

# DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses attention on the relationship between democracy and national development. It also identified the problems affecting democracy in Nigeria. These include bribery and corruption, low level of literacy, economic difficulties, destructive criticism, lack of compromise, lack of sustained democracy, biased judiciary, etc. The paper also highlights the conditions necessary for the success of democracy. These include periodic free and fair elections, tolerance of opposition, popular consultation, accountability, rule of law, political equality, majority rule, existence of multi-party system, press freedom, and independent judiciary. It also identified the roles of democracy in ensuring national - development. Recommendations on how democracy could lead to national development include: (i) Government should eradicate illiteracy so that all people can take part in the political processes, (ii) The elected representatives should see themselves as servants and they should serve the people diligently, (iii) Government should be able to stamp out corrupt practices among the elected representatives etc.

## **Introduction**

The concept of democracy is generally given a worldwide acceptance. Dible, (2002) defines democracy as a system of government in which the exercise of political power and authority is vested in the people through their elected representatives.

Democracy has also been defined as government by consent (Udom, 2002). It therefore means that it is the majority of the people that determine what is to be done in a particular society. Modern democracy is a system which gives to citizens maximum personal freedom and also periodic opportunities to choose their leaders and select governmental programmes from available alternatives.

Appadorai (1975) defines democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves. This suggests the existence of different political parties and groups, and elected process, and free and fair competition among these groups for endorsement by the citizens. The citizens endorse their leaders through the franchise which adult citizens have. According to Abraham Lincoln, the former U. S. President, democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people.

It therefore means that people in the society have a determinant power over decision making in a given society. Democracy is also a form of government which is concerned with the protection of personal rights and effective participation in government by the people (Samuel, 2002). It also implies frequent elections and the acceptance of the majority decision. In practice democracy is merely a government by the majority of people. It also includes equality before the law, free and fair elections, and the acceptance of the opposition party and independence of the judiciary.

National development means an increase in output and changes in the technical and institutional arrangements by which it is produced and distributed, (Kindlebeger and Herrick, 1977). The phrase national development is often used to denote the progress of a society socially, politically, economically, scientifically, technologically, morally, etc. A nation is said to develop when its various

areas of life as mentioned has attained its peak or apex. (Nwanyanwo, 1997) All these cannot be achieved in a chaotic atmosphere, where the country is ruled by "the Khaki boys" or military.

According to Ndoh and Emezi (1997), the impediments to national development may be tribal sentiment and ethnicity, lack of patriotism, economic sabotage, corruption, electoral malpractices, poverty, disobedience to law, and lack of government commitment to the development of infrastructural facilities.

Democracy and national development means how democracy can lead to national development of a country. It also implies how the type of training given to people can assist them produce the maximum output through self- discovered and utilized technology.

### **Problems Affecting Democracy in Nigeria**

According to Olaniyan (1979), there are so many problems militating against the success of democracy in Nigeria:

- (i) **Bribery and Corruption:** The attitude of the Nigerian politicians to win elections at all cost engenders the use of money as an inducement to voters, or even members of the electoral commission or tribunal to enable them rig elections and falsify judgement in their favour
- (ii) **Low Level of Literacy:** The low level of literacy has contributed a lot to the inability of democracy to succeed in Nigeria (Oyeneye, Oyenwenu, and Olosunde, 1988). Most of the citizens can neither read nor write and therefore fall easily into the rigging plans and deceptions of desperate politicians who are bent on capturing power at all cost.
- (iii) **Economic Difficulties:** Democratic governments are often likely to be faced by economic difficulties. This is so because political democracy is meaningless the system brings with it a significant degree of economic inequality. Therefore it must be noted that democracy cannot work in a society where there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor members of the society. According to Nwankwo (1985) western political democracy is a deception because so much of the wealth and property is owned by a few rich persons who exercise great influence upon all other aspects of society.
- (iv) **Destructive Criticism:** In a supposed democratic society destructive criticism is likely to have grave consequences on the effective operation of government. We must note that healthy criticism is constructive and progressive, but destructive criticism is destabilising and it stagnates government.
- (v) **Lack of Compromise:** Adigwe (1974) opined that the idea of democracy implies compromise. This means that as a result of discussion and compromise, peaceful resolutions can be found to the differences of opinion that exist within the State, but it has been observed that in many States compromise has been difficult to reach. The powerful members of the society or the party in government can be seen to have imposed their views on the other members of the society.
- (vi) **Lack of Sustained Democracy:** The lack of a democratic culture at all levels of the society militates against the conduct of free and fair elections. Military rule has been so long in Nigeria that people are not used to democratic processes. They do not fit in easily into the conduct of free and fair election.
- (vii) **Biased Democracy:** The judiciary as an arm of government that is expected to uphold the rule of law and people's liberty is often teleguided by the government in power. In such cases, they may make pronouncements that violate the country's electoral laws and are usually unable to demonstrate their independence from executive control.

### **Conditions Necessary for Free and Fair Elections**

Harold L. (1976) opined that the opportunity for political participation, political equality and the possibility of an alternative government make for a stable democratic form of government. In order that democracy may work successfully, certain additional conditions are necessary:

- (i) The habit of tolerance and compromise among the members of a community, "a sense of give and take" which is lacking in the annals of Nigerian politics,
- (ii) The provision of adequate opportunities for the individual to develop his personality; access to knowledge, through a system of state - aided free education, security against unemployment, minimum wage, fair conditions of work, leisure and some voice in determining the conditions of work to guard against economic slavery. This implies that vast disparities in the distribution of economic wealth should be progressively reduced (Thompson, 2002).
- (iii) According to Janowitz (1964), democracy requires proper organisation and leadership. Organization is supplied by parties which in spite of their admitted defects are essential to the successful working of representative government,
- (iv) **Tolerance of Opposition** Organised opposition is allowed in a democracy to express its

views on government policies. Even though the majority have the final decision, minority views should be tolerated,

- (v) **Popular Consultation** A democratic government seeks the people's opinion on its policies and programmes because they are the final beneficiaries of such programmes (William, 1980).
- (vi) **Accountability of Government to the People** The government is responsible, accountable, and responsive to the people that voted them into power.
- (vii) **Rule of Law** The constitution is the supreme law of the land in a democracy, and both the government and the citizenry are subject to the laws of the country, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999).
- (viii) **Political Equality** Every citizen in a democratic government is accorded equal opportunity to vote and be voted for, provided they are duly qualified to participate in the political process, (ix)
- Majority Rule** Government decisions, policies and programmes are based on the desires of the majority.
- (x) **Independent Judiciary** According to Udom (2002) in a democracy, the judiciary is free from the control of the other two organs of government; i.e. the decision and pronouncements of the judiciary are not subject to either executive or legislative control.
- (xi) **Press Freedom** the people have freedom to express their opinion on government through the press,
- (xii) **Existence of Multi-Party System** According to Oyeneye, Oyenwenu, and Olosunde (1998) the principle of democracy gives room for the emergence of various political parties which compete for political power, and when in government, help to mobilise the electorate to support government policies and programmes.

### **The Roles of Democracy in Ensuring National Development**

Democracy has priority over other forms of government and has been adopted by so many countries worldwide by reason of its paramount roles in the development of a nation. According to Samuel (2002) democracy is a government that everybody is involved in. He also observed that democracy is a government that carries its citizens along that can create meaningful development in

the society. In a democracy, there is always a free flow of information as freedom of speech and the press is upheld.

One of the roles of democracy in national development is that democracy as a system of government encourages the establishment of industry. For the fact that democracy is a government where the people are allowed to carry out their lawful business and also follow the constitution that guides and protect the actions of the people in a given society has contributed to the development of a nation.

Another role of democracy towards the development of the nation is by respecting the fundamental human rights. It is also a form of government that provides an enabling environment where the citizens are allowed to enjoy their fundamental human rights. This particular idea encourages the citizens to carry out their obligations.

Besides, another role of democracy towards national development is the provision of the constitution. This contributes towards national development in the sense that when all the rules governing a particular country is written down in a particular document, citizens know their rights and duties, and the ruling government will make sure the country is ruled according to the constitution and this brings about stability of government which encourages national development (Nwanyanwo, 1997).

**National Integration:** As political parties are allowed to exist in a democracy, they play a very major role in national integration which aids national development. Political parties, by being national in outlook enhance development as everybody will work to foster a common interest.

**Uniform Development:** According to Nnoli (1978), democracy brings about uniform development across the nation. As representatives are drawn from each constituency of the federation to form the government, each representative knows the yearnings and aspirations of his people and therefore works towards solving them. As a result this each section of a particular nation is given proper developmental attention.

**Grassroot Upliftment:** In democratic government, government is broken down into simpler units so that the common man feels its impact. People are given the opportunity to elect their representatives into public offices. These representatives once elected are responsible to the electorate. They are kept there so as to aid in the development of their constituencies politically, economically, socially and otherwise. By this arrangement the people's problems are easily identified and solved as such poverty is alleviated, youths become employed, people have ample opportunity to develop themselves educationally and economically.

Those who are less privilege are given awards like scholarship, loans etc. All these lead to national development.

**Political Education:** The survival of any nation or organisation depends on the deliberate efforts by the politicians to train successor generations to take over from them. This is a situation where the youths are given a sound political education and enlightenment engendered by the existence and the use of free press, mass media, political rallies and campaign and the general masses being well informed. This enables them to examine issues at hand for rightful decision. It is only through a democratic society that these could be possible.

**Economic Role:** Democracy is a peaceful stable and hopeful system of government, according to Eboh and Ukpog (1993). And it is only in a democratic society that peace, stability and progress is guaranteed. Any country ruled by the military is a threat to its economic development, because it will not attract foreign investors. Examples, Nigeria's twenty-five years of military administration did not allow foreign investors to come and invest. That is why Nigeria still lacks behind economically; but on the installation of democracy under Obasanjo, he showed that democracy is a reconciliatory system of government. He made a broadcast in his celebration of hundred days in office:

For me, I have put my hands on the plough and there is no looking back. I re-dedicate myself to the work of reconciliation and reconstruction, I appeal to all Nigerians, irrespective of sex, religion, ethnic origin, political affiliation or social status to join hands in the work ahead to make Nigeria not only great but also peaceful and prosperous. I appeal to all Nigerians to join me in the campaign to reconstruct Nigeria.

The speech was a plea to reconcile the international communities so as to attract foreign investors for our country's economic development.

**Social and Political Role;** Since democracy is the government of the majority, it creates an avenue for the citizens to socialize, interact and associate with one another by joining the same political party, and during electioneering campaign. In this way, some aspects of socio-political development are achieved.

**Protection of Human Resources:** Whenever the military takes over government from democratically elected officers, the constitution will be suspended and they will promulgate obnoxious decrees providing for detention without trial, sometimes resourceful citizens will be made to suffer the fate of • this obnoxious decree, some will be killed like Major Gen. (RTD) Musa Ya'radua, Ken Saro Wiwa, Chief M.K.O. Abiola during Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar's administration respectively. Therefore it is only democracy that can guard against the indiscriminate detention and elimination of resourceful citizens (Punch Newspaper 10th Dec, 1999).

### **Recommendations**

Anytime a legitimate government is put in place, there is bound to be development in all the sectors. So on that note a few recommendations or suggestions have been made:

- (i) In a democratic society all men irrespective of birth, position and power are deemed to have equal political right. For example right to vote and be voted for, freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of worship, freedom of speech etc.
- (ii) Since the democratic society permits constructive criticisms, government should allow people to criticize government programmes and policies constructively.
- (iii) The elected representatives should see themselves as servants and they should serve the

- people diligently,
- (iv) Government should eradicate illiteracy so that all people can take part in the political processes.
  - (v) Government should be able to stamp out corrupt practices among the elected representatives, (vi) The elected representatives should endeavour to render the account of stewardship before and after their tenure of office.
  - (vii) All the stakeholders in the democratic processes should contribute positively to the development of democracy in Nigeria,

### **Conclusion**

The best kind of democracy is that which enables as many people as possible to share in the making of decisions and in the actual functions of government (John, 2001).

Baradat (1979) maintains that democracy and expertise are two inseparable twin engines of stability and progress. Lack of expertise in our democratic process had vividly portrayed an abject and sad situation of square pegs in round holes. This predictably has resulted in chaos and confusion. Until skilled men in the business of statesmanship are given a chance, democracy in Nigeria will continue to remain a mirage.

To this end, I have enumerated few democratic roles leading to national development the explication of some concept, like democracy, national development and suggestions on how to have a sustainable democratic society has also been given attention.

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