

## **Good Governance: An Imperative for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the relationship between good governance and national development in Nigeria. Nigeria has designed and implemented different development plans and programmes yet real development have remained elusive in the country. The missing link has been the absence of good governance in the administrative systems of the country. It identified the characteristics of good governance to include: participation, rule of law, transparency, consensus orientated, accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness and efficiency. The paper reveals that the non-adherence to the application of the principles of good governance in the governance processes in Nigeria is the bane of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Obviously, government's responsiveness to emergences in the country is nothing but failure on all fronts, particularly when the government is not accountable to the people. Hence, the paper recommends that government should institutionalize the practice of good governance in all its activities so as to deliver the much needed development to the citizenry and civil society organizations should insist on effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery that meets the expectations of the people of the country.*

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**Keywords:** Good governance, underdevelopment, unemployment, development administration, national development, responsiveness.

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### **Introduction**

The Nigerian state, since its independence in 1960, has made frantic efforts at bringing development to its citizenry. These efforts were accentuated by the various national development plans and the rolling plans (including the recent Economic Recovery and Growth Plan – ERGP), policies, projects and programmes of successive regimes in the country, embark upon over the past five decades. Yet, development in its multifarious manifestations has eluded the people in particular and the nation at large. Observers have argued that the failure or elusive nature of development in Nigeria is a function of the governance system operational in the country. The argument is that bad governance produces underdevelopment while good governance produces development. As Onichakwe (2016) puts it, “national development remains a vital future of a nation, as such its realization is dependent on efficient application of good governance and development administration.

Nigeria is faced with huge development challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, infrastructural decay, low life expectancy, etc. For Nigeria to attain the expected development target or trajectory good governance must be the hallmark of development administration in the country. The non-adherence to the philosophy of good governance has been the bane of our national development in the country. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to show that the non-adherence to the practice of good governance largely accounts for failure of development, hence, in spite of all the efforts for almost sixty years, development has remained elusive. The paper argues that for Nigeria to experience real development good governance must be the guiding philosophy of development administration in the country. It follows therefore that organizations and individuals must adopt the practice of good governance in all their undertakings so as to achieve development.

### **The Concept of Good Governance**

The term governance refers to the specific system or approach by which a political system is ruled or governed. It is a process by which management of nations are made accountable for consistent cohesive policies, processes and decision rights in public service. Sharma, et al (2013) cited in Onichakwe (2016) see as the manner in which authority controls, or power of government is exercised in mobilizing a society's social and economic resources to add the issues of public interests. Governance encompasses the functioning and capability of the public sector as well as rules and institutions that create the framework for the conduct of both public and private businesses, including accountability for economic and financial performance, and regulatory frameworks relating to companies, corporations and partnerships (World Bank, 1991). In simplistic term, governance means the process of decision-making and process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) (Harry, 2010). Government is the principal actor in governance. Other actors include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), financial institutions, political parties, lobbyists, religious leaders, multi-national corporations, donor agencies, etc. Other than the government and the military, all other actors are grouped as being part of the "civil society" (Harry, 2010).

From the above, it is clear that good governance significantly focuses on the ingredients necessary for effective resources management. According to the Asian Development Bank (2006), good governance concerns norms of behaviour that help ensure that governments actually deliver to their citizens that which they say they will deliver. This behaviour, Amuwo and Heralut (2004) posit, is associated with democratic or free government. Simply put, good governance advocates the notion of democratic idea which is all about absorbing the challenges often posed by citizen's demand for greater control and involvement in the management of their affairs. In addition, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) assessed good governance from the functional aspects of government: whether governments achieve their stand objectives effectively or efficiently. This implies that as a concept it is seen as all such functions/activities that should help nations to achieve sustainable and self-reliant development and social justice. Thus, good governance has among others, the following defining characteristics: participation, rule of law, transparency, consensus oriented, accountability, responsiveness and effectiveness and efficiency (UNESCAP, 2005). Other related elements are human rights protection, social justice and environmental sustainability. All these characteristics are central to national development

anywhere in the world. Thus, societies are considered to be developed when these elements or characteristics flourish in such countries.

### **Meaning of National Development**

The word development is usually associated with the idea of improvement, advancement, progress, transformation and change. As a concept it is complex, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. ASUU (2002) asserts that, in its current thinking development encompasses human development, sustainable growth, poverty reduction, environmental protection, institutional transformation, gender equity and human rights protection. Embedded in the ASUU's articulation is the fact that in every aspect of human life development is an expectation. On the other hand, the Report of the South Commission (1993) describes development as a process which enables human being realize their potentials, build self-confidence and live life of dignity and fulfillment. To the commission, true development efforts must be directed at the fulfillment of the human potentials and improvement of social and economic well-being of the people. Hence, it is argued that development efforts have to be designed to secure what the people themselves perceive to be their social and economic interests. This implies that development efforts should not necessarily be to boost production of material goods, rather it should be to foster and enhance people's capacity to have a role in their society's development. It is therefore very important for people to be willingly involved in the different development activities, as agents and beneficiaries of development. Commenting on the people centered nature of development, Seer (1969) stated, any talk about development should expressly answer the questions: what is happening to poverty? What is happening to unemployment?, and what is happening to inequality?

From the above, national development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people. To achieve national development policies and programmes must be geared towards improving the quality of life of the citizenry. Such efforts should be targeted at providing social amenities like education, portable drinking water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, etc as well as create the enabling environment for employment generation and equality of citizens. This also involves encouraging people to participate in the politics or governance processes of the country. Development plans of countries that want to achieve national development should be designed to improve quality of life of the people in every facet of human endeavour.

### **Good Governance and National Development: The Nigerian Experience**

The nature and character of governance, particularly in the third world countries, has been a thing of concern to many world leaders. Like many third world countries, Nigeria is faced with the challenge of adopting a governance system that will deliver development to its citizens and this has become a great concern to many inside and outside the country.

For instance, participation element of good governance expects that the people of Nigeria should be actively involved in the making of major policy decisions of government, and in the implementation of public programmes and projects. In Nigeria, the people are only encouraged to participate during elections, to vote for candidates that would form the government. Once the government is formed the people are no longer important and are not allow to participate in policy making processes and implementation of public programmes and projects. Indeed, public opinion does not count on any matter on which the government is to make policy decision.

Also, on the rule of law, it is expected that the legal regime (the laws of the land) will be binding on every individual and the government and its agencies. But this is far from the experiences of Nigerians. There are so many individuals and state agencies that are “above the law”, impunity reign supreme, especially among those on the corridors of power. According to Ogundele (2018) the establishment of impartial legal bodies is meant to ensure full protection of all citizens of Nigeria in terms of human rights and civil liberties. He added that, “injustice is an encumbrance to peace and without peace socio-economic and political progress becomes a wild goose chase”. Rule of law in Nigeria is almost absent. Court orders are obeyed selectively, whereby the government picks and choose what court ruling it will obey and what it will not obey. Similarly, the government picks and choose which offender to prosecute and who not to prosecute. Extra-judicial killing by security agencies is almost becoming a daily occurrence in the country. No doubt, Nigeria’s experience with the rule of law has been terribly bad.

In the area of transparency, which implies to make available information to the general public and clarity about government rules, regulations and decisions, the Nigerian government has also performed for below average. Ogundele (2018) posits that “lack of information about government’s activities leads to mutual suspicions and distrust as well as mistrusts”. Keeping many things/information under wraps is at variance with good governance. In Nigeria, one good explain of information concealment by government is the sickness of President MuhammaduBuhari, which kept him in London hospital for almost one year, funded with the tax payers’ money. Yet, what was wrong with the president and how much was spent for his treatment is still a mystery, even with the freedom of information law in operation. Indeed, many government activities, contracts, expenditure, incomes are kept in secret from the public.

Responsiveness in relations to good governance means ability of public institutions, agencies and processes to respond to the yearnings of the people and serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time frame. In this regard, state institutions are lagging far behind. According to Ogundele (2018), “responsive and enthusiastic leadership is a blessing for any nation, especially when it involves the issue of security and safety of lives and property”. In this connection the Benue, Kaduna, Zamfara states attacks come handy to show poor response to situations by state agencies. Similarly, government’s responsiveness to emergencies such as floods, fire, accidents, etc has been very poor to say the least. This is inspite of the fact that the Nigerian constitution states that the security and welfare of the people is the primary duty of government. Still commenting on the responsiveness of government and its institutions to the Benue and Taraba killings, Ogundele (2018) wrote:

Given these scenario, it is most disturbing when some government officials talk about cattle routes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Are we the only people doing animal husbandry in Africa? ... Government may have to send some experts in animal husbandry to South Africa and Botswana in order to stop this peculiar mess in the country. Limpopo in South Africa is located in the Semi-arid zone and yet cattle, sheep and goats are ranched. They are not roaming freely on the land. In fact these ranches are tourist attractions. Therefore, the shrinking Lake Chad should not be an excuse for open grazing of cattle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

With respect to accountability, which means public officials must be answerable for their actions and behaviour to the people from whom they derive their authority, is far from reality. According to Ogundele, political leadership is not just to win election and therefore occupy the presidential villa with some cronies as if it is an end in itself, but rather such leaders must be answerable to Nigerians and that is what good governance demand of leaders. Also, accountability means that money supposedly spent on development project and the outcomes must be comparable or commensurate. But most often that is not the case in Nigeria. This is as a result of over-bloated or over-inflated contract figures, hence spendings are always far higher than visible or tangible outcomes and impact, yet the government and officials are not answerable to the people.

Lastly, on effectiveness and efficiency, which means processes and institutions are expected to produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal (Harry, 2010). In this element of good governance Nigeria government has performed very poorly. For instance, over the years government has embarked on various poverty reduction programmes, namely, national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) N-Power, School to Land, etc, yet in 2018 Nigeria became the “Poverty capital of the world”, underemployment and unemployment got to their peak and Nigerians are poorer, hungrier, and more miserable than ever before. Reacting to the alarming rate of poverty in the country, Senator Oluremi Tinubu stated thus:

A large section of the populace in today’s Nigeria struggles with the scourge of poverty, appalling standard of living, non-existent and decaying infrastructure, HIV and AIDs, maternal and infant mortality, terrorism, ethnic and tribal tensions and other ills symptomatic of a nation not fully at ease. The gap between our tremendous potentials as a country and our actual attainments is depressing and disheartening, for a country as endowed with human, material and natural resources as Nigeria, the level of poverty in which the vast majority of our people live is unacceptable.

What this clearly shows is that processes and institutions of state as well as the policies, programmes and projects they put in place to bring about development have not been effective and efficient. Indeed, Nigeria’s experience with good governance has been very poor in all the defining characteristics of good governance. If Nigeria must achieve national development, to provide answers to the questions: what is happening to poverty?; what is happening unemployment? And what is happening to inequality? The leadership of the nation must make conscious effort to imbibe the practice of good governance in every facet of public life.

### **Good Governance: An Imperative for Development**

There is widespread consensus among scholars of development studies, political economy and development practitioners that good governance is central to the attainment of development anywhere in the world. Essentially, for a nation to achieve development it must strictly adhere to the tenets of the practice of good governance in all its endeavours. For instance, the World Bank in its 1992 publication asserts that good governance is central to creating and sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development and it is an essential complement to

sound economic policies. The World Bank paper identified three areas of governance imperative for the attainment of development to include:

- (a) The form of polity and the way authority is exercised in society (parliamentary or presidential, military or civilian and authoritarian or democratic)
- (b) The process by which authority is exercised on the country's economic, political and social spheres and extent to which the citizens are involved and given responsibility; and,
- (c) The capacity of governments to conceive, formulate and execute policies and in general, to discharge governmental functions as effectively as possible.

Otaha (2009) argues that good governance “guides the country along a course leading to the desired goals, in this case development”, where development to him means the concept of equity, social justice and effective exercise of basic human rights. Still commenting on the relationship between good governance and development, Harry (2010) posits that effectiveness and efficiency aids socio-economic development. For instance, when public institutions and processes produce results that meet the needs of the society and make the best use of scarce resources at their disposal, they improve the living conditions of the people. Obviously, Nigeria has all it takes to become a World power because of the human and natural resources the nation is endowed, however, as Ogundele (2018) has argued, Nigeria lost the golden opportunity to be a world power and the missing link is good governance. He added that this glory is re-claimable through the lens of pragmatism at its peak. Simply put, for development to be achieved in Nigeria the state must make conscious efforts to practice good governance in all its manifestations and all spheres of public functions.

## **Conclusion**

The study have shown that good governance is an imperative for national development to be attained anywhere in the world. Development is people focused and it can only be achieved through accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency among others, all of which are elements of good government. Nigeria over the years has designed and implemented development plans, programmes and projects, yet “real development” had remained elusive because of the absence of the ingredients of good governance in the polity and exercise of authority among public office holders in the country. It is not therefore surprising that despite the humongous amount of resources spent by successive governments in delivering development to the citizenry development is far from being achieved, and the missing link is the absence of good governance. Thus, the conclusion of this paper is that for Nigeria to experience “real development” good governance must be the guiding philosophy of development administration in the country. As a result all government institutions, agencies, civil society organizations, and the people in general must imbibe the tenets of good governance in all their undertakings in the country.

## **Recommendations**

From the above findings the paper recommends that:

- (i) Government should institutionalize the practice of good government in all its activities so as to deliver the desired development needs to the citizenry.

- (ii) Civil society organizations should insist on effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery that meets the expectations of the people.

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