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# Good Governance and Democratic Dividends in Nigeria: The Nexus

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**Abstract:** The economic problems facing the Nigerian state that started some decades ago have continued to increase despite the current democratic method of governance. Democracy is not only a political concept but also an economic phenomenon for the realization of what people now commonly refer to as the dividends of democracy. It is in this direction that this study seeks to explain why democratic dividends seem to have eluded Nigerians. It concludes that corruption inhibits good governance and by extension the spread of the dividends of democracy. It argues that to stop or reduce corruption, the values must change and the Nigerian must be rearmed morally.

**Key words:** Economic problem, decade, democracy, political concept, realization, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria joined the committee of independent nations on October 1st, 1960 after a long period of about 100 years under British exploitation and domination. Since the attainment of independence, the country has witnessed enormous economic and political problems.

At the economic level, the quest for development has been and still is the major desire of the larger majority of Nigerians. Majority of Nigerians saw independence as an escape route from the bad conditions of the past. They reasoned that the country will grow in leaps and bounds considering that the country was now under the control of the indigenous ruling elites.

To the greatest chagrin and consternation, the above was not to be. A few years into the independence, the economy began to show signs of stress and strains. The discovery of oil and the thoughts that this would give us the sudden leap to prosperity did not materialize. In fact, oil that was supposed to be a blessing to the Nigerian state, turned out to be the greatest problem. The oil boom that the country experienced in the 1970's did not change the economic fortunes of the people. In the 1980's the economic problems of the country became manifest in increasing unemployment, skyrocketing prices of goods and services, poverty, decreasing value of the naira, hunger, disease and penury.

Over the years, various administrations (both military and civilian) have attempted to address the above economic problems of the country. The Obasanjo military administration formulated and implemented the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme. The Shagari administration that occupied Nigerians political landscape between 1979 and 1983 vigorously pursued the Green Revolution programme. The Buhari's administration was known for his War Against Indiscipline Campaign while the Babangida administration pursued the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Since then, the Abacha administration, the Abubakar administration, the Obasanjo (civilian) administration and the Yar Adua/Goodluck administration have also presented various roadmaps intended to take Nigerians to the economic promise land.

Unfortunately, these programmes have yielded minimal or no result. This is evident in the high level of poverty, penury, squalor and hunger under which most Nigerians still live up till this date. The hopes of millions of Nigerians who thought that independence would engender better life for them have remained unfulfilled.

At the political level, the country has experienced lawlessness, violence and instability. The parliamentary democracy handed over to the political elites by the colonialist did not last up to a decade before it was swept out by the military. To be precise, by January 15th, 1966, the military took over government. Rather than assuage the ethnic tension in the country at the time, the military tended to have exacerbated it. Events happened in quick succession and a monumental and fratricidal civil war ensued in 196. The war dragged on till January 12, 1970. Between 1970 and 1979, the military occupied the political arena in Nigeria. The Nigerian political elites did not seem to have changed their ideas and approaches to political activities despite the prolonged military rule. The second attempt at liberal democracy that was ushered in

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by the military in 1979 did not last too long. In 1983, the military struck again in a coup that ended the Second Republic. The Third Republic (1991-1993) was aborted as the presidential election that would have completed the task of that administration was annulled. An interim administration that was constituted lasted only 83 days as the Abacha administration took over.

Abacha also initiated a transition programme before death took him out of Nigeria's political landscape thereby ushering in Abubakar's administration. The Abubakar administration initiated its own transition programme and successfully handed over power to the Obasanjo's administration. After 8 years of that administration, power was handed over to the Yar'Adua's administration.

Today after the death of President Yar'Adua, we are under President Goodluck Jonathan. Unfortunately, despite all the various policies of different administrations, Nigeria is still faced with numerous political and economic problems. It is in this area that good governance is urgently needed to ameliorate if not completely obliterate these problems. This study therefore, takes a critical look at the nexus between good governance and democratic dividends. It argues that the major obstacle to good governance in Nigeria is corruption.

## DEMOCRACY, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DIVIDENDS: A CONCEPTUAL EXPOSITION

Democracy is a concept that has been subjected to various and sometimes contradictory interpretations over the years. Worse still, there is a dangerous assumption that the term is known and could be explained by everybody. However, no matter the varying interpretations, the idea of equality and liberty were central to the original meaning of democracy.

According to Schumpeter (1967) the democratic method is that institutional arrangement which realizes the common good by making the people themselves diced issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will. For Cohen (1971) democracy is a system of community government in which by and large the members of the community participate directly in the making of decisions which affect them all.

According to Bryce, democracy is government in which the will of the majority of qualified citizens rules (Ben and Peters, 1959). While Plamenatz contends that democratic government means government by persons freely chosen by and responsible to the governed (Ben and Peters, 1959). On his own part, Bobbio sees democracy as a cluster of rules permitting the broadest and surest direct and indirect participation of the majority of citizens in political decisions (Onyeoziri, 1990).

Generally, from all the above, democracy is a form of government in which citizens in a state have political investments of political participation and trust. It essentially has to do with the ability of the people to control decision making. Democracy emphasizes freedom of the individual in various aspects of life, equality among citizens, justice in the relation between the people and the government and the participation of the people in choosing those in government.

Democracy therefore has two dimensions. The first dimension sees democracy as an ideal goal, aim or standard, one that has perhaps unachievable but nonetheless highly relevant not only for classifying and judging political systems but also for fashioning strategies of democratization, designing appropriate political institutions and so on. An ideal democracy is therefore conterminous with a political system that might be designed for members of an association who are willing to treat one another for political purposes as political equals.

The second dimension has to do with democracy in practice as opposed to its theory. This becomes more pertinent because as Dahl (Onyeoziri, 1990) has pointed out having rights and opportunities is not strictly equivalent to using them. The mere fact that a democratic society concedes certain rights for example to vote and be voted for to their citizens does not imply that all qualified citizens will participate in these activities. Nevertheless, the defining characters of a democracy include pluralism and multipartism including free and competitive politics, popular participation in the political process, rule of law and respect for human rights and constitutionalism or respect for the rules of the game.

The term governance like democracy is not amenable to a one sentence and uncontroversial definition. The concept is notoriously slippery and loosely used. Despite the above problem, Adejumobi (1995) clearly identifies two broad dimensions of governance. First governance implies the efficient management of state institutions. Little wonder a scholar argues that governance is the acceptable face of spending cuts.

The second conceptual notion of governance which is more holistic has to do with steering society and the state towards the realization of collective goal (Adejumobi, 1995). The term good governance is a logical deduction from the term governance. Since governance is carried out in the interest of the generality of the people, good governance is putting the people first. It is governance that is carried out in accordance with legal

and ethical principles as conceived by society. Dividends simply means a quantity divided or to be divided into equal parts. It is also seen as a sum of money to be distributed according to some fixed scheme as profit on shares, share of surplus or assets or the like (Fund and Waghalls, 1953).

## GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC DIVIDENDS IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS AND THE PROBLEM

The above title begins with an assumption that democracy has a goal. The goal is to bring about some form of dividends. Since democracy is about the people, their wishes and aspirations then the dividends of democracy is simply how democracy can bring about development in the society through good governance. We may ask what is development?

The term development over the years has been conceived as a process of economic and social change with the aim of achieving better life. Only a few analysts has stopped to ask themselves of these changes could be worse for some sectors of society and better for others. It is very useful to retain the positive value placed on the term development and see development as first of all the escape of man out of the conditions of exploitation, poverty and oppression and that development involves changes in the basic institutions and structures of society.

Rodney (1972) sees development in human society as a many-sided process. To him, at the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. He further argued that some of these indicators are completely moral categories and are very complicated to evaluate. At the level of the social group, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships.

Schumpeter (1967) in his own contribution to the theory of economic development defined development as only such changes in economic life that are not forced upon it from without but arise by its own initiative from within. For Todaro (1977), development is a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization of an entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in income and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in particular attitude and in many cases even customs and beliefs.

In Dudley (1972)'s view, the questions to ask about a country's development are: What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to poverty?

What has been happening to inequality? If all these have declined from high levels then no doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result development even if per capita income doubled.

No matter what may be said about development, it has become clear that the concept of development has undergone profound changes over the years. The very meaning of development has been altered from an almost elusive preoccupation with aggregate economic growth to a much broader interpretation that encompasses the questions of poverty in equality and unemployment. The fundamental conception of development are questions of poverty in equality, standard of living, education, roads, electricity, health services, unemployment and other variables that have direct impact on the people. It is only good governance in a democracy that can bring all the above to the people and here lies the nexus between good governance and democratic dividends. Unfortunately, Nigerian democracy has failed woefully to bring these dividends to the people. This is clearly evident in the debilitating state of the infrastructure, mass poverty, penury, unemployment, decreasing standard of living, squalor in equality and many other certainly innumerable problems confronting the Nigerian state and its citizens. The question that logically comes out of the above is why has Nigerian democracy failed to deliver the dividends of democracy? The answer in the view of the researchers of this study is the high level of corruption among the political elites in Nigeria.

According to Akobo, Nigeria is the nearest thing to purgatory on earth, only short of the actual pronouncement of the judgement and punishment in hell. In the view of Onyeukure (Igbinovia, 2003), the Nigerian nation is a fraud. General Oladipo Diya also confessed that in Nigeria, all of us are corrupt. Also, contributing to the literature on corruption, Air Iyare argued that the only exclusive sphere in which the world has to learn from Nigeria is in the techniques of corruption. For him, the average Nigerian has six external senses instead of the normal five and the sixth is for corruption (Igbinovia, 2003).

That corruption is a problem threatening the socio-economic and political development process is common knowledge. Since democracy represents the framework for organizing the society today, it is important to get things right and not allow corruption to distort the political and economic system. What is corruption and what are its possible effects with particular reference to the dividends of democracy?

Akinseye-George (2000) conceives of corruption as including all forms of improper or selfish exercise of power and influence attached to a public as well as private office. Nye (1967) sees corruption as behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private (regarding close family, personal, private clique) pecuniary or status gains or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of public action.

According to various authors, corruption ranges from acceptance of money or other rewards for awarding contracts, violation of procedure to advance personal interest, diversion of public resources, etc. It is the misuse of authority. It also includes illegal and unconstitutional activities.

The impact of corruption on any society is certainly negative. Corruption leads to drastic reduction of economic growth and development. It scares away potential investors that would have correspondingly led to a boost in economic activities. Looting of government treasury by the political elites would also mean that very negligible amount would be left for developmental activities. By extension, corruption creates a high rate of unemployment, poverty, inequality, squalor and penury. Finally, corruption destroys good governance and cripples the realization of the dividends of democracy. Without corruption the dividends of democracy will flow to the grassroot.

## CONCLUSION

The study has so far taken a critical look at the nexus between good governance and democratic dividends. The study concludes that for the people to be positively affected by democracy, good governance is a fundamental and inevitable condition. However, good governance has continuously eluded Nigerians because of the high level of corruption amongst the political or governing elites. It is in this wise that we must insist that the leaders and public functionaries are accountable for their actions in public life. We must rebuild the Nigerian nation, re-invent the Nigerian, reinvigorate the government and social structures. Indeed, the Nigerian must be rearmed morally, be born-again not so much in the churchian sense but also in the psycho-moral sense. We must strive to imbibe the ethic of hard work and genuine living (Igbinovia, 2003).

Furthermore, the leaders must embrace integrity, probity and high standard of self-discipline. They must be patriotic and naturalistic. The Nigerian press should also continue to educate the public on the evils of corruption. They should use their medium to state unequivocally that crime is bad and illegal. Finally, to reduce corruption will involve renewing the work ethics, respect for the dignity of every human being contempt for wealth not created from identifiable quest, transparency and accountability in government and building a new social order driven by new values (Igbinovia, 2003).

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