



## ABSTRACT

*Democracy is a fundamental concept that has been widely accepted/adopted and practiced among countries of the world, intellectuals/scholars/political leaders as the best option igniting good governance and national development worldwide and Nigeria in particular. This paper agreed that constitutional democracy is the best principles if adapted will shower blessings*

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## EMOCRACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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### Introduction

Since the return of democracy in Nigeria which saw the emergence of democratically elected leaders or government on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, many Nigerians have become skeptic on whether the current dispensation can sustain national security, integrity and unity of this country in its various ramifications. This is justifiable through Nigerian passed experiences in other Republics.

Democracy is however, concerned with the acknowledgment of the rights and obligations or procedures that secure rights and ensure that obligations or procedures that secure rights are fulfilled through its principles or rule of law, institution and separation of powers. Others include political participation, delegated legislature and representative government. The ultimate goal of democracy is to cater for the welfare of its citizens by protecting and securing lives and property and their rights. Thus, the credibility and legitimacy of any democratic government or political system of a state is



anchored on this premise In t his regard, Apeikerd Washima demonstrated that, a look at the political system in Nigeria since 1960 clearly reveals that a lot needs to be done to realize this objective. The myriad of challenges bedeviling Nigeria is a clear manifestation of the ugly, unwanted, unprecedented and unwholesome issues affecting the masses. Resources are not fairly distributed among the masses that is why there are regular and persistent unemployment,

*and dividends of democracy to the masses and the country at large as well as stability and national development. The paper however, outlines some democratic bottleneck as it affects the running and practice of democratic government in Nigeria. These includes; corruption, insecurity, political thugs and thuggery, lack of good leadership quality, poverty, unemployment, lack of vision and mission statement/lack of good governance from the ruling elites amongst others has been a major problem affecting development in Nigerian society. In the light of foregoing, the study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Under the primary sources, oral interviews were conducted among the political class as well as the masses while the secondary sources was the review of textbooks, periodicals, internet service and other unpublished materials such as seminar and conference papers, project/dissertation/thesis among others materials relevant to the study. The study is timely and significant because it added value to the practice of democracy if adhere strictly to the principle/tenets of democracy as well as contribution to knowledge. The findings of the study revealed that the role played by the political leadership in Nigeria is grossly inadequate because they have not meet the yearnings and aspirations of the Nigeria people. The paper therefore, on the basis of the above recommends amongst other things in order to achieve a virile, strong and sound democracy in Nigeria society.*

*Keywords: Democracy, National, Development, Experience, Issues, and way-forward*



religious/communal crisis, youth restiveness, electoral malpractice among others.

In democratic government, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, honesty and above all transparency are the fundamental building block. In his words, Dakyen, posted that, fundamental rights, improvement in the rule of law, transparency and accountability can only be guaranteed within the orbit of good governance, a platform provided through effective and genuine democratic process. When democracy is practiced the way it should, there will be development that could be described as national development. However, this is very difficult to come by. Therefore, democratization does not solely depend on the creation of the basis institutions of democracy but to a large extent on the creation of the right environment for the institution to survive and function. The paper reiterates that democracy and development co-habit and inactivity of the former will surely destroyed the later. The paper will further look at democracy and national development extensively as well as the challenges as it affects national development in Nigeria. Finally, conclusion and recommendations shall be drawn for a better Nigerian if properly adjusted to and will surely achieve the desire National Development we are struggling for.

### **Research methodology**

Democracy as a concept have attracted the attention of scholars in the recent times. However, one problem of this concept is that, it has been conceived by different scholars in various dimensions and views. And arises with the involvement of other academic disciplines in its handling, and because different disciplines have their own traditions, norms, perspective and ideas, in carry out a research. In the light of this, one can hardly introduce technical terms that have been developed within the framework of one discipline without translating them into the language of other relevant field of study.

The methodological approach to this research is primarily targeted at providing a coherent interpretation of all the sources and data that have been used in this work. Many sources are implored in reconstruction of any aspect of the past human activities if it is to be regarded and



considered reliable and historically admissible. And this research work is therefore not an exception. The sources used in this particular work are many, varied and are often classified into primary and secondary sources. Among the primary sources are oral interviews which have been and will be conducted with well-informed personalities and will be subjected to critical analyses and interpretation. Equally close examination will be extended to the use of secondary sources comprising mainly of text books, journals, seminar and conference papers, Dissertations, Thesis and projects among others.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Democracy:** It has been noted and accepted that Democracy as a concept have no universal acceptable definition even through all definition, from and amongst various scholars are heading toward the same direction, that's meaning or saying the same thing. As an ideology as well as principle is widely accepted as oath of modern governance. The promise of democracy is anchored on popular participation of the people in political processes of any given nation. Although, the concept coins in various terms, from classical democracy to liberal democracy Baradat (1979) and African democracy Ake (2001). Despite complexity and interpretation by different scholars, societies and writers within the democratic institutions have collectively come to identify common features and characteristics of what democracy is all about. From Abraham's definition to Robert's conception of democracy, the hope of the people has remained one of the permanent fundamental features as they are to enjoy the dividends of democracy such as freedom from poverty, employment and respect for fundamental human rights, access to free and compulsory education, security as well as social infrastructures.

In the light of the forgoing, Gokehale (2013), seems democracy as a multi headed concept and a component of several elements involving political ideas, economic and social force, ethical principles, a form of government and a way of life. As a way of life democracy involves freedom to make choice what one does, where he lives and how he uses his earnings, the operations of institutions, the home, the church, local,



state and federal governments, the rights of justice and fairness, the absence of social class barriers and equality of opportunity among the people. Ojo (2006), argued that it is set of institutions that fulfill at least two essential requirements. It must elicit as accurately as possible opinion of many people as possible and who shall be their representations and how the state ought to be governed.

Okeke (2012), sees democracy as a matter of rights and obligations and or procedure that secures rights and ensure that obligation is or can be fulfilled. As a political system, democracy starts with the assumption of popular sovereignty, vested the ultimate political power in the people. It presupposes that man can control his destiny, that he can make moral judgment and practical decisions in his daily life. It implies a continuing search for truth in the sense of man's pursuit of improved ways of building social institutions and ordering human relations Garba (2007), stated that democracy is derived from the Greek words "demo" and Kratis" (authority or rule). It implies the authority or rule of the people. To the ancient Greeks, direct participation of all male adults was therefore possible due to the relatively small population. Modern democracy however, is seen as representative or indirect due to the complexity of modern government and large population. Thus, democracy is a form of government which citizens elect representatives who will govern on their behalf and according to the wishes of the majority. In such the rule of the majority, individuals and majority rights must be respected in accordance with the laws or constitution of the land. It implies that elected representatives must operate within the ambit of the constitution and not arbitrarily. Dakyen (2014), "Democracy whether classical or society democratic or socialist talks about representative government and the empowerment of the people" Sallah (2008) opines that, "Democracy is fundamentally about exercise of power by the people... it should principally focus on how far they go in exercising direction and control over those representative in order to ensure the protection and promotion of their rights and the enhancement of their general welfare.



### Two main types of Democracy

- a. **Direct Democracy:** This is where all the citizens attend the Assembly and take part in decision making in order to govern the state or the society. This type of democracy was practiced in ancient small Greek city states.
- b. **Indirect or Representative Democracy:** In this type of democracy, the citizens through election elect those who will represent and govern the state on their behalf. This type of democracy replaced the direct democracy in modern states as it is no more possible for everybody to gather in one place in order to take decisions to govern the state as a result of the large size and population of the modern states. Nigerian, America among others countries of the world practiced this system.

### Features, attributes or characteristics of Democracy

- a. Regular and periodic elections;
- b. Assertion of the principles of the rule of law in the constitution and its observance;
- c. Majority rule in the country;
- d. Respect for the rights of the minority groups;
- e. Equality before the law;
- f. Guaranteeing fundamental human rights;
- g. Existence of party system;
- i. Free, credible and fair elections;
- j. Equal political rights to vote and be voted for;
- k. There must be an independent judiciary

However, democracy is anchored on popular participation of the masses in political processes of their country, as they are made to enjoy the dividends of democracy such as reduction in poverty, employment opportunities, respect for fundamental human right, access to free medical and education services. Others include; good network of roads, protection of lives and property and other means that would better the live and wellbeing of the people. It is no gain saying that the Nigerian political class and politicians in their intellectual parochialism perceive



the concept of democracy, in its most pedestrian understanding to mean provision of social infrastructures and by doing so circumvented the critical indices of democracy and by negating the forces of democratic norms and value in our fatherland.

### **National Development**

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, sees development as the process of gradually becoming bigger, stronger, better or more advanced. This simple means the advancement of socio-economic, culture cum political activities a country could cater for its citizens. However, Sale (2014), argued that National Development can be referred to as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of every persons in any given nation.

Ekpo (1990) also agrees that development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the nation especially those who are poor. He further opines that the most often than not, the term development is used in an exclusive economic sense, the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features. In his contribution to the meaning of development, Dudley (1969) argues that, the questions to ask about a country's development are: what has been happen to poverty, unemployment and inequality? If all these have declined from high levels beyond all doubt then, this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been going worse, it would be strange to call the result development even if per capital income doubled. This definition is centered on the improvement of the living condition of the citizens, and it means that economy growth without development.

Rodney (1972) again argued that development in human society is many sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increased in skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well being... At the level of the society groups, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations... in the past, development has always meant the increase ability to guard the independence of social group. For real development to emerge, the following were advocated:



- (i) Free, compulsory and universal education
- (ii) Improvement in educational and training for the working population.
- (iii) Raising the standard of living of the people
- (iv) Improvement in the health of the people, by all round provision of health facilities.
- (v) Make sure that level of consumption of materials social and spiritual goods and services are raised.

Diejomoh (1972) also views national development as a process of increasing the level of per capital income of a nation as well as the standard of living of the national population which is measured in terms of food and nutritional level, health, education, housing, recreation and security. Coombs and Ahmed (1974) see national development as a profound transformation of social and economic structures, institutions, relationships and processes in a National Geographical area. Based on this and for the purpose of the subject matter, one could view development as borne out of genuine and the needs to change beliefs, attitude, norms, value as well as old ways of achieving goals for more pragmatic, dynamic effective and efficient social economic and political transformation of any given nation. This definition means that, development implies improving the quality of life and the wellbeing of the people. In other words, it implies provision of basic social infrastructures, increased food production, improved employment opportunities and increased income.

However, the term national development is multi-faceted and spans diversion of the life of the nation. The development of a country should be evidence sound and productive technology as well as socio-economic and political activities of the state. As all aspect, may not be precisely equivalent in the magnitude of development recorded therein, it require some balance or spread such that there is no serious lopsidedness in the developmental character of the nation. In the area of technology, development means the ability of a country to prove some practical evidence of technological self-reliance. In this context implies that the country requires a minimum of external aid to cope up with the demands





of the critical aspects of life where the true application or scientific ideas, skills gadgets and knowledge are ascertain. Such country is not just only a consumer but also a producer of the said technology, which also possesses the ability and energy to maintain or repair broken down machinery of various sorts. For sound technological advancement to come to play, a country must have the capacity or ideas to speak and understand the technological terminologies of the western world in modern times and courageously engage in such high technology areas as space travel, nuclear science, offshore oil drilling, electromagnetic radiation, radiation medicine, cell biochemistry among others or at least in the intermediate and relatively low level technology areas as health technology; food production, bomber harvest and preservation architecture, transport and communication, domestic electrification and construction works and special skills in exploiting most of her mineral, water and forest resources.

An understanding of the above analysis of development proved that development can be seen as the progressive movement of a country that involves not only economic growth, but also some general inclusive concept such as provision of health delivery services, sound education, equitable distribution of resources, strong and viable electricity, good road network among other essential services and infrastructural development all with a view to improve the living standard of the people. If we accepted this, then national development can be referred as total development in the area of socio-political, economic as well as cultural development of any nation. On this notes, it is imperative to conclude that the pride of any government or nation is the attainment of development so that its citizen can derive natural happiness through good governance.

### **Democracy and National Development: some contending issues**

The return of Nigeria to democracy on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999 (Fourth Republic) till date after the demise of first, second and the aborted third Republic was an attempt to review the image of democracy in Nigeria which has been bastardized by the military regimes and the so-called politicians in Nigeria. The Nigerian people at this particular time have expected with



feeling of excitement that the new political leaders/elites on the corridor of power and democratic government shall bring the needed accelerated development in all sphere of life in Nigerian society. It was also expected that the political class would definitely address the question of social – political and economic trauma affecting the nation. These includes: insecurity, mass unemployment, poverty, poor governance, corruption, ethno-religions crisis among others. However, seventeen years of Nigeria into Fourth Republic, the extent of which these issues are been tackled as a way to refocus the image of Nigeria democracy in order to achieve meaningful development in the country remain a matter of public discourse.

In a democratic regime, people of Nigeria expect some level of democratic dividends coming from political leadership. These includes steady power supply, massive employment opportunity, access to quality and compulsory education, health care delivery services, improved social infrastructure, poverty reduction, security of lives and property and general well-being of Nigeria society. Expropriating from this premise, what is today harvested in Nigerian of un-interrupted democracy has been that of poverty regime, untold severe hardship, pains and agony, unprecedented insecurity and rampant killings of innocent souls and corruption spreading like wild fire. No wonder, some Nigerians today feel that military regime is better than the democratic regime. According to Desert Herald Report (2014) as quoted by Linus that under the military dictatorship, citizens were virtually free to live and earn a living in any part of the country without fear of harassment and killings such as that of the dreaded Boko Haram that has defied military solution despite the enormous resource that are being wasted through security agencies.

Because of the selfishness and greediness of the politicians in Nigeria, democracy has only succeeded in worsening the hardship of the common citizens instead of providing dividends to their followers. The overall interest of the political class/elites in this country was the accumulation of Nigeria fund for their personal interest and not to serve the interest of the suffering masses. It was deduce and proved that, insecurity in Nigeria society today arising from armed robbery,



kidnapping, ethno-religions/communal crisis bedeviling the nation that triggered poverty/hardship among Nigerians, millions/billions of Nigerian money were snatching away on daily basis by Nigerian political leadership into foreign accounts, forest, burial ground, houses and suck – away among others while the suffering masses are dying of hunger, hardship, starvation every day and those who survive leave in abject poverty.

According to Buhari (2005), what Nigerians bargained for and expected under a democratic rule was a government that would create a system that would guarantee at least the following:

- The installation of competent and accountable administrative machinery; and the end of arbitrariness and the use of public office for private gains.
- Putting in place effective constitutional and procedural checks and balances in the exercise of state power.
- The nurturing and respect for a free and independent judiciary.
- The creation of an environment conducive for business and foreign investment and
- The commencement of the drive for a higher standard of living for the people and drastic reduction in the levels of poverty and corruption.

The submission made above is quite commendable and for development to take place, all issues raised above must be looked into properly.

However, Nigerians dreams and expectations towards national development become fake for example, poverty in Nigerian has assumed pyramid level, insecurity of lives and property is on the increase every day, corruption become a permanent feature in Nigerian society, structural decaying, inflation spreading like wild fire in Nigerian market, high rate of unemployment, lack of sound health centres and sub-standard educational system. Buhari (2005) again asserted that, Nigerian has been saddled with civilian administration that have wasted the years doing nothing other than struggling with issues of legitimacy arising from rigged and fraudulent elections.



He further accused the country's democratic leaders of displaying exemplary incompetence within the context of failing checks and balances. One major issues affecting development planning was lack of good economic planning by Nigeria leadership. Since the beginning of 1999 to date, it has been clearly revealed that the major problem confronting Nigeria leaders was lack of economic planning and courteous regard for the budgetary procedures in all manner of governance in Nigerian political system.

For every successive government to improve or perform, the leadership must plan and observe the budget passed by National Assembly for effective national development.

Political godfatherism and motherism, economic wastages, insecurity of lives and property, money laundry, misplaced priorities, insincerity of welfare and plight of the common masses and lack of political will/vision and mission statement have continued to remain a permanent attributes of the democratic leadership since the historical date of independent in Nigeria.

It has also be alleged that the fight against corruption in Nigeria has been purely selective and proved towards dealing with opposition parties and enemies than reducing the real corruption since corrupt businesses has continued unabated amongst the political class in Nigeria.

In another development, democratic consolidation, good governance and development have continued to fail in Nigerian State. The political class has failed woefully to deliver the proceeds of democracy to the people and thereby engulfed self – serving, exploitation, arrogant among others.

Nigerian state is highly endowed with both human and material resources and was ranked the sixth largest oil producing nation in the world but yet could not achieve any processes of development largely due to corruption and poor leadership style. The quality of socio – economic and political development has drastically depleted over the years which will take the will of God to reverse the needed national development of the nation.



## **CONCLUSION**

In the course of our discussion on democracy, we agreed that democracy has been widely received and practiced as the best form of government that can bring about national development and security of the masses. There is no doubt that a link existed between the two concepts. Democracy is among the most popular system globally because of its expectation that it will facilitate development due to the possession of instruments of power that can initiate development. Furthermore, the concept of national development has been fully discussed and analysed while the various obstacles to national development in democratic regime such as corruption, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, infrastructural decayed among others has been identify and analysed too.

This paper concludes that for Nigeria to witness national development, there must be transformation of orientation, attitude and character and in addition corruption must be ameliorate to the bearable minimum to ensure sustainable development.

## **RECOMMEDATIONS/WAY FORWARD**

Having discussed, analysed and conceptualized democracy, national development and factors militating against national development in a democratic set up in Nigeria, the following are factors required for good governance and national development to flourish. For it is these factors that promote freedom and to a greater extent peace which is a necessary ingredient of national development in Nigeria.

1. **Popular Participation:** Popular participation gives the citizens the right to participate in the political process he/she deem fits. Therefore, he/she has the right to vote and be voted for. In accordance of these noble goals, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in section 40 provides that: every person shall be entitled to assembly, free and associate with other persons and belong to any political parties, trade union or any association for the protection of his interest. Popular participation of citizens in politics is an indication of democratic presence good governance and the needed national development



- 2. Freedom of the Press:-** The press or the media has an important role to play in achieving the needed national development in democratic dispensation. Free press whether print or electronic media is the fourth estate of the realm. It serves as a watch-dog of the society and the nation at large in any given democratic set up. The presence of vibrant and sound media is an important consequence of national development. In the normal sense, the media is to educate, entertain and in turn inform the general public about the happenings of the government weather (good or bad) in attempt performing its constitutional role and because of inevitable role played by the press in national development, George Washington, the first American President observed that:

*If I were faced with having to choose  
between government without the Press and  
a Press without government I would most  
eminently opt for the latter Oyebode.*

Therefore, the Freedom of Information Act passed into law by the National Assembly is in the right direction. But government and individual has to curtail the excesses of the press under the press freedom bill to make it more accountable to the people so that the national development can be achieved. This is because if the press is not checkmated, it has the tendencies of misinforming, misdirecting and will derail democratic process and the needed national development. While doing so, the government must be cautions not to violate the fundamental freedom of the press which has always been the case in the previous dispensation.

- 3.** The Judiciary, electoral bodies should be free in discharging their duties and responsibilities without any interference from either the legislature or the executive, it may not discharge its primary function of protecting the citizen against infringing on the fundamental human rights. Also an independent electoral body that is charged with the responsibility to conduct free, fair, credible and sound election guarantees the popular views of the people in an election by electing the needed candidate of their choice. However, if these bodies mentioned are been manipulated



- by individual, cooperate bodies and above all the government, the expected national development will go comatose and the end result will be harvest of anarchy instead of national development.
4. Government should mobilize resources to improve the already decay social infrastructures such as education, road network, health and medical services, provisions of uninterrupted power supply, pipe born water among others. This will go a long way alleviating poverty, hardship and suffering of the masses and above all improving the living standard of the people and the output of our local industries which save country economy from total collapse. All this mentioned if maintain or adhere to will create employment opportunities for our teeming graduates and youths that engaged in other anti-social vices that are capable to destroy national development.
  5. Employment should also be provided to our graduates and youths from the tertiary institutions. If employment rate is reduce drastically, most of these applicants will not be easily mobilized into classes of criminality like, ethno-religious crises, militant groups, terrorism, drug pushing, child trafficking among others. This will surely reduces or ameliorate cases of insecurity which has become impediments in the corridor of national development.
  6. The rule of law must be strictly observed. Central to democratic practices and good governance is constitutionalism and the rule of law. Rule of law bring about sustainable democracy and the needed national development. It must therefore be predicated on effective strategies of strict observance of the provisions of the constitution, respect for due process, orderliness and both the executive and legislature lawfulness.
  7. There is need for individual, government and entire Nigerian society to collectively fight against epidemic like corruption that has eating deep in our society Non-Government Organization (NGOs) and other civil society group should as a matter of urgency and in no distance time help sensitize the public, civil servants and the politicians the evils attached with corruption and its implication on the society if not attacked. The culprits should also be brought



to book through prosecution in the court of law to serve as deterrence to others. Thus, the government must tackle and display the political will necessary for winning the fight against corruption. The government should wake up to their responsibility by protecting the lives and property of its citizens through her security agents by way of combating all manner of conflict such as ethno-religious crisis, farmers and herdsmen crisis, political and election crisis. Others include kidnapping, thugery, among other forms of violence in Nigeria. It is also out of place to incite one people or groups against one another for selfish political, social or economic interest. Because no society can achieve meaningful national development in the atmosphere of rancour.

8. Transparency and accountability are also the needed indices for national development to strive. There should be accountability to the Nigerian citizens by office holders' for every single kobo spent. This is not just about efficient and effective management of resources accruing to the state and by extension the state should also be held accountable for not providing the basic necessities of life to its people. Accountability talks of responsibility of the government to its citizens in all endeavours. Thus, the state and its agents should be held responsible for any element of insecurity as stated above. While transparency means openness, degree of accessibility and clear caution without iota of suspicion. The state is supposed to gain the confidence of the people by making decisions in accordance with the rule of law. Stakeholders should also make all available inputs without fear or favour, intimidation, repression or coercion. Accountability and transparency are critical variables for national development if the leaders adhere to.

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