

**Good Governance: A Pathway to Sustainable National Development in Nigeria**

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**D.O.I:** 10.5281/zenodo.8026724

**Date of Publication:** 04-12-2021

**Journal Website:** <https://gjollaas.com/index.php/pub>

## Abstract

Good Governance is intended to enable a government to effectively and efficiently manage, control and harness both human and material resources for the overall development of a particular country. Indeed, Good Governance has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the welfare of the citizenry is improved through the provision of some basic necessities of life. The paper argues that lack of Good Governance is a major challenge to Nigeria's National Development in the Fourth Republic. The paper, therefore, argues for Good Governance as a panacea for sustainable national development in Nigeria. In doing this, the paper relies heavily on secondary sources of historical data. The paper concludes by recommending that political office holders should be visionary, selfless, accountable and responsive to the needs and yearnings of the citizenry.

**Keyword:** Leadership, Development, Governance, Democracy, Corruption.

## Introduction

The ability of a government to efficiently and effectively manage, control and harness both human and material resources of a nation is what good governance entails. Indeed, the promotion of good governance has become so important and a crucial ingredient in developing efforts for African governments and the donor community since the early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the issue of good governance has engaged the attention of international financial institutions, including the World Bank and several intergovernmental organisations like the G-8.<sup>2</sup> These institutions have made good governance a crucial and critical prerequisite in their aid and donation policies to countries with bad governance.

While adopting its "System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa", the United Nations has placed at the centre of consideration, the issue of good governance in Africa; and its inter-relationship to sustainable development.<sup>3</sup> Governance, indeed, covers the over-all direction and management of each country's affairs in accordance with its established constitutions, institutions, cultural values, norms and procedures.<sup>4</sup> Good governance must reflect all these elements. It must also be the combination of choice and performance, promising a settled relationship between the leaders and the led, based on the assurance of the predictable use of the institutions of the country.<sup>5</sup> This implies accountability on the part of those who occupy public offices; and an informed citizenry able to demand standard of performance.

This paper is of the view that lack of good governance in Nigeria has been a major challenge to sustainable national development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It argues that good governance presupposes the existence of effective local institutions. It is only when this is put in place and functioning very well that the country shall begin to witness a change leading to sustainable national development.

### **Conceptual Classifications Governance**

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), governance is defined as “the science of government behaviour and performance, including the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels”.<sup>6</sup> It gives the framework via which citizens and groups exercise their rights, meet their obligations and, at the same time, articulate their interests. Indeed, governance is all about people and the environment they have chosen to live. Governance comprises the institutions the state establishes for implementing its policies and programmes with a view to facilitating the socio-economic and cultural development of a country.

### **Good Governance**

The Manila Declaration on Governance defined good governance “as a system that is transparent, accountable, just, fair, democratic, participatory and responsive to people’s needs”.<sup>7</sup> The UNDP identifies nine core characteristics covering eight key urban issues as regards good governance. They include: (a) Participation (b) Rule of Law (c) Transparency (d) Responsiveness (e) Consensus orientation (f) Equity (g) Effectiveness and efficiency (h) Accountability-Decision-Makers in government.<sup>8</sup>

Good governance, in Nigerian context, will mean the use of power by the government, that is, the President, Ministers, Senators, Members of the House of Representatives and how the public service operates to promote: (a) democracy, accountability and transparency (b) to formulate and implement good policies (c) to effectively and efficiently manage the Nigerian human and material resources with a view to achieving sustainable national development, and finally (d) to achieve economic prosperity to alleviate poverty.<sup>9</sup> Arguably, good governance is a pre-requisite for sustainable development in Africa. This is because growth and development need a predictable regulatory framework, such as effective, efficient and transparent public administration; and an independent judiciary, where civilian and business conflicts/disputes and other legal matters can be settled and court cases brought to an end.<sup>10</sup> Good governance means that the voices of the weak and the most vulnerable must be heard in decision-making over the distribution of development resources; and that political, economic and social priorities are based on broad consensus among the three stakeholders, that is, the state, private sector and civil society.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, all these stakeholders are key to sustaining human development.

## Development

Development means different things to different people at different times.

Development as a concept, could refer to political, social and economic development. Also, it is also possible to refer to such things as legal, administrative, military and technological development, just to mention but a few.<sup>12</sup> Meier argues that, the totality of these dimensions of the development as a concept, and many others constitute the so-called national development.<sup>13</sup> In the contemporary times, there is the preoccupation by some scholars to come up with operational definitions that could be of interest to policy makers and economic planners. Indeed, over the past five decades, the search has been to identify the relevant and crucial indicators or variables that should reflect adequately the concept of development.

There is a school of thought that sees development as growth. The United Nations (UN), in the 1960s, declared the decade as “the development decade”, predicting a growth rate of six per cent for all the developing countries.<sup>14</sup> This conveyed the impression that growth and development was one and have the same meaning. It was expected that growth would have a trickle-down effect on the welfare of the masses. The empirical evidence emanating from Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia and Nigeria revealed that their respective growth rates never translated into economic development in the real sense of it.<sup>15</sup> This automatic equating development with growth became challenged for failing to bring into focus other key critical issues like inequality, unemployment and poverty.

Development is also defined by some scholars to mean reduction in poverty, unemployment and equality.<sup>16</sup> This school of thought was championed and popularised by Dudley Seers. He raised some fundamental questions as regards development. He

avers that:

The questions to ask about a country’s development are: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result ‘development’ even if per capital doubled.<sup>17</sup>

Seers also included the issue of reduction in dependency or self-reliance. He further submits that development must be self-driven and self-reliant.<sup>18</sup>

Also development is expressed as provision of basic needs. This approach to development was promoted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in the 1970s. The ILO sees development as a process that ensures the provision of the minimum basic needs required for living. They include: shelter, food clothing, basic education, basic health, among others. By this, all these basic needs or necessities of life are to be provided by government.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, development is also seen as human-centred. This concept of development was popularised by the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) in the late 1980s.<sup>20</sup> Here, human beings are expressly brought into focus. In other words, human beings are considered to be at the epicentre of the development process. The Rio Declaration adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 argues that:

Human beings are at the centre of concern for Sustainable Development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding this concept of development, the key issue and variable of concern is human development; that is, a process whereby human choices are expanded by making them to live a long, healthy, productive, and innovative life. Umo avers that, economic growth within this view must deliver on the critical issues of income, democratic participation, employment, among others.<sup>22</sup>

### **Sustainable Development**

According to the World Bank, Sustainable Development (SD) is defined as

“simply development that continues”.<sup>23</sup> A significantly wider explanation is contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. SD is defined as:

Long-term continuous development of the society aimed at satisfaction of humanity’s need at present and in the future via rational usage and replenishment of natural resources, preserving the earth for future generations.<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, this notion of SD here is vague, reducing it to the pursuit of development that would be in tandem with environment protection. However, the most classical and well cited idea of SD is the one provided in Brundtland Commission’s Report, which argues that:

Sustainable Development (SD) is the kind of development which satisfies the current needs without endangering the future generations to satisfy their own.<sup>25</sup>

The United States National Research Council also sees nature, life support and culture as three important things that must be sustained.<sup>26</sup> It further identifies people (human beings), economy (wealth) and institutions (status, social capital) as three key elements that must be developed.

Onukaogu sees SD as “having bottom-top and top-bottom approaches”.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding bottom top approach, the generality of the people, that is the masses must be actively involved in decision making. In other words, they must collaborate and be in partnership with government concerning how best their needs and aspiration will be met. As regards top-bottom approach, government itself must have a link with the people,

share with them, its policy agenda and partner with them in taking steps and actions that can optimally and maximally enhance SD in the land.<sup>28</sup>

From the above description of SD, we can identify four critical features. One, SD is about apt and sound exploitation of natural resources. Two, it entails meeting the basic, immediate and target needs of the people. Three, it identifies nature, people and culture as three vital elements that must be sustained. Finally, it singles out people, economy and institutions as critical human elements that need development.

### **Democracy and Good Governance: Any Connection?**

The concept of democracy was used by the ancient Greeks to mean government by many as opposed to government by a few. 'Democracy' as a term originates from the Greek words '*demos*', meaning 'the people'; and '*kratia*', which means 'rule'. When putting together, it means 'rule by the people'.<sup>29</sup> Abraham Lincoln in 1863 defined democracy as "Government of the people by the people, and for the people".<sup>30</sup> Indeed, a true democratic government has a number of features that distinguish it from other forms of government. They include: individual liberty; majority rule with minority rights; free, fair and credible election; and, of course, competing political parties.<sup>31</sup>

Real democracy needs competing political parties. A political party may be described as a group of people who come together with a view to winning elections, conducting government and determining public policy. In a genuine democracy, rival parties help to make election meaningful, in the sense that, they give voters choice among candidates representing diverse interests and perspectives. The political parties out of power are expected to serve as loyal opposition by criticising the policies, programmes and actions of the party in power. Through this, the parties in opposition help to make those in power to be more responsible and responsive to the needs of the people.<sup>32</sup> In a genuine democratic society, power belongs to the people. This means that, the people can remove and replace elected representatives peacefully via the ballot box.

From the foregoing, democracy is all about governance; and good governance is about law and good ethical behaviour. Good governance can only thrive where there is corresponding moral and ethical environment.<sup>33</sup> It would be very difficult to talk of good intention in a corrupt society. Good governance, for a country that has keyed into democratic ideals and the rule of law means "the transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic and financial resources for the purposes of equitable and sustainable development."<sup>34</sup> This involves clear decision-making steps at the level of public authorities; transparent and accountable institutions; supremacy of the rule of law in the management, allocation and distribution of resources, among others, aiming at preventing and mitigating corruption.<sup>35</sup>

Nigeria's democracy has been described as mere "electoral democracy".<sup>36</sup> This is a system in which elites and their cronies hold elections, but citizens have little real influence on the process. In fact, Nigeria is paying a heavy price for the abdication of responsibility to an extremely self-centred, greedy, avaricious and selfish political class. A country cannot be democratic, until its citizens have the opportunity to elect their representatives via elections that are free, fair and credible. This will provide an important means of improving responsiveness by making elected representatives transparent and accountable to the electorate. But election fraud undermines this critical function, arrests good governance and derails national integration, growth and sustainable development.<sup>37</sup>

Democracy and good governance are interwoven. Arguably, democracy is supposed to lead to good governance. In Nigeria, since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the reverse has been the case.

### **The Challenges of Good Governance in Nigeria**

Democracy and good governance, as indicated earlier, are supposed to be a siamese twin. Put differently, democracy and good governance go hand in hand. Democracy is meant to give birth to good governance; and the latter will lead to sustainable national development. But, this has not been the case in Nigeria. What Nigeria has been witnessing since 1999 when the Fourth Republic began can be described as bad governance.

A renowned scholar and Professor of Political Science, Sam Oyovbaire argues that Nigeria's democracy is in crisis; and that there is crisis of governance in Nigeria.<sup>38</sup> Also, Onanuga submits that "we are all victims of Nigeria's bad governance, and we all experience its symptoms in one form on the other."<sup>39</sup> These symptoms include, failed educational system, comatose health system, malfunctioned transport system, dysfunctional government, erratic power supply, deteriorated security system, among others. These symptoms point to the helplessness and incapability of government to do well in these areas, which amount to inability of government to perform its primary duties up to expectations.

One of the challenges of good governance in Nigeria is leadership. Arguably,

Nigeria is blessed with great and abundant human and natural resources with every potential to be a great nation.<sup>40</sup> Naturally, Nigeria is endowed with millions of acres of arable land, billion barrels of crude oil reserves, vast gas reserves, untapped minerals; and a wealth of human capital.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, with these abundant reserves of both human and natural resources, Nigeria has the potential to build a prosperous economy and provide for the basic needs of its citizenry. Dionco-Adetayo avers that, if these enormous resources are well managed, they could support "a vibrant agricultural sector capable of ensuring the supply of raw materials for the industrial sector as well as providing gainful employment for the teeming population".<sup>42</sup> Despite these resources, Nigeria suffers from the problem of good, effective and efficient leadership that can manage, control and harness these resources judiciously with a view to facilitating sustainable national development. This leadership failure in Nigeria has manifested in bad governance, electoral fraud and violence, insecurity, pervasive corruption, unemployment, widespread poverty, among others.<sup>43</sup> Chinua Achebe, regarding leadership in Nigeria asserts that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, [and] to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.<sup>44</sup>

Agbobu in alignment with Achebe's position, declares that "All those who have ruled



Nigeria are dealer not leaders".<sup>45</sup>

Leadership at all levels in Nigeria, from local, state and national, has failed to translate the vast resources of the country into an enviable level of development. One may raise a poser as to why the leaders should be blamed for Nigeria's problems. The reason for this is that, according to John Maxwell, a leadership expert, that "everything rises and falls on leadership."<sup>46</sup>

Admittedly, leadership is key in any society or organisation, but this, however, does not tell the whole story. Followership is as serious as leadership when addressing societal or organisational performance. Followership can be regarded as the other side of the coin of leadership. Indeed, followership cannot be separated from leadership as a nation or society deserves the kind of leaders it gets.<sup>47</sup> Followership is crucial to leadership. In other words, there can be no leadership if there is no followership. This fact raises a serious challenge to the Achebe's thesis of squarely blaming Nigeria's problem on failure of leadership. Arguably, bad followership would probably bring about bad leadership. Followership can impact leadership a great deal, positively or negatively. As regards Nigeria, followers are docile, gullible, sycophantic and not ready to confront the leaders for their nefarious, evil and atrocious behaviour because of personal and selfish reward.<sup>48</sup> They are unwilling and lack courage to demand accountability from the leaders. Followers in Nigeria make unreasonable financial demands and other difficult obligations that make leaders to compromise their integrity and standard; such that would make them to dip their hands into the public treasury with a view to meeting such demands and obligations.<sup>49</sup> The argument here is that, both leaders and followers are guilty in the case of bad governance in Nigeria.

Another big challenge to good governance in Nigeria is the widespread public corruption. Since 1999, Nigeria had been having democratically elected civilian regimes. Corruption has been the bane of politics in Nigeria. Corruption has been identified as one of the main socio-economic factors that pose a direct threat to Nigeria's nascent democracy.<sup>50</sup> Accountability and transparency in the activities of the authorities are preconditions for the sustainability of democracy. The present travails of Nigeria on political and economic fronts are due largely to its pervasive public corruption, which are been reported on a daily basis by the mass media.<sup>51</sup> Corruption can be described as "any form of dishonest, unethical, or fraudulent conduct by those in some position of authority or involved in a transaction".<sup>52</sup> Also, it includes cronyism, nepotism, patronage and electoral malpractice. Nigeria has been at different times ranked high in corruption by Transparency International (TI) and other organisations. Transparency International (TI) carried out a survey on the corruption levels of 90 countries in 2001, Nigeria was found as the most corrupt in that ranking.<sup>53</sup> In 2001, it slightly improved to occupy the second-most corrupt country in the world out of 91 countries surveyed.<sup>54</sup> In fact, corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. It has affected all public sectors – the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) health institutions, educational institutions, public corporations, among others.<sup>55</sup>

Corruption has telling effects on people, the economy, and the society in general. These are evident in decrepit infrastructure (bad roads, inadequate and irregular power supply, lack of pipe-borne water, dilapidated public structures, among others; substandard educational opportunities, including inadequate staffing, inadequate laboratories;



comatose libraries, poor health services, injustice; and lack of safety nets for the poor and the elderly.<sup>56</sup> These translate to environmental pollution, substandard education, poor environmental and personal hygiene, rising unemployment and untimely death. The effects on the economy are equally devastating. These include, withdrawal in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), lack of development; trade deficit and large public debt.<sup>57</sup> As regards this, Okotoni submits that:

A society that is corrupt, a society that celebrates mediocrity, robbers and looters of public treasuries; a society that believes its own lies, and a society that has lost its core values of integrity, sound character, good name, morality, uprightness, honesty, respect for elders, family values, good neighbourliness, hard work, respect for law and human dignity, justice and fair play, etc. has in no little way jeopardised the success of democratic governance and national sustainable development.<sup>58</sup>

A former Oxford Scholar, Richard Joseph, once described the socio-political structure of corruption in Nigeria as “prebendalism”.<sup>59</sup> This involves the systematic abuse of state office and resources for personal, selfish and group gain.

Acemoglu and Robinson argue that, there is a strong connection between political and economic institutions.<sup>60</sup> What is happening in Nigeria in this Fourth Republic could be described as “extractive political and economic institutions”. Extractive political institution concentrates power in the hands of a narrow, selfish elite and places little impediments on the exercise of this power. Economic institution is then structured by this selfish, narrow and parochial elite to extract resources from the rest of the society. The resultant effects of these “extractive political and economic institutions” are unemployment, erratic power failure, dilapidated hospital, massive poverty, bad roads, among others.<sup>61</sup> In other words, corruption has become a monster in Nigeria, which has dealt a deadly blow to good governance.

### **Concluding Remarks/Policy Recommendations**

As regards its application, good governance is a pathway and precondition for a democratic society to achieve sustainable national development. As shown previously, the symptoms and consequences of bad governance are corruption, injustice, inequality, among others. Corruption has generated unimaginable level of poverty and underdevelopment in contemporary Nigeria. Furthermore, good governance produces economic efficiency by reducing transaction costs via the operation of the rule of law, transparency in government and corporate management and accountability for all institutions and individuals in a democratic society. The imperative of good governance in Nigeria arises out of the urgent need of the country for institutions that can deliver public good. These public good include; one, the right to vote in competitive elections as a means of installing governments that are accountable to the electorate; two, this consists of the programmes and services that advance the well-being of the citizenry without discrimination. To get out of the woods, the paper recommends the following: Nigeria, as a country, needs genuine leadership. A genuine leader is the one that is visionary, willing and ready to move away from the status quo. The process of selecting leaders at

the various levels of Nigeria society needs review. The idea of imposing leaders rather than allowing the people to choose their own leaders should be rejected. This means that all stakeholders must be involved in the process of selecting leaders at the local, state and national levels. This will bring about the emergence of genuine leaders who are not self-seeking or selfish.

Furthermore, it is high time the followership in Nigeria received new orientation. They should stop being gullible and docile. They should ask questions from their elected representatives, they should also stop demand gratification from them. With the new orientation, Nigerians will decide their own destinies and become responsible followers.

Corruption should also be tackled headlong. Corruption has done more damage and dealt debilitating blow to this country more than anything else. Kid glove approach must stop. There must be stiffer measures. Immunity clause in the 1999 Constitution must be expunged, amended accordingly, if Nigerian government is, indeed, serious about the fight against corruption. Regular and prompt payment of salaries and emoluments of workers is highly recommended with a view to reducing the incidences of loss of selfesteem and corruption among public officers. There must be the political will on the part of governments to tackle the problem of corruption via enforcement of rules and regulations, not minding whose ox is gored. Adequate punishment must be meted out to offenders instead of the “handshake” judgements given by some judges to serious offences. The judiciary must be over-hauled in order to remove corrupt judges. Finally, there is the urgent need to give the fight against corruption a big dose of political will supported by adequate funding of the anti-corruption agencies, like Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Related

Offences Commission (ICPC), which must also, in addition to funding, be strengthened.

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