

Good Governance and the Challenge of Development in Nigeria: The Benue Experience

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Abstract

The return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 was supposed to usher in remarkable progress in areas of personal freedom, liberty and above all development for the people as compared to the military regime. But since then, there has not been the desired development. This study seeks to examine the relationship between good governance and development and to identify the various causes and problems associated with bad governance causing underdevelopment. It is the position of the paper that, Benue is underdeveloped not as the form of government that is in place, but as a result of non-accountability, embezzlement and corruption. There it recommends that, the way forward and for development to take place is for the Leaders to embrace good governance, accountability. Finally, for Benue state to achieve its desired development, political office holders should emerge from a legitimate process right from the political parties' primaries to the election proper. The kind of political office holders we have did not emerge from a transparent and legitimate process which eventually led to bad governance as is evidenced by the gross underdevelopment of the state.

Keywords: Good Governance, Development, Benue State, Democracy

Introduction

Democracy is indeed government by the majority through their elected representatives. This means that it connotes the idea of representativeness and responsibility in the whole process of governance, which is central for any meaningful development to take place. This is to say that one of the fundamental reasons why the state was put in place, as postulated by the social contract theorists was to give the state powers by the citizens so as to care for them, this was as a result of the inability of the citi/ens to achieve *or* attain such responsibilities individually. According to Johari (1989:107) citing Thomas Hobbes:

Life in the state of nature was brutish, nasty and short, as a result of this un-conducive atmosphere for man. to operate freely; compelled man to surrender his rights to a constituted assembly for governance, and in return the state was supposed to enhance good life or well-being of the citizens.

With the advent of democracy in Nigeria, the citizens at different political era have given their mandates to their representatives, who now serve as leaders, both in the Executive and the Legislature, to steer the affairs of the state. On the other hand, those entrusted with such responsibilities are in turn supposed to champion the course of development so as to better the lives of its citi/enry, (Dudley, 1982). It is however interesting to note that the quality of governance in Nigeria and Benue State in particular has not remarkably improved the standard of living of the people. Surprisingly, despite the country's abundant endowment of both natural and human resources, the state is still struggling with development.

Benue State was created in 1976, (41) forty-one years ago, but the state is retrogressive in terms of development. This is not as a result of lack of natural resources or manpower but the inability of both the civilian and military governments to consistently pursue policies and programmes that are development oriented. These leaders did not create an enabling atmosphere for development to consolidate, and this is to imply that the concept of good governance was not on their agenda. Since then, there has been a very weak link between democracy, good governance and development. Issues such as the observance of the rule of law, accountability and transparency, political stability, good infrastructural facilities and good educational/health system are some of the characteristics of development but these are indeed lacking in the state.

In any given society, good governance precedes development. The concept of good governance centers on the ability of the leaders in control of state power to formulate policies and programmes that will have direct impact in addressing the needs of the people. Commenting on the issue of good governance for attainment of development, Clinton (2009:2) holds that:

What Africa needs is not more strong men, it needs stronger democratic institutions, that will stand the test of time, for

without good governance, no amount of oil, no amount of aid, no amount of efforts can guarantee Nigeria's success, but with good governance nothing can stop Nigeria.

Hence, it is clear, that for any meaningful development to take place, there must be leaders who are willing to embrace the concept of good governance as a benchmark for governance, and by doing so development will be inevitable, since Benue State and the country at large are blessed with both human and material resources yet to be properly harnessed.

It is against this backdrop that this analysis looks inwards on the relevance of good governance and why it should be embraced by our political leaders in Nigeria and Benue in particular to solve the problem of under- development. There are a lot of challenges hampering the process of development in all the spheres of affairs. This is largely due to the failure of political leadership to entrench good governance in the state.

Conceptual Clarifications

In elucidating the concept of good governance, it is imperative to first understand what governance is and what it means. Governance is traced to the Latin verb "Gubernare" which means steering a ship, and it is from this particular word that the concepts; governs, government and governance are derived. Governance according to Anger (2007:3) citing the World Bank's Report of 1986, is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. The notion of Good Governance first appeared in a 1989 World Bank Report on Africa, which defines it as:

...exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. Good Governance includes some or all of the following features: an efficient public service; an independent judicial system and legal frameworks to enforce contract; the accountable administration of public funds; an independent public auditor, responsible to a representative legislature, respect for the rule of law and human rights at all levels of government; a pluralistic institutional structure and a free press. (Stein 2009:6).

Good Governance drawn from the above analysis can be linked as policy framework, because it imposes demands on policy makers in their exercise of power. According to Hamdok (2001:2) it encompasses:

.. an effective state that possesses an enabling political and legal environment for economic growth and equitable distribution of national resources. Civil societies and communities, are present in the policy making process, with the state facilitating political and social interaction and fostering societal cohesion and stability.

This also includes a private sector that is allowed to play an independent role in the economy. All the above elements, when put together with purposeful leadership in place monitors policies that are implemented and are essential for sustainable development and good governance in any credible democracy. Good governance is the respect for the basic rights of individuals as enshrined in the Constitution of the country, adherence to the rule of law, transparency and accountability in handling government affairs in terms of managing the country's resources, (Burns; 2000). Burns further argues that the standard of living of the people will definitely improve and the problem of underdevelopment of developing countries will be solved if fundamental human rights are respected, the Constitution obeyed and resources are properly managed. All (2015), sees good governance to mean greater accountability by public officials, transparency in governmental procedures as well as predictability in government behaviour and in the political system. Good governance here suggests managerial and organizational efficiency, accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness to the public, transparency in decision-making and pluralism in policy options and choices; also it involves popular participation, rule of law, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness. (Aciebayo 2001:28). Therefore, good governance indeed portends the ability and capability of public office holders to ensure and guarantee the political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the citizens, (Atake and Dodo, 2010). By implication, the policies made by public officers should have a direct impact on the people within the political system.

To Abagen (2006:26), good governance means ruling in a fair, free and consensual manner. This also means that, the tenets of

democratic political rules are adhered to. It also implies that there is political liberty in the alternative choice of party ideologies, candidates and even forms and types of governance. He further buttresses that, good governance entails ruling a political system in which the welfare and concerns of the people are the first priority of government. From the above conception, good governance embraces all the things that will make life more meaningful to the people by the government, from choosing their leaders down to participating in the affairs of governance. Good governance requires a clear process of decision-making and public policy formulation. Government structures are one means through which decisions are arrived at and implemented, but also both formal and informal organizations may sometimes influence the decision making process. Good governance assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. With good governance, it is believed that certain things that are wrong in society will begin to straighten out, societal morality will improve, good education will become easily accessible to all, tolerance will improve among the citizenry as they have less burdens to carry, justice will no longer be easily sought via violence; and a lasting democratic and individual peace will be closer to mankind, (Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1991; Burns, 2000). According to Kempe and Amoako (2003:30) Good governance entails the existence of efficient and accountable institutions; political, judicial, administrative, economic, corporate and entrenched rules that promote development, protects human rights, respects the rule of law and ensures that people are free to participate in and be heard on decisions that affect their lives. Good governance includes the following features; it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effectively efficient, equitable, and inclusive and above all, maintains the rule of law. It ensures that corruption is minimized. To Elaigwu (2005) this assertion indicates that good governance, should involve both the government and the governed which in turn will bring development to the people since the views of the minority in the society, are taken into consideration as well as the wishes of the most vulnerable, which constitute the major part of the society.

Development on the other hand is an objective that nations have sought to achieve, and includes every struggle and attempt aimed at improving the structures of the society like government institutions, culture of the people and provision of infrastructural facilities, (Kanbur, 2006). All these pathways are geared towards attaining development. The desire to attain rapid growth and development in the domestic economy is a common feature of countries all over the world that have attained independence. In their quest for growth and development, these countries embraced various policies which they attest can accelerate their attainment but here in Nigeria and Benue State in particular; such policies have not yielded the desired results due to poor governance.

Development as defined by the United Nations is seen from the human perspective. It involves having the basic necessities of life; these include having access to medication and a healthy environment, adequate clothing as well as sufficient food, (Sumner and Tribe, 2008:1). According to Seers (1969:2) development can be assessed thus: what has happened to poverty? What has happened to unemployment? And what has happened to inequality? When the above stated problems are reduced in a society, such a society is said to have attained development. Rodney (1972:9) asserts that development is the ability of the state to harness its natural endowment for the wellbeing of the citizens. The inability of the state to tap arid effectively use its natural resources can be seen as a strong feature of underdevelopment.

To Sorkaa (2003:6) development involves human and material components. To him development in whatever form must involve economic development, which is a process of joint or collective production in the mobilization and management of some or combination of all factors of production. He further argues that development is also social and political. Political development to him is a process of gradual socio-political change in which the populace increases the awareness of their capacities and knowledge to organize effectively themselves in the acquisition political power. This situation enables them to participate in the decision-making process, create and allocate resources equitably and efficiently among individuals. By this definition it means that development readily demands man's knowledge of who gets what and when in the production process which is the pivot of economic

progress.

Further explaining development from the scientific perspective, Sorkaa (2003:8) asserts that, a scientific definition of development has to commence with the concept of the mode of production. This refers to the manner in which goods and services are produced in a society. The mode of production comprises of two components: forces of production and the social relations of production. The component of productive forces focuses on the forces that propel production to higher levels like, natural resources and manpower, especially science, technology and industrialization. Therefore, the extent to which the above factors are improved on, explains the level of development in any given society. Unfortunately, Nigeria tends to be on the other side of the divide or equation, because she has a high level of developed manpower but its natural resources are not fully tapped.

The second component of the mode of production in the scientific analysis of development has to do with the social relations of production. This simply means the kind of relationship people find themselves in the process of production. There exist two groups in this process: those who own and control the means of production and the other group who neither own nor control, but have their labour power to hire. The relationship between the two groups is not a cordial one, since the haves tend to exploit the have nots by trying to maintain the status quo for the haves while they have nots seek for change. This accounts for class struggle, which to some extent is the key to attaining change or development in the society.

The Social Relations of Production as an important component of development, it involves progressive changes that engross the sharing of the products of an economy. This sharing of the proceeds of the production process consequently leads to quality in the solutions to the basic needs that accrue to majority of the people in a historically determined economic system. Development therefore comprises the creative combination of these components; productive forces and the social relations of productions. Development can thus be quickly arrived at when more emphasis is placed on the quality of rural development. The people who form the larger part of society are then given a totally free atmosphere to contribute to the policies that target them in terms of

development.

According to Sen (1989:81) development encompasses the economy, political, socio-cultural and the environmental dimension. While economic and social progress and the elimination of poverty are the objectives of development, it includes also freedom from fear and arbitrary arrest, free speech, free association and the right to vote and be voted for. It is under-development in political culture to rig elections and reject legitimate electoral petitions. Development is also an elastic concept that embraces the total transformation of the society, a shift from the old ways of thinking and the old forms of social and economic organization to new ones. It is a change in the way the society functions- norms, expectations and institutions. This scenario has presented a situation of lessons to be learnt from the Asian countries, which have moved away from the old forms of both social and economic organization and in the process have erased their names from third world status.

Therefore, development in any given society can be arrived at when more emphasis is placed on the quality of rural development, since that is where the majority of the people in the society reside. The people must not merely be consulted, but should be given a platform to indicate their interest in the areas that are topmost in terms of their needs and priority. In this discourse development implies improvement in the socio-economic life of Nigerians. This study shares the view of Goulet (1971) that the core values of development are life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. These are the same value platforms that the concept of good governance hinges its consistent relevance. Life sustenance refers and relates to the provision of basic human needs to raise people out of poverty such as qualitative food, education, housing and clothing. Self-esteem is concerned with independence and self-respect. Boeniniger, (1999) and Allen and Thomas (2000) agree that no country that is exploited or dependent on another for basic human needs and industrialization can claim to be developed. Freedom indicated here as a core value implies freedom from want, ignorance and squalor.

Brief History of Benue State

What is today Benue State was created on February 3rd 1976, by the then I lead of State, General Murtala Mohammed. The State derives its name from River Benue, the second largest river in Nigeria. The State is located in the middle belt zone of Nigeria and shares boundary with five other states namely; Nasarawa to the North, Taraba to the Iast, Cross River to the South-East, Enugu to the South-West and Kogi to the West. The capital of Benue State is Makurdi and is located at the Northern border along the two banks of the River Benue. Other major towns in the State are Gboko, Adikpo, Vandeikya, Katsina-Ala, Otukpo, LJgbokolo and Adoka. (Benue State Ministry of Information, 2010).

The appellation of the state is "The Food Basket of the Nation". This is basically because of the abundance of its agricultural resources. The state is a major producer of food crops such as yams, rice, bean seed, sorghum, maize, soya beans and a wide range of other crops such as cassava, sweet potatoes, cocoyam, ginger, sugarcane, millet and groundnut. Others include palm oil; mango, cashew, orange etc. which are also grown in large quantities in the area. Livestock like goats, pigs, poultry, sheep and cattle are reared all over the state while the River Benue itself serves as a fishing ground. The state is made up of several ethnic groups; the major ones are the Tiv, Idoma and igede while others include Etulo, Abakpa, Jukun, Hausa, Akweya and Nyifon are the minorities. The Tiv are predominantly farmers and are also known for their hospitality and rich cultural heritage. Benue State possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which finds expression in colorful exotic clothes, masquerades, sophisticated music and dance such as the Tiv Anchanakupa, Mamiwata, Ingyough/Tsuwe-tsele and the Idoma Anuwomowo and Odaburu. The Tiv Kwaghir (Puppet Theatre) provides a memorable entertainment of Tiv folktale and social commentary. (Benue State, Ministry of Information, 2010).

Good Governance in Benue State since 1999

Nigeria saw herself into another epoch of democratic civilian government which was introduced on the 29th day of May 1999, with Olusegun Obasanjo as the President and George Akume as

Governor of Benue State. The swearing in ceremony which was held at the IBB Square in Makurdi was filled to capacity with party members and well-wishers. The euphoric crowd was present not just for the new political leadership, but also in support of democratic rule, after a prolonged period of military dictatorship. The people's expectations were indeed very high, since they felt a sense of hope that democratic governance would improve their lives through its obvious benefits, (dividends of democracy). Mantu, (2009) maintains that democracy is closely interconnected to good governance in its projection of certain principles such as popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultations and periodic elections. If democracy, is practiced as envisaged by the liberal school of thought, the situation of bad governance in liberal democratic systems which connotes representation would be virtually non-existent. This results in a sociopolitical environment where the electorate is free to choose their representatives through periodic transparent elections. This is what the expectation was in Benue State. Participation here connotes getting involved and determining outcomes.

Other aspects of democracy entail responsible and responsive leadership, accountability in governance, efficient service delivery that meets the needs and expectations of the populace which maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain. These factors also include equality before the law, the rule of law, fairness and justice and above all transparency and accountability in public conduct, (Stiglitz, 2002; Campbell 1, 2008). When these mentioned elements of liberal democracy are adhered to by the leadership the debates on good or bad governance diminish. The recurrent situation in Benue State however is not satisfactory. In existence rather, is the opposite of what a true democratic setting postulates and the negative implications for meaningful development. In reality these are characterized by a high level of dependency on the West in terms of major dealings, as in the case of technological advancement which we lack as a country.

The Challenges of Development in Benue State

Benue State is faced with the challenges of development and governance not because the state lacks the basic needs for development which are human and material resources, but because the leaderships have failed in their quest to actualize good governance in terms of what they are expected to do for the people. It is noteworthy that as regards basic democratic practice what obtains is rather a warped leadership recruitment process. Local Government elections for instance are selection instead of election processes. By this, the leaders in the state consistently display insensitivity to the electorate, are obtuse to the people the dealings of government, show no sense of remorse *what so ever*, (Jibo, 2014). Another point to be made here is that various leaderships usually articulate and produce extensive governance and development plans that more or less reflect the previously indicated conceptualizations of good governance. The Benue Advance Plan by George Akume and Our Benue, Our Future by Gabriel Suswam his successor are cogent examples. Assessing this period the major challenge to good governance was the lack of strong alignment of the development blueprints of these two administrations on one hand and the gradual lack of political will to adhere to good governance tenets. *The Benue Advance Plan* was in operation from 29th, May 1999 to 29th, May 2007 while *The Our Benue, Our Future* was from 29th May, 2007 to 29th May, 2015.

While these two plans were not strictly hinged on the doctrine of good governance, they were viable alternatives and were close to its tenets. The pattern of development of governance plans in Benue State is that there is usually a lopsided concentration on material and pecuniary issues than intangible and psychological ones. Most times these intangible issues form the fulcrum for the attainment of material objectives. Good Governance prescribes an enabling environment where the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, right to franchise (voting) and freedom of association are consistently expressed and thrive. Both the Benue Advance Plan and *The Our Benue, Our Future* blueprints are rather silent

on the issue of protection and enforcement of fundamental human and political rights.

In fact the political socialization process by the governments in power from 1999 to 2015 practically and violently caged the opposition which is not only a critical component in the democratic process but also a statutory check on the excesses of the executive arm of government. Therefore political rights were consistently violated. Persons perceived with divergent views were consistently hounded, threatened and often killed, (Jibo, 2014, George-Genyi, 2013). The outcomes of the 2004 local government elections in Kwande Local Government Area were inconclusive due to interference from the ruling administration. In the 1999 Local Government elections there was a spread in opposition parties winning at least a third of electoral constituencies. Not the same can be said about the local government elections for 2004, 2007 and 2012 in which the ruling party used the power of incumbency to hijack the electoral process and win. Violent conflicts that destroyed property and claimed numerous lives were the result of these unfortunate situations.

Another challenge was the poor levels of political will to see through various developmental policies. Throughout the period from 1999 to 2015 not a single viable enterprise was successfully established thus deepening the economic woes of the people. The Benue Advance Plan and the Our Benue, Our Future Plan were not strictly followed by government. A good example is the Makurdi Water Works Project that was on the state budget from 2000 to 2015 without the people getting potable water. Corruption was also an issue as officials of government were arrested and arraigned on charges of fraud, misappropriation and embezzlement. In fact George- Genyi (2013:159) asserts that:

It is common knowledge that the governance project is quite expensive as those who are in government, both the executive and legislative engage in scandalous, conspicuous consumption lifestyles at the detriment of the provision of social services to the people who continue to wallow in abject poverty.

In both administrations these development plans were more or less jettisoned going by the actions of government thus compromising any attempts at good governance

Conclusion: Towards Ensuring Good and Democratic Governance

It is indeed quite glaring that clue to the nature and character of governance since 1999 there is a huge development deficit due to a poor appreciation of the principles of good governance by the political leaderships. The symptoms and consequences of bad governance are corruption, injustices, inequity, integration crisis, ethno religious feuds and Benue has experienced a sizeable amount of these factors. However, as regards good governance, the most critical issues are those of integrity and freedom.

Corruption has indeed generated unimaginable levels of poverty in the state. This lack of integrity and political freedom are the main factors that have severely compromised good governance. Poverty in the vast majority of the populace makes it nearly impossible for them to properly articulate problems and arrive at solutions. This situation leads to a vulnerable populace that is easy to manipulate and victimize. Due to the fact that poverty is also a weapon in the hands of the political elite for further manipulation and exploitation, it is further perpetuated to maintain the grips of the political elites on the society. Therefore, to promote good governance viable anti-corruption policies and practices that encourage a more transparent leadership recruitment process devoid of rhetoric must be put in place. In addition, the legislature and the judiciary must become proactive to reduce administrative and social injustice. Their capacities must be improved to enhance their functionality as a healthy and sound judiciary and legislature are sine qua non for good and democratic governance.

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