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# ROLE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the inexorable Interplay between democracy and development in Africa. Data was collected through secondary sources. The paper locates the endemic nature of underdevelopment in the absurd; being eminent due to the negativity in the process and nature of democracy which creates weak and incompetent institutions and mechanisms. This incongruence and haphazard practice of democracy has placed a veritable drag on the process of development thereby exacerbating the level of poverty and other vices in the polity This paper positions that, there is a great linkage between democracy and development. For nations of Africa to be developed, the core values of democracy such as the rule of law, legitimacy, accountability, choice etc as illustrated in this work must be upheld.*

## **Introduction**

Many decades after the attainment of political independence by all African countries and a series of democratic experiments, the “all other things” that were supposed to follow as promised by the nationalists during the fight for independence have not followed. Development and liberation, which the people bargained for, have remained a mirage.

Several reasons are held as being responsible for the low level of development in Africa. Some of these reasons are colonial legacy, social pluralism, corruption, poor labour discipline, lack of entrepreneurial skills, poor planning and policies. These factors offer significant explanations for the low level of development, but concretely, they are not sufficient as other factors such as political and external linkages also serve as impediments to development in Africa (Ake, 2003).

The implication of the above thesis is that, despite the tremendous human and natural resources available to African nations, most African nations remain highly underdeveloped, what can be termed “hunger in the midst of plenty”. The underlining issue here is that, the leadership that took over from the colonialist and those after them have concerned themselves

strictly on issues of self-preservation and primitive accumulation for personal aggrandizement (Nor, 2014).

Development depends mainly on good leadership to provide effective direction and policies. This finds acceptance by Ajene (1987:17), when he argues that, the level at which people accept policies and contribute meaningfully to development depends largely on the nature of the leadership. Indeed, it is leadership that decides the manner in which the wishes and aspirations of the people are realised.

However, the ruling class in Nigeria and other African nations have failed in providing such direction as a result of their undemocratic acts and practices that are anti- people and anti-developmental. Efforts at democratisation and development in Africa have often failed due to the fact that, the essential attributes of leadership have been lacking among many leaders who have ruled African countries since independence (Ajene 1987).

This paper therefore explores the essential elements of democracy and examines developmental strategies adopted by African countries particularly Nigeria with a view to understanding why democracy has brought about underdevelopment in the country.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work adopts the neo-classical political economy approach to analyse the interwoven nature of democracy and development. The neo-classical theories argues against the claims made by the classical or bourgeois scholars that freedom from state intervention and belief in market system would ensure optimum resources allocation (Anifowose & Enemou,1999).

The neo- classical theory of John M. Keynes according to Jhingan (2007) believes in state intervention and participation in economic activities. He argue that, for full societal development, the control of inflationary gap and general recession, government intervention was needed to inject money into the economy, and to embark on fiscal and monetary policies to correct distortions such as unemployment and therefore reposition the economy towards greater productivity.

The major assumption in understanding the nature of development in Africa is based on the internal conditions. According to him, the internal problems in African countries particularly Nigeria such as unemployment, corruption, weak institutional arrangements, bad leadership, ethnic and religious conflict are responsible for the underdevelopment of these nations.

It is imperative to observe that State regulate the economy by creating conditions that are friendly for investment. Coupled with good policy formulation and execution of projects and provision of social services, development is enhanced. In Africa and Nigeria however, the state is undemocratic, and as such, it has failed in its duty to regulate the economy effectively because of its repressive nature as exhibited by those in power. This has resulted to a hostile environment that is not conducive for development (Nor, 2014).

This work therefore adopts this approach to position the inefficiency of the state to regulate the polity because of its undemocratic nature thereby making the society vulnerable to underdevelopment.

### **The Concepts and Elements of Democracy**

The concept of democracy has suffered definitional precision due mainly to varying background, ideas, beliefs and conceptions of scholars. While some scholars look at democracy from the institutional point of view, others approach it from the values point. In other words, democracy can be regarded as a form of government, a way of life, or an attitude of the mind.

Appadorai (1978:137) defines democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives, periodically elected by the people. This means that, a state is democratic if it provides institutions for the expression and supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy. Anfowose and Enemu (1999:145) argues that, democracy include a cluster of rules and institutions permitting the broader participation of the majority of the citizenry in decision making through their representatives. This cluster involves, elected government, free and fair sections in which every individual's vote carries the same weight irrespective of sex, religion, and culture without compulsion or intimidation.

Whatever conceptualisation ascribes to democracy, there are some salient elements that characterises the core value of democracy. Elaigwu (2004) states that; there are five important characteristics of democracy. First, political authority must originate from the people. Any authority that does not have the consent of the people is not democratic. This means that, to hold and exercise power, it must emanate from the people. Secondly, for a society to be termed democratic there must be absolute rule of law. This is because the rule of law provide for the predictability of actions and reactions in the

system. In this situation, no one is above the law, the leaders nor the followers. There are no sacred cows in the rules operating in the system.

The third characteristic of democracy as listed by Elaigwu is legitimacy. For a government to be democratic, it has to be legitimate, emanating from the people without the rigging of elections and political manipulations and must be able to provide the basic needs of the people, the purpose for which it is elected. The fourth feature of democracy is that of choice. The people should be able to use their choice to adjust and make meaningful changes in the system. The final element of democracy is that of transparency and accountability in the conduct of government affairs. Democracy should be organised in such a manner that, leaders can be held accountable for their actions and inactions as it affects the well being of the people.

From the aforementioned, we can conclude that, for any society to be termed democratic there must be rule of law, equity, proportional representation, satisfaction of the greater majority of the people, political and civic liberties as well as a mechanism for output and input to aggregate their yearnings and aspirations.

### **The Concept of Development**

The concept of development just like democracy is complex and difficult to explain. This is because of the difficulty in judging and verifying the extent and what actually constitutes development. However, various scholars and institutions have tried to explain and describe it based on their perception and situation. To Rodney (1972), development means the ability of a society to cater for its own needs and to guard and protect its interest from infringement upon by other groups or societies. He also views development as an overall social process, which is dependent upon the outcome of man's effort to deal with his natural environment.

From the foregoing, it can be implied that development is the ability and capability to transform the society so as to provide for the basic needs of the people. Development is both at the individual and societal level, At the individual level, development means increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, self-discipline, increase creativity, material well being and a sense of responsibility.

Todaro (1985:108) describes development as:

*A multi-dimensional process involving the reorganisation and re-orientation of the entire economic and social systems. This also involves, in addition to improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs.*

Development is both a physical and mental process, the transformation of the society and the person. That is why Marxists look at development of the society as an egalitarian society which can only be attained through the rapid and radical transformation of the mode of production from capitalism to communism. A situation where majority of the people will own and control the means of production.

In the same vein, Gana (1986) sees development as that which concerns the capacity and the creative ability of a people to effectively transform the natural resources of their environment into goods and services through the imaginative and practical applicability of their creative talents and productive labour force. Development is therefore human centered as it is the sum total of relations between the productive forces and man which result to a drop in the level of poverty, unemployment, inequality and an increase in good life of the greater majority.

In Africa, many nations have made several efforts towards attaining development such as the Lagos Plan of Action among others and the now New Partnership for African development (NEPAD) and other strategies like the creation of the African Development Bank, the indigenisation policy, import substitution, structural adjustment programme, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) etc. However, all these strategies have not yielded the desired results. These strategies have not solved the problems of development because of the structure of the state, economy and the nature of leadership which is not development friendly due to dislocations in the system which has not permitted it. Ake (2003) observes that, instead of focusing on development, the focus of most African leaders is on internal struggle for power. Political power has become overvalued as it is the path to easy wealth and privileges hence focus is on trying to control state power to the neglect of pursuing developmental goals.

### **Democracy and Development in Africa: An Overview**

Ake (2005:126) argues that, development is a collective endeavour and therefore, strategies of development are not made and implemented in a vacuum. Every development strategy is contextualised in a particular state, structure and culture. This implies that African nations can develop only in the context of democratic politics operating within their area.

People are supposed to be the beginning and end of development which is a fundamental element of democracy, i.e participatory and consultative democracy, a situation in which the goals of the people are received and aggregated through their representatives. However, democracy in Africa and Nigeria is antithetical to the core values of democracy. Africa is placed on an undemocratic status in two folds i.e, within the continent and on the world stage.

On the world stage, Africa particularly Nigeria is entangled into an undemocratic world. The world of inequality, sharply divided between the West and the North, a situation in which governments of the nations of the North cede much of their powers to a new 'institutional trinity' of the IMF, World Bank and WTO (Ayodele, 2005). These agencies help nations of the West in their dominance of the North by increasingly setting the rules within which individual nations must operate. This new form of world governance is not based on the consent of the governed and is highly undemocratic. The inequalities of this new world order have continued to make Nigeria weak, dependent and underdeveloped as the policies passed down on them are mainly for exploitation. In this kind of undemocratic situation, the quest for African nations to attract development on the world stage is therefore a mirage.

That is why Adebisi as cited by Tamonnu and Atanda(2004) warned the ruling class to be aware that, the forces that colonised our people and held them in bondage are not yet spent but effectively operating. He further contends that;

*Their exploiting forces may have managed their strategy and tactics for efficiency purposes but they have no intention whatsoever to end their game of exploitation because, their societies have been nursed and nourished on the resources gathered from other countries..., it will be naive of our ruling class therefore, to continue to regard the external environment as friendly.*

This sums up the issue of globalisation as preached by the West and embraced by African leaders, trapped to draw Africa deeper into underdevelopment. The proponents of globalisation dictate the nature of other things that happen in the polity, those that hold are those that project their interest alone.

The condition for development does not exist. For development to take place, the socio-political factors existing must be development oriented. This is what Sandbrook (1987) argued that:

*It is the socio-political factors in particular, which place severe limitations on economic development, hence, any developmental strategy, whatever its economic advantage must be politically and socially viable.*

In the same vain, Goldsmith (1987); Pouregerarni, (1988) also argued that, political development conditions economic and social development. This means that, for development to take place, the political arena must be in such a way that, they will be development friendly. The consequences of this undemocratic situations is that, most projects situated does not reflect the yearnings of the people, a situation that make the people not to protect the project instead, they sometime carry out acts of sabotage against such projects. Another consequence is that of political hatred especially between the ruling class and the followers who allegedly are opposition members. Developmental projects are hardly sited in areas that are believed to belong to the opposition, thereby creating an imbalance in the overall development of the society. Due to misplaced priority, communities are not studied to understand the most pressing needs of the people, hence projects are carelessly situated.

Another common feature of the undemocratic nature of African society particularly Nigeria is the issue of corruption, political domination and 'god fatherism'. Contracts of jobs are given to incompetent political 'god fathers' and party loyalist that have no knowledge about the people and the projects. They are mostly interested in the benefits of such contracts. This act hinders or reduces the pace of development of the society (Akuul, 2013).

From the foregoing discussion, we can deduce that, the poverty of ideas and lack of control by African leaders has brought about the take over of African states by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and World Bank who control and dictate issues of welfare and development. This explains why economic

reforms based on the principles of deregulation, privatisation, liberalisation are practiced in Nigeria and other African nations.

The consequence of this is that, projects are executed only when they satisfy the interest of the international organizations. This act account for the increase decline of state infrastructures like roads, hospitals and schools . The shortage of these facilities as well as the retrenchment advocated by these agencies have resulted to poverty which on the other hand creates a fertile ground for hostility and conflict which add to the woes of the people. This has made the people to turn away from the state to community and self-help efforts such as thrift societies etc. to survive ( Akuul, 2013).

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that, there exist a correlation between the lack of democracy in African society especially Nigeria and the deterioration in the socio-economic conditions of the continent. The absence of core democracy in Nigeria has continued to encourage lack of accountability and good governance (Nyango, 1988). Ake (1990) also agree with this view when he said that; Africa needs democracy not only because democracy is desirable in itself, but also because it will greatly facilitate development. He argues further that, authoritarianism in Africa has undermined development through political repression, which has turned politics into warfare”, thereby, infecting leaders with a “siege mentality” and effectively relegating development issues to very low priority.

The role of democracy in development also center’s on the fact that, leaders rely on repression, which has made the people to cut off from them as they are disassociated from public policies. The state is therefore seen as a force to be feared, cheated when the opportunity comes, evaded and defeated as circumstances permit. In this kind of circumstance, development becomes a mirage as the factors to facilitate it are completely destroyed.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This paper has examined the correlation between democracy and development and it has been established that, the structure of the state and the economy inherited from the colonial era created a political environment that is repressive and hostile to development. Because of the undemocratic nature of the Nigerian state, people’s oriented projects that are supposed to sprout development are not carried out as the people are alienated from the government and its activities.

Situating development in Africa should not be by the number of vehicles on the road, the increase in oil wells or refineries, the duration of the

tenure of office of the president and his cohorts or the number of mobile and telephone facilities, but it should be situated in the ability of the nations to produce and control the means of production, and resources to pursue aggressively the cause of industrialisation, which will eventually lead to improved conditions of living of the greater majority and guarantee productive competitiveness on equal basis in the international arena.

Development should be situated in such a way that it will arrest unemployment, poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, injustice, corruption, inequality and general backwardness. The only way to do this however is by instituting democracy in its true sense of it. A democracy that begins and end with the people. A democracy that gives the people real decision making powers, their collective rights guaranteed and equality instituted.

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