

The State, Governance and Socioeconomic Development Realities in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is a strong relationship between the state, governance and socioeconomic development. The importance of good governance in attaining sustained socio-economic development cannot be overemphasized. This study explores the link between the Nigerian state, governance and socio-economic development. The study reveals that Nigeria's historical foundation and multi-ethnic loyalty has made governance in Nigeria prebendal and corrupt, favouring mostly the leader, his cronies and ethnic nationals. This has encouraged mediocrity and laxity and engendered ethnic disagreements, thereby turning the Nigerian state into a terrain of intense struggle and conflicts as political, religious and ethnic factors and forces come to bear on the allocation of revenues and resources. On the basis of these findings, the study recommends accountability, transparency and the rule of law. It also recommends extensive national value reorientation that will inspire both a vibrant, active and patriotic citizenship/leadership and an active civil society that can drive the process of utilizing Nigeria's enormous human and material resources for sustained socio-economic development.

Keywords: State, governance, socioeconomic development, realities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every society is defined by a set of values, orientations, practices and norms that identify the context in which their political activities or governance take place. Almond and Powell (1988) refer to this as political culture. They argue that these sets of values and orientations underlie and give meaning to political action, inputs or outcome in any society. In other words, the character of any society determines largely what happens in such a society. Therefore, to understand the relationship between the political structure/system (state) or governance and socio-economic development of the Nigerian state, an understanding of the political culture is necessary.

According to Pye (1966), the particular pattern of development in any country depends largely upon how it is able to resolve the crises of identity, legitimacy, participation, penetration and distribution. In Nigeria, these crises have retrogressively influenced the state, governance and socio-economic development. As our history has shown, governance in Nigeria has been overridden by ethnic, religious and regional interests and conflicts. Thereby weakening institutions, institutionalizing corruption and slowing down socio-economic development. And much more is the demise of the spirit of national stewardship and patriotism. Regrettably, the state, the instrument of governance within which socio-economic development is pursued has remained continuous embroiled in these conflicts. Both in public policy implementation, budgetary allocation and strategic political appointments, who gets what, how and when depends on ethnic and regional cleavages with development patterns and trends absolutely characterized by these dichotomies. In the leadership recruitment process, also, excellence, competence and character have repeatedly been sacrificed on the altar of ethnic and religious consideration. Hence, the rise of mediocre leadership in virtually all levels of governance. These issues and others represent Nigeria's barriers in driving sustained socio-economic development.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The state, governance and socio-economic development are the core concepts of this study. Thus, this section deals with the discourse of the concepts as a foundation for my analysis. A state is an organized community living under a unified political system. According to Gamer (2001), the state is a community of persons, more or less numerous, permanently occupying a definite portion of territory, independent (or nearly so) of external control and possessing an organized government to which the great body of inhabitants render habitual obedience. The state plays an important role in the society. It is the most powerful and universal organisation. It is a rare and incomparable organisation. It is distinguished from other forms of association by its purpose, by the methods it employs to carry out those purposes, by having territorial limits and by its sovereignty. The primary purpose of the state is to maintain order and security. It does so by means of a system of laws backed by force (Agi, 2003).

The state is more clearly expressed by a government and entails a number of permanent institutions, governmental bodies for policy formulation and making of laws; a judicial system with police and federal services to apply the law; and the armed forces for defense against external enemies, and if need be for putting down internal insurrection.

According to Coker (2008), the state has become more coercive in contemporary times. It employs the apparatus of force in the process of implementing public policies and also control and legitimizes authority by maintaining the pattern of class domination and subordination.

The word “State” is sometimes used to refer to some politically organized communities that are not sovereign, notably the constituent members of a federal union, such as those of Nigeria, the U.S.A or of the Commonwealth of Australia.

From the Greek city-state to Machiavelli “La Stato” down to the sixteenth century Bodin’s republic, the state has been saddled with the responsibility of making laws and rules to establish order, discipline and give direction to the society. Government is the established administrative machine of every state. The Nigerian state is a creation of colonialism and even with the supposition that less state means more development, the state has remained crucially instrumental to socio-economic development.

2.1 Governance

The mechanistic theory as postulated by Thomas Hobbes (1558-1679) describes government as the agency by which men sought self-preservation from the warlike state of nature. Contemporary scholars are yet to refute the fact that the protection and preservation of life and properties were not only the motivation for the establishment of government, but the primary end of government once established.

The World Bank (1989) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. For the World Bank, governance has three dimensions; the nature of political regimes; the exercise of authority in the management of social and economic resources and, the capacity of government to formulate and implement policy and to discharge its functions.

According to Moore (1999), governance is the process through which citizens and state agents interact to express their preferences, exercise their rights and obligations, reconcile their differences and cooperate to produce public goods and services. It is the challenge of making the society a better place by producing the collective goods and services that people cannot provide individually. The list of collective goods and services include: security, public roads, schools, hospitals and control on epidemic diseases; a functioning and effective judicial and police/penal system; efforts to encourage people to invest in productive assets and enterprise; measures to combat domestic violence, cash transfer programmes for the poor, limits on emissions etc and all those many other ways in which “public authorities” (people who have authority to act on behalf of collectives) try to make the society more livable and on the long run, generally less violent. Governance therefore is the various actions and inactions of the state through its institutional framework within which socio-economic development is pursued.

2.2 Socioeconomic development

This is the process of social and economic development in a society. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Changes in less-tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm and the extent of participation in civil society. Causes of socio-economic development are basically changes in technology and in laws which is one of responsibilities of the state in the process of governance.

Scholars like Gboyega (2003) opine that development as an idea embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material wellbeing of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future.

Chrisman (1984) views socio-economic development as a process of societal advancement, where improvements in the wellbeing of people are generated through strong partnership between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society.

Socio-economic development is the combination of social and economic development. In this case, socio-economic development includes the advancement or improvement in the standard of living and the increase in economic life and conditions of the people.

Realities

Reality is the state of things as they actually exist. The totality of all things, structures (actual and conceptual), events, (past and present) and phenomena. According to Hlatky (2001), we cannot understand our lives and society unless we understand the reality that we live in, and we cannot understand the reality we live in unless we understand the original cause. Realities as used in this work represent the presentation of issues, situation/ condition (historical and contemporary) as they truly are.

2.3 The Nigerian State

According to Nwabueze (1976), the origin of the Nigerian state can be traced to the 1861 treaty between King Dosunmu and the agents of her majesty the Queen of England in what is popularly known as the annexation of Lagos. The single entity called Nigeria became very clear after the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates under the leadership of Lord Frederick Lugard. Lugard and other subsequent colonial administrators were able to administer Nigeria through the 1914 Nigerian Council, the 1922 Clifford Constitution, 1946 Richard Constitution, 1951 Macpherson constitution and the 1954 Lyttleton constitution. It is important to note that the instruments of colonial governance were not only exclusivist in context and approach; but granted the Governor-Generals irresponsible veto that gave them the leverage to conduct national affairs at their whims and caprices. The challenge the Nigerian state continuously suffers today.

The excesses of colonial leadership propelled series of agitations for an independent Nigerian state including the 1957 motion for independence. On October 1st 1960, Britain granted formal independence to Nigeria.

The formal granting of independence opened a new chapter in the history of Nigeria. But rather than open a new chapter of focused, patriotic and responsible governance provoked by decades of colonial bastardization and dehumanization, it was rather a new chapter of the campaign for power. In other words, what became common was the recrimination between region and region on the competition over which of the three (North, East and West) would make the best of the gain of self-rule. This unhealthy competition brought about tension between early post-independent nationalists who were mere ethnic representatives rather than national leaders.

Given this early manifestations, it could be averred that Nigeria's founding fathers did not share a common ideal on the Nigerian project. Sectional and ethnic domination rather than socio-economic development of the Nigerian state became more important. Balewa himself as Prime Minister referred to Nigeria as the mistake of 1914. For Chief Awolowo, Nigeria is a mere geographical expression. Azikiwe, recognizing the danger of this division, advised succinctly that the leaders should de-emphasize their areas of differences and conflicts in their vision of Nigeria. All these are proves of the visionary distortions and political disagreement of Nigeria's nationalists who were in control of the machinery of government. This ethno-tribal disposition or competitive communalism has prevailed and is manifesting in contemporary Nigeria's politics and governance. Political power or public office is first to the benefit of the holder and his ethnic nationals and cronies. This has also affected the clamour and struggle for state power, the process of appropriation and allocation of values, public policy formulation and implementation and even the choice or recruitment of the managers of state. Corruption remains on the rise, nepotism, tribalism and regionalism all collapsed the first republic and triggered the unwanted civil war that depleted both human and material resources. And fifty two years after independence and over forty two years after the civil war, this disposition, agitations and challenges remain and socio-economic development continues ashamedly crawling in the midst of enormous human and natural resources.

3. GOVERNANCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

To understand socio-economic development, it is important to factor in the role of the state and government. Governance plays a crucial role in the development of any society. Socio-economic development, production, wealth creation and distribution are largely influenced by governance and the solution to many socio-economic problems come through political channels. Government policy in areas like taxation, tariff laws, railways, electricity, telecommunication, education (science and technology), state aid to agriculture and industry clearly affects socio-economic prospects of states.

In Nigeria, after the return of civil rule in 1999, laying the foundation for political and economic liberalization and engendering a framework for social and economic development became and still is a critical responsibility of government. Agreeing with empirical evidence that good governance is a key determinant of sustained socio-economic development. The stride towards socio-economic development, democratic ethos and accountability have been at the lowest level and national institutions have remained weak.

Although many Nigerians believe that visionary leadership and good governance remains the hallmark of pushing the growth and development frontiers as well as accelerating the pace of socio-economic progress in any society. In reality, the Nigerian state operates far from this universal democratic truth. Bad governance (political, economic and social governance) constitutes the major challenge to socio-economic development in Nigeria (Shabbir, 2004). The problem with Nigeria is that the system lacks institutional checks and balances (or mechanism) to control the autocratic tendencies in governance and to hold political actors accountable. The lack of ethical politics and values, and responsiveness in governance coupled with massive corruption has hampered socio-economic development. Even the numerous probes and reforms that have taken place in recent times have not culminated to tangible results. This appears to confirm that Nigeria's socio-economic problems are basically

the problem of governance and corruption, which prevents the state from putting its abundant human and mineral resources into productive use.

It is disheartening to know that with trillions of naira budgeted yearly, critical infrastructure (roads, airports, railways, schools, hospitals, etc) remain deplorable, institutions remain weak and majority of Nigerians still live below the poverty line and values continue to degenerate. Therefore, as a foundation for sustained socio-economic development, the entire governance chain from how to make politicians more accountable and effective in service delivery and policy implementation without corruption; to awakening an active citizenship and building strong institutions require internationally acceptable reforms if Nigeria must join the league of developed nations by the year 2020.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the state and governance are important catalyst to socio-economic development. I have opined that good governance remains a veritable platform for engineering socio-economic development in Nigeria. It is important to note also that, achieving sustained socio-economic development will demand solving some of Nigeria's political problems (like federalism, state police etc) which economists and even politicians pretend have been solved. Governance must be guided by high levels of morality and integrity and should transcend zoning and ethno-religious thinking. I recommend also complete independence of the judiciary, scrupulous respect for the law and human rights at every level of government, transparent accountability of public monies and independent auditors responsible to the legislature and not the executive. To make sustained progress, governance must be wedded with transparency and accountability and improve economic management as well as investments in education, health and critical infrastructure.

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