

ACCOUNTABILITY: A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The concept of accountability connotes the obligation of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their performance and the manner in which they have exercised powers conferred on them. Its main aim is to check wrong and arbitrary actions and increase efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes. This paper focuses on accountability for sustainable democracy in Nigeria and it will look at the concepts of accountability, sustainable democracy. It was concluded that: Sustainable democracy requires the existence of these non-negotiable principle: – the strict observance of the principle of accountability, upholding of the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights, an independent and credible electoral process, access by the citizenry to basic necessities of life (food, shelter, education, health, and transportation), transparency in government, a robust and independent judiciary, and a free and independent press. It also requires that strict measures be taken to rid the polity of vested financial and commercial interests.

Keywords: Accountability, Democracy and Sustainable Democracy

Introduction

This paper focuses on accountability for sustainable democracy in Nigeria and it will look at the concepts of accountability, sustainable democracy and draw a conclusion thereon.

Being accountable is to be answerable for your actions. In a true democratic political system, the government is answerable to the people for their policies and actions in the state or country. In business circles, leaders and executive officers are accountable or answerable for their actions and the impact which such actions has on their business organizations. In essence, accountability has to do with accepting the responsibility which naturally flows from one's actions or inaction or omissions.

Each workplace or business organization has a unique in which it conducts its business. Some business outfits operate a hierarchical structure while others adopt informal employee engagements. The principle of accountability in the workplace, deals with who the employee is expected to look up to and what they must align with in the culture and values of the organization. The employee must from the onset, be familiar with the organization's mission and goals if he or she wants to take responsibility or accountability for his role. For a happy work life in the business organization, the employee's personal goals should align with the organizational goals of the business outfit. In that manner, the employee will strive to do his best to improve his skills, work harder and feel like a valuable member of his organization.

Conceptual clarification: Accountability

Olowu (2002) in (OECD 2012). defines accountability as the requirement that those who hold public trust account for the use of that trust to the citizens or their representatives. The concept underscores the obligation of an office holder to fulfill the expectations of his office. It is understood to be a measure for the results of an office holder's actions. Public accountability is a *sine qua non* for any regime that would refrain from corruption and ensure public service delivery to the citizenry. Laxmikanth (2002), in (OECD 2012), the concept of accountability connotes the obligation of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their performance and the manner in which they have exercised powers conferred on them. Its main aim is to check wrong and arbitrary actions and increase efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes.

According to Nwagbara (2018), African leaders are yet to provide good governance (leadership) necessary for effective and meaningful development. The importance of good leadership in this regard can not be overemphasized. The concept of good leadership encompasses general values and basic freedoms that include accountability, transparency and competence. Unfortunately, good governance is still a far cry in Africa: Corruption, lack of accountability, lack of transparency and others have been a thorn in the flesh of African political development. Effective leadership entails recognition of the limitation of a single individual to understand and control what is happening in the society. The willingness to delegate power and responsibility to competent citizens is one of the essential attributes of good leadership. More importantly, the choice of good leaders and subsequently the subordinates, determines to a great extent how such leaders and subordinates will be committed to the achievement of national interests as against sectional and private interests. Nigeria has been seen as a failed state in these processes of choice of leaders at whatever level of governance, and this failure accounts for the poor level of her developmental efforts.

In a wider sense, accountability implies a willingness to be judged on performance:

- Accountability is the acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions. It implies a willingness to be transparent, allowing others to observe and evaluate one's performance.
- In the U.S. financial world, accountability includes a requirement that public corporations make accurate financial records available to all stakeholders.
- In recent years, there has been an increased focus on other elements of corporate accountability such as ethical conduct, environmental impact, a commitment to diversity, and fair treatment of employees.

Types of Accountability

Corporate, political, and governmental accountability. Not surprisingly, they overlap each other.

Corporate Accountability

At its most prosaic, accountability is about the numbers. Every public company is required to publish a financial report quarterly and annually detailing its income and expenses. An auditor reviewing a company's financial statements is responsible for obtaining reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from any material misstatements caused by error or fraud.

Accountability requires corporate accountants to be careful and knowledgeable, as they can be held legally liable for negligence. An accountant is responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the company's financial statements, even if an error or misstatement was made by others in the organization.

Political Accountability

Political accountability in recent years has focused on money. Specifically, it requires transparency about corporate donations to political causes and candidates. For example, the non-partisan Center for Political Accountability and the Wharton School at the University of

Accountability: A Tool for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria.

Pennsylvania jointly publish an annual index rating the disclosure and oversight policies of major public corporations regarding their donations to political causes and candidates.

Government Accountability

The role of corporate cash is only one of the global issues regarding government accountability.

USAID, the federal agency that administers civilian foreign aid, defines measures government accountability by these key factors: a free and fair political justice system; protection of human rights; a vibrant civil society; public confidence in the police and courts, and security sector reform.

Media Accountability

The media in the U.S. is uniquely protected by the First Amendment from interference by Congress. This does not mean that it is free from accountability.

The media have long been under the constant scrutiny of a number of watchdogs, internal and external. In the internet era, these have been augmented by independent fact-checking organizations such as FactCheck.org, Snopes, and Politic Fact. These and other organizations monitor the media for bias and errors and publish their findings for all to see.

Social Media Accountability

What if a publisher had 2.8 billion contributors and all of them were free to say whatever they wanted? That's roughly the position that Facebook is in, although it is arguable whether the social media site is or is not a publisher. In fact, denying that it is a publisher may be a good defense strategy for Facebook, which is now under fire for spreading dangerous misinformation and providing a platform for hate speech.

At this writing, some are proposing that Facebook be held accountable for the posts it publishes, or the ways in which it promotes and distributes those posts to its vast membership.

Accountability in the Workplace

To management coaches, accountability in the workplace goes beyond giving each employee a task to complete in a project. It also means making each individual accountable for the success or failure of their contribution to the overall project. In other words, it's all about ownership of success-or failure.

The four core components of accountability

The four core components of accountability as presented in Alnoor Ebrahim's article are: (1) Transparency, which involves collecting information and making it available and accessible for public scrutiny;

2) Answerability or Justification, which requires providing clear reasoning for actions and decisions. Behn (2001) sorted accountability into four types – accountability for power, performance, justice, and finance. These four types of accountability can increase trust, democratic behavior, collective responsibility, and the effectiveness of management.

The importance of accountability

Accountability eliminates the time and effort you spend on distracting activities and other unproductive behavior. When you make people accountable for their actions, you are effectively teaching them to value their work. When done right, accountability can increase your team members' skills and confidence.

Democracy

Although many definitions of democracy abound in theory and practice, the one universally accepted is that advanced by Abraham Lincoln, which says that democracy is the government of the

people, by the people, and for the people. The abiding principle of a democratic government is majority rule, one in which supreme power is held by the people under a free and fair electoral system. In a democracy, the supreme power is held by the people under a free and fair electoral system. In a real democracy, the people possess the constitutionally guaranteed right to choose who rules over them at any given point in time. (Davies, 2013).

In apparent recognition of this universal concept of democracy, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (1999) in Section 14, (2a) proclaimed that “Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this Constitution derives all its powers and authority.” Sub-sections 2b and 2c respectively state that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government and the participation of the people in their government shall be ensured. (Davies, 2013).

A democratic system of government allows for and provides for checks and balances in the exercise of governmental powers. The President of the federation and the Governors of the states cannot arrogate powers to themselves or spend money on projects without recourse to the appropriation and approval by the houses of assembly.

In a democratic system of government, there are laws guiding and directing how purchases and procurements by government officials ought to be carried out. The President of the federation and the Governors of the states (as well as the ministers and commissioners working under them) cannot buy things for the public office without adherence to the Procurement Act and the Due Process Laws of the state. (Davies, 2013).

All these measures are what we call accountability in governance. The end result of the strict observance of accountability principles in governance gives rise to employment opportunities, development, growth and stability.

The dividends of democracy and Sustaining Democracy in Nigeria

Democracy is deepened and sustainable when there is good governance and this must be the central goal of the party in power. Good governance is imperative for social and economic progress. There are four key indicators of good governance in any society viz; Rule of law – Democracy is short-changed by decision-making that is democratic only in name. The Constitution and actual written laws must be obeyed and upheld, while due process must be followed. Things should be done in an orderly, predictable manner, and for sustainability of democracy, political parties, particularly the ruling party must have respect for democratic governance and democratic institutions.

Good governance requires the development and strengthening of independent state institutions like the security agencies, a functional legislature (allowed to express itself), and a viable and independent judiciary. Every effort must be made to ensure that these institutions function properly and optimally with or without the human actor. Human beings come and go but institutions remain. When these institutions are firmly established and devoid of political control and manipulation, they guarantee the regularity of human conduct and people can predict how the system will respond in a given situation. (Peter, 2012).

Democracy is undermined when actions or the inactions of state institutions appear tainted with greed, personal aggrandizement and corrupt practices, ethnicity, partisanship and or hypocrisy. I am fully in support of the current anti-corruption war of the federal government; it is about time we deal with the monster of corruption in our society and sanitize the polity with sound anti-corruption policies and action. But our institutions must be democratic and civil in their actions, and the rule of law must be a guiding principle. Due process must be followed and an integrity test must be performed within the institutions, and their application of the law among the citizenry, ensuring there is no bias in order to retain public confidence.

The party in government must be seen to drive the process with sincerity of purpose to ensure a buy-in by the citizenry. I suggest therefore that in the fight against corruption, the norm will be for the anti-graft agency to first conclude its investigations, indict persons involved, then arrest them and

immediately proceed with prosecution in a court of competent jurisdiction. With this in place, the integrity of the process and outcomes will be better.

The attitude of our politicians is a far cry from the zeal of the people to sustain the democratic system. Politicians perceive campaign promises as a mere gimmick to woo the people and to get votes at the elections. In developed democracies, the office holders are often reminded of their campaign promises and a deviation from such promises could be a ground for impeachment from office. The people hold their leaders to account. Regrettably, impeachment proceedings in Nigeria are often taken up for personal reasons, party affiliations or religious undertones.

The former president Olusegun Obasanjo while speaking on Saturday told Nigerians that they will soon have to say good bye to Nigeria as a nation. According to Ripples Nigeria, chief Obasanjo made this known during an international symposium to mark his 85th birthday in Abeokuta the Ogun state capital. He stated that the country has changed political parties from 1999 till date and all that the politicians could deliver is backwardness politically, economically, and socially. <https://m.scoopernews.com/share?newsId=24432909&shareChannel=WhatsApp> He added that Nigeria has gotten to a situation where election results are no longer counted, stressed that the choices of leader is no more the will of the people. Obasanjo said, “since 1999, we have changed from one political party or another. We have maneuvered and manipulated to the point that election results are no longer reflections of the will of the people and we have seemed to be progressively going back rather than going forward politically, economically and socially”.

The former President further explained that if Nigeria should continue to elect leaders with sweat-word campaigning who lack honesty, integrity and patriotism, Nigerian should be ready to say good bye to the country as a nation.

“We have activities without requiring actions and personnel to move us forward. If we continue in the same pattern of recycling, sweat-word campaigning, maneuvering without the substance of integrity, honesty, patriotism, commitment, outreach, courage, understanding of what makes a nation and what make for development, we will soon have to say good bye to Nigeria as a nation.” <https://m.scoopernews.com/share?newsId=24432909&shareChannel=WhatsApp>

Democracy is advanced when elected political leaders fulfill the promises they made to their constituents during electioneering campaigns. There is nothing worse than unfulfilled promises in a democratic system. When leaders act as if promises they made during campaigns do not matter, it erodes the trust and confidence of the people in the system. The resultant effect is conflict, apathy, inequality, manipulation and corruption, all of which pose serious threats to sustainable democracy.

Political leaders at all levels must realize that promises are meant to be kept; the promises that we make during electioneering campaigns matter and we are under obligation to keep them. That is the only way to maintain the trust and confidence. Confidence is key and indeed, necessary between the people and their leaders for a sustainable democracy.

In many parts of Africa, many parties unlike their counterparts in Europe, are more like artificial parties, used as vehicles to advance the personal ambition of their leaders to win elections, sponsor their preferred candidates or control state power. They fail to provide an institutionalized framework from which the society can hold elected persons and governments to account.

Rather than be known and largely assessed and judged by their ideological stand/manifestoes, many political parties are more distinctive in ethnic, religious and regional terms. For democracy to thrive and be sustained therefore in Nigeria and Africa, whole political parties need to be grown to become healthy and functional institutions. While consolidating our democracy and running through the seventeenth year of this 4th republic, there is need to observe that campaigns and political advocacies have not largely been based on ideological identities, and worse still memberships appear to be more based on convenience, personality cliques, ethnicity, regional identities, and electoral possibilities at the moment in question. (Holden, Linnerud, & Banister, 2014).

This is a major setback to the sustenance of democratic growth, as the stability of political parties may not be guaranteed, be it the party in government or the opposition party. The gale of defections in the last few years among political actors clearly shows that our politics is still largely

driven by self, and not ideology. If not checked, this has the capacity to weaken our party systems and impact negatively on sustaining our democratic growth.

Sustainable democracy needs strong and sustainable political parties with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good. There is need, therefore, to strengthen political parties so that they do not constitute a weak link in the democratic process. As we strive to support the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in partnership with other multinational bodies to truly gain independence to conduct credible elections, we must begin to pay attention in our developmental process to the strengthening of party systems and political parties. (OECD, 2000)

To achieve sustainable democracy, we must understand that there is more to democracy than elections and voting. The fact that a nation chooses her leaders through the ballot box does not necessarily translate to democracy. There are certain tenets upon which any democracy can be nurtured and sustained. These are sovereignty of the people, majority rule and minority rights, the rule of law and good governance, respect for civil and political rights, mass literacy, economic prosperity, social development, free press, and an independent judiciary. Sustainable democracy is attainable when the conditions listed above are prevalent in the society. (Duran, Gogan, Artene, & Duran, 2015).

In a democracy, accountability inevitably assumes a pre-eminent position as it derives its legitimacy from the people at large.

Accountability is at the heart of every government, what the nature of that accountability, and how it is articulated, however, depends upon the kind of polity a country has.

The greater the need for accountability, the greater is the difficulty of its enforcement. Bureaucracy tends to monopolize within itself awesome power, which is not necessarily used for the citizen's welfare.

Accountability is important in good governance to keep the public servants tuned to the right perspective, including goals; society needs to have at its disposal definite ways of holding the servants accountable. Accountability is the acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions. It implies a willingness to be transparent, allowing others to observe and evaluate one's performance. Accountability is an acceptance of responsibility for honest and ethical conduct towards others. In the corporate world, a company's accountability extends to its shareholders, employees, and the wider community in which it operates.

Accountability leads to Good Governance and sustains democracy.

Accountability is important in evaluating the on-going effectiveness of public officials or bodies ensures that they are performing to their full potential, providing value for money, instilling confidence in the government and being responsive to the community. (Mouffe, Chantal, 2005).

Accountability is a mechanism designed to ensure that the affairs or the entities are conducted with due regard to the interests of those who are interested in the affairs of the entity.

Accountability guarantees actions and decisions taken by public officials regarding government initiatives and respond to the needs of the community thereby contributing to better governance and poverty reduction. It also means their decisions and actions are subject to oversight so as to guarantee that their stated objectives are met. (Nwabara, 2018).

The Good governance recognizes accountability in terms of improving the delivery of public services, measuring performance and providing incentives to achieve targets and sanctions in case of non-performance.

Accountability is not to be viewed only in terms of democratic control and integrity of operations but also in terms of performance.

Through series of reform measures such as Financial Management Initiative, creation of Executive Agencies, Citizen's Charter, and Public Service Agreement, complete transformation of bureaucratic structure and efficient public service, accountability is embedded.

Accountability: A Tool for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria.

Several countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada and USA have embraced the philosophy of accountability and brought significant improvement in public service delivery and efficiency. USA has enacted a Government Result and Performance Act 1993.

The basic characteristics of Accountability can be summarized by Nathan, (2013) are as follows:

- Definition of goals of the institution and powers, functions and resources committed thereto
- Planning, directing, supervision and control of activities/operations
- Recording of transactions
- Audit by an independent authority
- Final disposal of the accountability responsibility

Accountability is important in evaluating the on-going effectiveness of public officials or bodies ensures that they are performing to their full potential, providing value for money, instilling confidence in the government and being responsive to the community.

Conclusion

Sustainable democracy requires the existence of these non-negotiable principle: the strict observance of the principle of accountability, upholding of the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights, an independent and credible electoral process, access by the citizenry to basic necessities of life (food, shelter, education, health, and transportation), transparency in government, a robust and independent judiciary, and a free and independent press. It also requires that strict measures be taken to rid the polity of vested financial and commercial interests.

Finally, political parties must plan for the present and future needs of the people for democracy to be sustainable. For this to happen, civic leaders and elected representatives must embrace the principle of deferred gratification and long-term planning that has the welfare of the people at its core. Together if we take immediate action, we have the power to build a people-oriented and sustainable democracy.

Taking responsibility at the work place is what ties you to your organization. You may feel like an outsider at times, but if you start taking accountability for your actions and decisions, you could contribute in more ways than one. This will add value to your role and improve your performance.

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Dr. Veronica Akandu Kulo; Mirriam A. Effah and Dr. Regina Agor Agbogo

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