



Assessing Democracy in the Context of Good Governance: A Focus on Kogi State

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ABSTRACT: Every human society, as primitive or civilised it may be, has its own system of organization. Though the idea of democracy is old as the history of organised human societies, its contemporary practice connotes a new version or an improvement over what was obtainable in ancient Greeks, or even in the pre-colonial African political systems. As society evolves and undergoes transformation, so are emerging challenges that require new thinking and solutions. It is against this backdrop that political philosophers since the days of Plato and Aristotle in ancient to those of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu etc, have been preoccupied with how best to organize society for the good of the people. It is in the light of this development that Aristotle carried out a study of constitutions where he arrived at the idea of democracy as the best form of political organization comparable to monarchy and oligarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy has become a universal standard and so popular that it is now taken as the only legitimate form of government for humankind or the only "civilized" form of government. The impression is often given that democracy is good; to be undemocratic is bad (Elaigwu, 2014). Hembe (2003, p.29), maintains that;

democracy is not only considered as a political system and a form of political organisation through which the goal of development could be achieved; but also a means of finding solutions to the prevailing economic, social and political problems since it provided opportunities for mass participation in the socio-economic and political decision making process.

Meanwhile, struggles for democratisation in Africa gathered momentum in the 1990s, especially states under predatory military authoritarianism and under one party dictatorship. As noted by Ake (2001, p.135) "just a decades ago, military rule, one party system, and personal rule were the standard fare in Africa; now they are exception rather than the rule". It

implies that at present, almost all countries of Africa including Nigeria are said to establish their political systems on the principles of liberal democracy. While the post-independence and indeed, post-military era in Nigeria, like in most African countries seems to resolve the controversy about the best form of political organisation that can ensure the greatest happiness for the generality of the people, the political leadership is yet to place the country on the path of good governance. Though, government both at the federal and state levels, at times in collaboration with the international financial institutions, have initiated and adopted several policies, programmes and development blueprints as well as other forms of financial commitments to deliver democratic dividends to the people, there are no satisfactory indices to demonstrate that democratic practice in Nigeria has translated into good governance. The reality of democratic governance in Nigeria is captured by Ake (1995);

The contemporary world is not a favourable environment for democracy. We have always prefer the reputation of being democratic to the notorious inconvenience of practicing democracy. Now we can enjoy the reputation without the inconvenience because we have trivialized democracy to the extent that it is no longer threatening to those in power or demanding on anyone. Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without losing its symbolic value. While it spreads, our world is more repressive—we hear repeatedly that development has failed in Africa. The point, however, is that it just never started in the first place because of inclement political conditions. More than anything else, it is politics that is under developing Africa.

Kogi state which is the focus of this paper is not exempted from the failure to deliver good governance to the citizens, particularly since 1999 when the country returned to democratic rule. Generally, the pace of socio-economic and political development in Kogi state does not reflect its enormous human and material resources. The abysmal performance and poor governance profile in Kogi State point to the fact that democracy is not just about erecting democratic institutions or electing leaders in to political offices. As important as that may be, it is fundamentally about dignity of the human person, about his or her freedom to be what he or she elects to be (Gana and Omelle, 2005). As noted by Lawal and



Olukayode (2012), the growth and development of democracy depends largely on the practice of its ethics, ideals and norms as they serve as bedrock for democratic consolidation and sustainability. It suggests that the level of development of democratic institutions; and how a particular society imbibes the tenets and principles of democratic practice determine to a larger extent the level of its socio-political and good governance profile. This paper therefore, assesses Democracy in the context of good governance with a particular emphasis on Kogi State.

Conceptual Analysis

The key concepts in this paper are democracy and good governance. These concepts have attracted several scholarly attention and a lot of literature has been developed therefrom. Indeed, to consider all the views with regard to the conceptual implication, theoretical arguments, historical dimensions as well as the various perspectives put forward by scholars regarding these concepts is too large an exercise for this piece. Instead, some views of scholars will be carefully selected in order to throw light on the meaning and how the concepts of democracy and good governance are used in this paper.

Democracy

Democracy has been defined by scholars in different perspectives that it has become easier to identify it than to define it (Enemu, 1999). As Johari (2003) rightly puts, in spite of the various views and perspectives, democracy can be viewed as a form of state, a form of government, a form of society and above all, an ethical idea or a way of life. As a form of state, democracy prevails where people are powerful or the sovereign authority is vested in the people; democracy as a way of life implies a society that stands on the pillars of liberty and equality. What is of most interest in this study is the meaning of democracy as a form of government. In this regards, Appadorai (2004) traced the roots of the concept to two Greek words – “demos” meaning people and “kratia” meaning rule. In this context, democracy simply means the rule of the people. It is a process through which the will of the masses (majority) takes precedence over that of the individual or minority group.

In modern times, the popular definition of democracy is arguably captured in the Gettysburg Oration of President Lincoln who designates it as government of the people, by the people and for the people (Johari, 2003). Meanwhile, if there is any consensus on the meaning of democracy in modern times, it is perhaps in relation to the understanding that it is not personal rule and that it is different from authoritarian/dictatorial rule (Jega, 2007). It can also be said that democracy is based on some form of participation and/or representation. It is assumed that in a democratic political system, government derives legitimacy from the people. Government also exercises authority within the framework of a body of supreme laws called the constitution.

A summary of the above views suggests that democracy is a form of government that takes cognizance of the interests and welfare of the masses. Among other things, it provides social opportunities likely to enhance the capabilities of individuals to develop their potentials. For the common man, this means increasing his capacity to overcome poverty, protest against unemployment and social exclusion and increase the ability to take advantage of the favorable economic environment to improve his standard of living. Politically, even the poor are empowered in a democratic system. This means that they are included in the development process through consultations. This signifies correlation between democracy and good governance.

Good Governance

The concept of governance, according to the World Bank Report (1989) is the exercise of political power in the management of a nation's affairs. This definition thus implies that governance encompasses the state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes and implementation capacity, and the relationship between the governing apparatus and the governed - that is the people in terms of their standard of living (George-Genyi, 2013). Governance typically emphasizes leadership which suggests the way political leaders manning the apparatus of the state, use or misuse power, to promote social and economic development or to engage in those agendas that largely undermine the



realization of the good things of life for the people. Thus, governance can be said to refer to the way power is exercised in the management of the country's economic and social resources to the development of a society. It is the ability of the government to efficiently and effectively promote the economic well-being of its people.

Good governance therefore implies a system of government based on good leadership, respect for the rule of law and due process, the accountability of the political leadership to the electorate as well as transparency in the operations of government (Odock (2006). Transparency has to do with the leadership carrying out government business in an open, easy to understand and explicit manner, such that the rules made by government, the policies implemented by the government and the results of government activities are easy to verify by the ordinary citizens. Accountability as a component of good governance refers to the fact that those who occupy positions of leadership in the government must give account or subject themselves to the will and desire of the society and people they govern. Therefore, good governance is in tandem with democratic practice which is largely characterized by high valued principles such as rule of law, accountability, participation, transparency, human and civil rights.

Theoretical Framework

The central element of democratic practice is leadership which is expected to deliver good governance. In the light of this, governance theory becomes imperative in explaining the nexus between democracy and good governance. Governance theory is a brainchild of World Bank and it has develop some principles to guide the development of developing nations. Governance theory contradicts the argument of neo-Marxist scholars who attribute underdevelopment of TWCs mainly on the dynamism of international capitalist system. According to the governance school of thought, the problem of TWCs including Nigeria is basically internally induced. However, the facts of the Marxist and Neo-Marxist theoretical assumption to some extent provide insight into the historical development of underdevelopment in Nigeria.

The basic principle of governance is about how effective the public sector in TWCs can be developed. It assumes that a modern form of government is not just only about efficiency, that governing is also about accountability between the state and its citizens. Evidently, in most countries of the West African sub-region including Nigeria, the political leadership tend to accumulate and appropriate greater share of the societal wealth thereby leaving majority who belong to the other segment of the society to resort to "informal state" or groups. It implies that the failure of democracy to deliver jobs, create wealth and empowerment, and indeed provide social and economic services is as a result of poor governance. The general argument of governance approach is situated in the context of the social contract theory. It is the duty and responsibility of state to create enabling environment for development to thrive. Therefore, failure of the state to live up to its contract is tantamount to the failure of good governance.

Governance theory has been advanced by such scholars Migdal (1988), Zartman (1995) etc, who argue that in the absence of good governance, a nation may experience state collapse or failure. This has been the lot of most African countries including Nigeria where bad governance has held sway. A state ideally is meant to be an organization, composed of several agencies led and coordinated by the state leadership (executive authority) which has the capacity and authority to make and implement the finding rules for all the people and applying force if necessary to have its way.

A cursory look at the foregoing perspectives, it implies that good governance is just about the making and implementation of policies by the leadership which are simple to understand by the citizens. It is also not justified to reduce the role of the citizens to that of verifying the results of government activities. To be clear, good governance is an enterprise jointly undertaken by both the leadership and the followers.

The Nexus between Democracy and Good Governance

Democracy and good governance have shared values and attributes such as as popular participation, capacity expansion as well as freedom (Mazrui, 2002). It is observed that where these principles or rules are generally



observed, such a government is adjudged to be democratically constituted, and where the reverse is the case and there are breaches, such a regime is definitely undemocratic regardless even where it attempts to meet or satisfy the welfare needs of the people. Though democratization is an independent variable that explains the level and extent of governance delivery in any society, much of it depends to some extent on the context within which the analysis is carried out (Osaghae (1995). It implies that a contextual analysis of the relationship between democracy and good governance would be of high utility having been reputed for its ability to account for differences in the same phenomenon in different systems.

As part of good governance, democratic politics does not just end at political contestations but that political contestations are guided by moral principles, which according to Betham (1994, p.60) include ensuring open and effective challenges to government and government policies through free and fair elections, increasing citizens' participation; maximizing the accountability and transparency of office holders; guaranteeing equal rights for all citizens; ensuring full inclusive citizenship, based on respect for gender, cultural, religious and other differences; and assuring effective redress against infringement of citizens' rights. Generally, democracy is essential to good governance in all ramifications. It contributes to good governance delivery by providing a context for effective policy formulation and implementation.

However, critics are of the view that the urge to align good governance with democracy is caricature. This is because some of the East Asian countries that have recorded remarkable growth did so within the context of authoritarian rule. The argument is that what is important is not so much on the form of government, but its impact. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Mahathir, and others, have alluded to the fact that, what their societies need is not democratic government, but good government; That is, a government that will provide economic well-being, political stability, social order, communal harmony, efficient and honest administration (Huntington, 1997, p.11-12).

In a similar vein, it has been argued that, Western political values that liberal democracy embodies are seen to be subversive of the cultural values of the Asian society. In the African context, some scholars make a similar argument. Bujra and Molutsi (2000) contend that "while western style of liberal democracy is based on the exclusive concern for individualism, competition and accumulation, values devoid of social welfare, whereas deep social affection and collectivism that promote social well-being are the core values in Africa. The discourse about forms of government rather than outcome of governance is an issue of structure. They are not mutually exclusive categories, and may be seen to be opposite of the same coin. If we are interested in outcome, structure and process should also be important. While authoritarian regimes may promote productive governance, there is the problem of sustainability. Without orderly process of political organization and procedure, the gains of development may not be sustainable. Huntington (1997, p.12-13) puts it thus:

yet while authoritarian rule may provide good government for a decade, or even a generation, it cannot provide – and throughout history never has provided good government over a sustained period of time. It lacks the institutions for self-reforms; public debate, a free press, protest movements, opposition political parties, and competitive elections. Democracy in contrast, is base on a much more realistic and complex view of the human nature and on the recognition that ambition Experience clearly shows that only democracy provides good government over the long haul.

It can be deduced from the available literature that what is contentious is the form of democracy to be practiced in given socio-economic formation; be it liberal or social democracy. More importantly, the character of the state and its politics is core to understanding the performance of the political leadership and democratic governance in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world.

History of Democratic Governance in Kogi State and Nigeria

Historically, African societies had organised political system in terms of kingdoms, empires, and small city-states way before 1500 (Mazour, et al,



1983). However, these traditional institutions have been replaced with modern liberal democratic principles through the process of colonialism and globalization. This process was also facilitated by the decolonization of Africa after the 2nd World War and the emergence of a New World Order occasioned by the end of Cold War. The collapse of communist ideologies in the USSR and many Eastern European countries, brought about a new world order with the triumph of western liberal democracy across the world. In Nigeria, the history of modern democratic practice can be traced to the development of constitutional government which began after World War 1 (Okpeh, 2013). In 1922, the Clifford Constitution was introduced and it gave impetus to the formation of political parties. This development resulted to the introduction of elective principle which marked the beginning of Nigeria's journey to liberal democratic governance.

At independence, two dominant styles of government emerged in Africa: military dictatorship and one-party authoritarian rule. Although Nigeria has been practising a multi-party system except in 1989 when the Country practised two party system. The advent of military government was not restricted to Nigeria. It became a common feature in African countries as the military intervened in Ghana, February 1966; Mauritania, July 1978; Mali, November 1968; Liberia, April 1980; Guinea, April 1984; Congo, April 1977; Chad, April 1975; Central African Republic, December 1965; Burkina Faso, January 1960; Burundi, November 1960, Benin, October 1963; Sierra Leone, March 1967; Sudan, May 1969; Rwanda, July 1975; Niger, April 1974; Uganda, January 1971, Togo, January 1907; and Zaire, October 1965 (Ujo, 2012). On the other hand, many African leaders, at independence, introduced one-party system as attempts to perpetuate themselves in power. Examples include Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Almadu Alhijo of Cameroun, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Felix H. Boigny of Cote'd Voire, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, William Tubman of Liberia and Sekou Toure of Guinea (Ujo, 2012).

To properly understand the historical journey of democratic rule in Nigeria, there is need to consider Report by the African Election Database (2007) which outlines stages of political development in Nigeria as follows: 1960 – 1966 (civilian), 1966 – 1979 (military), 1979 – 1983 (civilian), 1983 – 1989 (military), 1989 – 1993 (diarchy), 1993 – 1999 (military) and 1999 – date (civilian). Going by this classification, the history of Nigeria's post-colonial democratic practice could be categorised into first, second, third and fourth republics. In the First Republic, the federal government was formed by a coalition of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC), after the 1959 elections (Edoh, 2003). Another election was conducted in 1964 to form a national government that was dominated by NPC. This period witnessed several crises that disrupted the democratic process. Okpeh (2003) highlighted these crises to include, the AG crisis, the census palaver, the 1964 federal elections crisis. Meanwhile, Nigerian political class at independence proved incapable of managing these crises and it resulted to the military coup of January 15, 1966 (Okpeh, 2003).

The first military regime of Aguiyi Ironsi had made no efforts to return the country to civilian rule and the Gowon's military regime did not achieve its nine-point transition programme. It was the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime that revitalised the democratic process which led to the second democratic republic rule in 1979 after nearly a decade and half of military rule (Edoh, 2003). The parties that dominated this era include Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria's Peoples Party (NPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) (Atim, 1998). The second republic collapsed on the account of growing dissent within the military and political class that the game of politics was not being practiced as it should be. The speedy wiping off of the opposition group and the gradual turning of Nigeria into a failed State, systematic devaluation of naira, pervasive poverty as well as ever widening social gap between the rich and the poor were becoming problematic for comfort (Atim, 1999). Edoh (2003, p.76) concludes that, "once again, the utter inability of Nigeria's



ruling elites to play electoral politics according to the rules of the game had pushed the nation into a political *cul-de-sac* from which only the military offered an escape route". The first military regime after the second republic had no transition programme (Okpeh, 2003). It was the Babangida's military regime that began the democratic process of the botched third republic by setting up the Political Bureau in 1986 (Edoh, 2003). In his views Jibo (2014) described IBB transition agenda as the longest of all the ones presented by the Nigerian military governments and thus, it was generally understood as an excuse to elongate his tenure in office. During this period, two political parties – Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) were formed. However, the IBB's transition programme ended with the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections (Ojo, 1998).

An Interim National Government headed by Ernest Shonekan was put in place after the annulment of June 12 elections and the stepping aside of IBB. The Interim Government was overthrown by Sani Abacha in November, 1993 (Omotola, 2007). The military regime of Abacha drafted a constitution through a Constitutional Conference that formed the bedrock for the regime's transition programme. As if to demonstrate a commitment to a democratic electoral process based on competitive political parties, Abacha had given the new electoral body, National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) the nod for the registration of five political parties: the United Nigerian Congress party (UNCP), the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM (Edoh, 2003)). The greatest obstacle to Abacha's transition programme was the politics of self-succession embarked upon to handover to himself. However, the self-succession plan was aborted due to the death of Abacha on June 8, 1998 (Omotola, 2007).

As noted by Edoh (2003), the sudden death of Gen. Sani Abacha and his succession by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar created the opportunity to re-energise Nigeria's movement towards democracy. In eleven months, the

Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar regime that succeeded Abacha, successfully completed a transition programme which climaxed with the handing over of power to a democratically elected government headed by Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. The Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition programme introduced three political parties: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Peoples Party (APP) (Edoh, 2003). Obasanjo completed 2-term tenure of 4-years each and handed over to Umaru Yar'Adua on 29th May, 2007. Following the death of Umaru Yar'Adua on 5 May 2010, Goodluck Jonathan became the third president in the acting capacity before he later won the election in 2011 to become the elected President of the country. Jonathan ambition to secure second tenure was unsuccessful as he lost to Muhammadu Buhari who became Nigerian president on May 29th, 2015 and was re-elected in 2019 for the 2nd tenure of 4-years. From the foregoing historical survey of democratic practice in Nigeria, it can be deduced that prior to the present democratic dispensation (1999-date), successive civilian administrations in Nigeria have proved capable of conducting elections that could ensure successful transition to another civilian regime. More so, it is pertinent to point out that, Jonathan was the only incumbent who lost election to opposition party. Suggestive of the above analysis is that civilian rule is synonymous with democratic rule and military administration is considered undemocratic and an aberration.

The Challenge of Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Democratic practice in Nigeria has so far been a dilemma. In Nigeria, democracy has been restored for about two decades ago, with so much hopes and expectations from the people. It is assumed that with democracy, people would be free to choose their leaders and representatives and hold them accountable for the overall objective of fast tracking development and improving the general living conditions of the masses. This expectation is not misplaced considering that Nigeria has abundant human and natural resources. However, the reality on ground has shown that this expectation is largely unfulfilled. Obviously, there is failure of governance both at the local, state and national levels. The failure of leadership has been identified as a basic problem that remains



unsolved right from the foundation of the country. This problem continues to generate and complicate the enormous governance challenges that confront the country. Similarly, Agagu (2004) traces the failure of democratic governance in Nigeria to the nature and character of the Nigerian state whose origin and initial goal was not to pay any serious attention to the problems of the subjects but to exploit people and their resources to serve the goal of the metropolis. In other words, it has never been inclusive *abinitio*. This is later reinforced by the nature of political elites whose goal is self-serving at the detriment of the masses and even the state.

Lipset (1960) argues that democracy is related to the state of economic development. The more well to do a nation, the greater the chances it will sustain democracy. This is because economic prosperity brings peace; and there is close relationship between peace and development. This implies that extreme poverty and income inequality is detrimental to sustaining democracy (Muller, 1995). Evidently, the economic wellbeing of most Nigerians has continued to worsen since the return to democratic governance. Good governance for many years has remained elusive in Nigeria especially on account of endemic corruption. Corruption is a barrier to the growth of the nation because personal interest has taken over public interest. Corruption has eroded efficiency and professionalism of patriotic services to the Nigerian federation (Odeh, 2010). Odeh is apt, even history reveals that the political parties before and after independence metamorphosed from cultural organisations and as that were ethnically based. In spite of efforts put in place to fight corruption, the 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International ranked Nigeria 148th (together with Comoros and Guinea) among 180 countries surveyed.

Perhaps nothing demonstrates the challenges of democratization in Nigeria better than the problem of ethno-nationalism. The issue of ethnic cleavages, manifested in the high incidence of ethno-nationalism, has loomed quite large in the affairs of successive Nigerian governments. A major problem arising from the ethnic and religious diversity of

Nigeria is that it makes democratic compromise difficult. The different groups clamour for scarce resources and for control of the government. This leads to what Chirot (1977) refers to as "democratic paralysis". Among the various groups in Nigeria, the presence of hostility is rampant and this has constantly created instability in the polity as a result of nepotism (Nnoli, 2000). Merit and efficiency are scarified on the altar of ethnic chauvinism. Hence conflict between groups seems to be the order of the day in the polity rather than the development of a cooperative spirit. Ethnicity is therefore a plague that is prevailing over democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The increased ethnic tension that this has brought, has affected economic development as the climate is considered not investment friendly (Odeh, 2010).

Conflict of interests between the executive and the legislature is another point to reckon with. The perennial disagreement between the executive and legislative branches of government over some issues is explained in terms of inherited tradition of executive dominance despite the inherent pre-eminence of the legislature in the constitutional allocation of responsibilities. In addition, the overbearing role of the executive linked to situation of extreme centralization of power and resources has remained a key challenge in Nigeria's democracy; it is at the root of the growing culture of impunity and lack of respect for the rule of law. In another dimension, the judiciary is not only manipulated but also lack the needed autonomy to support and sustain democratic project in Nigeria. The transparency and independence of the judiciary is far from reality in Nigeria. Rather than being the last hope for the common man, the Nigerian judiciary is the last hope for our unimpeachable leaders. Obviously, Nigeria is today battling with modern day autocracy that retains some democratic norms. The system substitutes democratic system with totalitarian rule in every sphere of human interest and activity. The increasing pattern of centralization and political control by the executive contradicts the principles of democracy that emphasizes freedom of opinion and decentralization of the political system. The Nigerian politics that is characterized by intimidation, oppression, and subordination is in most part a product of the general culture.



Political democratization involves certain values, which includes freedom of association, citizen participation in decision-making and non-arbitrary rule, tolerance of opposing views, respect for law and order, free and fair elections, leadership transparency. Since 1999, Nigeria has been witnessing an increasing build-up of authoritarian structures and institutions. The control units, particularly the Police, Army, EFCC, ICPC, DSS, INEC, and so on, are authoritarian and thus out of control. Consequently, human rights abuses have worsened in the society over the years, and mostly the common people are feeling the pinch. According to Okechukwu (2012) more than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the country's democracy is the pervasive insecurity of lives and property, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, assassinations, kidnappings, armed banditry, ethnic and religious conflicts, coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts. The increasing number of unemployed Nigerian youths, some of whom are already recruits for criminal activities continue to plague Nigeria.

Politically, although there has been a flourishing and robust civil society in Nigeria, especially since the return to civil governance in 1999, and significantly aided by the availability of information and communication technology (ICT), its impacts as the counter force between state and society in Nigeria leaves much to imagination. Thus, despite the flourishing mass media (print, electronic and social), very little evidence of citizen journalism (or investigative journalism) that could check the state effectively exists. Issues get drawn to the domain of public discourse only to ebb out without the public knowing their resolutions. In other words, the conduct of the media as a vital component of civil society adds to the opaque nature of the official zone of public service. Similarly, Alkali (2018) argues that the increasing privatization of labour laws and employment relations in the country attenuates the capacity of labour to effectively organize for the purpose of moderating the excesses of the state against society. Meanwhile, the contentious issue of Africa's weak and fragile democracy has raised so many debates on the inability of most states in Africa to have sustainable development in spite of being democratic. The aforementioned factors triggered secession threats,

clamoring for restructuring, hatred and so on. The overall implications on the continent of Africa and Nigeria in particular leaves more to be desired.

The Success or Failure of Democratic Governance in Kogi State

Kogi State is located between the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue. It was created on August 27, 1991, during the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, with Lokoja being its capital city. Like many other states in Nigeria, Kogi state is heterogeneous in nature, with the Igala, Igbira and Okun as dominant ethnic groups. A salient issue in the political history of Kogi state is that the political alignment and struggle to control the political structures of the state has been defined by the ethnic composition and manipulation in the state (Omotola, 2008). Economically, Kogi State is richly endowed with both human and material resources. The state is endowed with expansive fertile land for agricultural activities, a large deposit of iron-ore located at Ajaokuta and Itakpe, and limestone at Obajana and a large forest in Kogi West where timber is produced in commercial quantity (Omotola, 2008). Despite this resource base, there are only three major and productive companies known in the state: the Ajaokuta Steel Company, the Iron-Ore Mining at Itakpe and the Dangote Cement Company (privately owned). Currently, the two government-owned companies are not operating far below average installed capacity. The State is also endowed with other resources like palm oil, marble, dolomite, coal, and ironstone (Onah, 2001). Despite this resource endowment, the unemployment and poverty level is very high.

Kogi state has historically experienced both military and civilian administrations. Since the creation of Kogi state in 1991, State has produced four (4) different democratically elected governors. Abubakar Audu was the first to be elected governor in 1993 and 1999. Audu was defeated by Ibrahim Idris in the 2003 general elections under the platform of the PDP. Idris served for eight years, and by 2012 Idris Wada won the elections under the PDP again and served for four years until his defeat by the APC in the 2016 general elections. Currently, Yahaya Bello



is the governor who took over in 2016 and re-elected in 2020 for second term. Meanwhile, successive administrations in Kogi state since the return to democracy in 1999 have struggled with the issue of good governance delivery which has not produced satisfactory results. A point of departure for interrogating the impact of democratic governance on development in Kogi state, is to begin with the present administration of Yahaya Bello (2016-date). If the media reports are anything to reckon with, Yahaya Bello of Kogi State would have been one of the most criticized governors. This sentiment is even shared by his party, APC which acknowledged that the Governor has come under series of criticisms ranging from non-payment, his faceoff and subsequent political fight with Dino Melaye, his stand on COVID-19 amongst others (APCNews, Shared on Facebook, Twitter; January 6, 2016). However, like any other government that wants to be seen as pursuing development, the Governor has embarked upon some projects, which he completes some while others are on-going. Imperative as the need may be to list all the projects and programmes of the Yahaya Bello as recorded by several sources, our assessment of the governor in terms of governance delivery is based on his intervention in the areas of security, infrastructure delivery, economy, poverty reduction, employment generation, education, healthcare delivery and political participation.

Section 14(2) (b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) states that the security and welfare of the people is the primary purpose of government. Thus, security and welfare of citizens become critical for ascertaining the level at which government can deliver on its governance mandate. Insecurity is a general and indeed, one of the major challenges of governance in Nigeria with increasing magnitude and intensity in contemporary times; and Kogi State is not an exception. However, the security scenario in Kogi State is far better when compared to other States; and thus, it is not out of place to attribute the success story to some of the efforts made by the Governor with regards to his declaration of war against criminals in the State. Economically, a notable effort by the Governor Bello of Kogi state is in the area of Tax Reform. In this regard, the governor constructed Kogi Revenue House as a move

to increase the State IGR. Kogi State as of today has moved from that State with a ridiculous paltry monthly Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of N350million from the previous administration to N1.3Billion. In the area of agriculture which is a critical component of Kogi economy, the State Government has contributed to the cultivation of 3000 hectares of rice and 5000 hectares of cassava in the state. More so, the Governor constructed a Kogi Rice Milling Factory, in addition to other projects to enhance agriculture production. Agriculture efforts have made Kogi state to be regarded as one of the leading producers of cassava and rice in Nigeria.

With regard to infrastructure delivery, particularly roads construction, the Governor constructed and rehabilitated some roads such as Ikeje-Ogugu-Ette Road, Shintaku-Gboloko Road to Dekina in Kogi East etc. More so, the Governor, through the Healthcare Plus concept, completed Medical Diagnostic Centre in the State which many considered as his major achievements in the area of healthcare infrastructure delivery. To deliver on education infrastructure, government has carried out several intervention measures such as renovation of schools and the construction of GYB Model Primary Schools across the 239 Wards of the state. Notwithstanding his development efforts, an assessment of Yahaya Bello's governance delivery does not suggest that the economy of the state has shown significant improvement to impact positively on poverty, unemployment, low productive capacity, and general welfare of the people. Infrastructure delivery has not essentially improved especially with regards to healthcare and education infrastructure delivery. Kogi state, like many others in Nigeria, is fixated on Federation Account Allocation; and remains among the least developed states in Nigeria.

Though there exist some noticeable progress since 1999, especially in the areas of infrastructure delivery such as roads, health centres, schools as well as improvement in people participation in governance processes. Kogi state is also known for the concept of unifier, the governor has included young men and women in his cabinet outside his State. The word unity has taken the centre stage in the contemporary politics of Nigeria because of the internal grumblings and suspicion amongst the



various ethnic groups of Nigeria. For the purpose of the future of Nigeria, lessons must be learnt from Governor Bello Yahaya leadership experience in Kogi. Unifier mantra has become a household name of His Excellency, popularly known as *the new direction government*. Kogi before Bello, used to be a state polarized across ethnic – tribal and religious lines. With his coming, there are equitable and fair sharing of political dividends and positions, purging out of usual favouritism cum nepotism, preaching of merits and due processes, he has incorporated women in politics and 30% affirmation fulfilled.

However, Kogi state has continued to battle with underdevelopment and its attendant problems of infrastructure deficit, endemic poverty, high rate of rising unemployment, insecurity occasioned by armed Fulani Herdsmen attacks, kidnappings, etc, low capacity utilization and weak industrial base, non-payment of salaries, and indeed, poor governance. Generally, there is abysmal performance and the governance profile in state is said to be poor. The pace of socio-economic and political development in Kogi state does not reflect its enormous human and material resources. Kogi State is nowhere placed to compete favourably with other states in Nigeria such as Lagos, Rivers, Kano etc through generating the dynamism that deliver infrastructure and payment of salaries as well as create expansion in the private sector that is capable of creating jobs and wealth for the teeming youths.

There seems to be a disconnection between the practice of democracy and good governance in Kogi state and Nigeria at large. Instead of delivering the common goods for majority of the citizens, democracy has become an institution for producing corrupt, self-seeking and bad leadership in Nigeria. Kogi state of Nigeria has had her fair share of governance crises that have characterized democratic practice in Nigeria. Government in Nigeria generally and Kogi State particularly has been saddled with the problems of lack of commitment and continuity of programmes and projects. Similarly, the lack of maintenance culture is another strong challenge. This has been the characteristic of most

administrations. Coupled with this, is the visible display of reckless spending of public resources for personal use.

More so, there is absence of accountability mechanisms that hold governance at local and state levels to explain how they are deploying state's resources and potentials. Instead of initiating and implementing vision plan based on the enormous resources the state is endowed with, the political leadership usually perceived State as a means of personal aggrandizement. Indeed, across the length and breadth of Nigeria, there is a visible discontent between leaders and the electorates as there is a yawning gap between the quality of the people's standard of living and their leaders. This is the dilemma of democratic governance in Kogi State and Nigeria at large. The decades of Kogi State's existence would have predisposed her to growth and progress especially given her resource endowments and location. This would have made it an institution for effective development. It calls for the need to interrogate what has been happening to the resource endowments, what has been happening to poverty, unemployment and inequality, or how much qualitative transformation has taken place in the areas of agricultural development, education, health and infrastructure which impact on matters of poverty and unemployment.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to interrogate the extent to which democratic practice has impacted on good governance in Nigeria with a focus on Kogi State. Based on the findings of the paper, it concludes that, the good governance profile of Nigeria and Kogi state in particular is generally poor and unimpressive. Though some achievements especially in the area of infrastructure delivery, agricultural development and unity etc have been recorded. That notwithstanding, the basic issues of the security and welfare of the generality of the citizens remain worrisome. Meanwhile, the paper argues for a re-evaluation of the practice of democracy in Nigeria. A task that involves eradication and alleviation of widespread conditions of poverty, unemployment, and inequitable social conditions. It equally entails sustainable development which ensures the well-being



of the people by integrating socio-economic development, and environmental conservation and protection.

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