In the words of Camdessus (1997), IMF President: 'Good governance is important for countries at all stages of development...Our approach is to concentrate on those aspects of governance that are most closely related to our surveillance over microeconomic policies, namely the transparency of government accounts, the effectiveness of public resource management, and stability and transparency of the economic and regulatory environment for private sector activity'. What therefore emerges from discussions on governance is a concocted conceptualization of good governance with serious prejudice to the ability of the government to deliver on the welfare and needs of the people, rather than the enhancement of the profit of capital, both local and international.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to give a broad overview of the role of governance in ensuring development of a nation. Looking at the theoretical framework adopted, it is obvious that Nigerian national leaders have not kept faith with their obligation under a democratic structure. Corruption, manifesting in fraud, embezzlement, diversion of resources and so on, is a major bane that needs to be addressed if Nigeria is to experience any level of development that will impact positively in the lives of the citizenry. In a country such as Nigeria where good governance has been a far cry, development will continue to be stagnant and maintaining social order could be a mirage.

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