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ATTITUDINAL CHANGE AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES: OPTION FOR NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Contemporary Nigerian nation is undergoing a process of democratization-in search for a better society. However, many existential problems arising from the polity pose potent danger to the well-being of its citizens' peace, stability, and development of the country. This paper investigates the most possible way out of this ugly situation and having viewed this despicable situation, which gets worse by the day, notwithstanding the enormous human and natural resources the nation is endowed with argues that, the way to salvaging the situation lies in conscientious attitudinal change of the citizenry and the time-tested-and proven guiding provision of democratic values would solve the problem and bring about the much needed development and flourishing of the country. This paper therefore recommends education of the citizens and their enlightenment to bring about this needed result.

INTRODUCTION

Recent political discussions in Nigeria centre around the dividends and gains of democracy. Democracy gives ample freedom of moving around, investigating issues, expressing oneself, and constructively differing with others on visibly national discourse. As a social catalyst of change, democracy provides an insight or opens window that has let in light into many shades of freedom of human creativity, economic investments and policies, promotion of the peoples education and attentiveness to the people wellbeing and their anthropological needs.

Democracy as a system of government with its unique values also requires a positive attitudinal change of the citizens of a country. The thrust of this paper as pointed out in the abstract is to investigate and point out the most authentic option and the way forward for the nation for a meaningful and sustainable development.

EXPLICATION OF CONCEPTS

In x-raying the issue at hand, it is expedient that we begin with the explication of such concepts- attitudinal change, democratic values-democracy as these are planks to evaluate Nigeria as a nation.

ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

In its briefest possible compass, the word "attitudinal" is an adjectival form of the word "attitude" meaning "state of mind, behaviour, or conduct, showcasing one's feelings, opinion or purpose" (Landau, 1999: 46).

Attitudinal change means to positively alter one's opinion or way of thinking about somebody, something, or behaviour towards somebody/something. Thus, we can talk about change of one's attitude/behaviour as well as change in public attitude with regard to something or towards a particular course of action/event. Humans are dynamic and so constituted, that not all kinds of behaviour or actions promote their general well-being. Certain kinds of actions befit their nature, set them apart from other animals or creatures, promote their general well-being and consequently lead to their self-fulfilment. Other kinds of actions are antithetical to their nature and militate against their well-being: happiness, self-fulfilment and development. Human nature in all its intent and purpose is structured such that they have to behave in certain way while refraining from behaving in certain other ways if they must attain internal harmony, happiness and self-fulfilment.

From the foregoing, it is an indubitable fact that to attain internal harmony, human ought always live a moral life and to dispense with this, will take him back to the state of nature where life was brutish, nasty and short - the resultant effect is underdevelopment. Indeed, it has never been in the interest of humans to act against the law of their own nature such a behaviour is foolish, short-sighted and self-destructive (Omoregbe, 1993: IX).

In fact, it has shown that the greatest obstacle to the development of any society is what Albert Sweitzer calls moral immaturity which I see as an excrescence behaviour or summersault in attitude that in all situations has led to disequilibrium in social relation. These excrescence behaviour include- immorality, corruption, dishonesty, fraud, embezzlement of public funds, selfishness. These vices are daily reoccurring decimals in Nigeria's development stride. There is therefore urgent need for a change of attitude if Nigeria is to move forward and make any meaningful progress in national development.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES

According to the New International Webster's Student Dictionary (1099: 189). The word "democratic" is an adjectival form of the word "democracy" meaning government in which political control is shared by all the people, either directly or indirectly, through representatives whom they elected". It is a system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elected. An American President Abraham Lincoln sees it as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Such a government to satisfy this definition must extent not only to the political sphere but also to the economic and social spheres (Giltong, 1988: 11; Fotopoulos 1997; 206).

With respect to the word value, means moral or professional standards of behaviour; it also means intrinsic principle or property of something. Therefore democratic values mean the good/moral principles and properties/practices inherent in democracy. It entails living in accordance with the moral standard and principles inherent in a democratic system of government. There are certain values that are associated with democracy that make it attractive and desirable as a system of government.

These democratic values include:

- a. Periodic election of representatives into various political offices
- b. Free, fair and credible elections
- c. Maximum participation of the people and gives maximum accountability to the electorate
- d. Sovereignty belongs to the people. Thus democracy has an in-built mechanism-resistance against oppression and tyranny (Owolabi, 1999: 11)
- e. Human dignity is enhanced in a democratic society through the respect for and protection of the fundamental rights of man, especially, the right to freedom and equity. These rights include:

freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of religion (worship) are given free expression in democracy without fear of arrest or punishment
All citizens have equal opportunities to develop their talents and actualize their potential

- f. With the principle of equal opportunity, citizens develop their respective talents and use them to serve themselves and their country. Thus, the society at large benefits from the developed talents of its members.
- g. In a democratic society, it is the will of the people which (Jean Jacque Rousseau call, “The General Will”) that prevails.
- h. The principle of the rule of law is sacrosanct. It is the hallmark of democracy. Every citizen is equal before the law and the national interest cannot override it no matter the circumstance.

DEVELOPMENT: MIRRORING THE NIGERIAN NATION: Briefly, in mirroring the development with the view to discussing or applying to the topic in question. With regard to this, we will take a leap by defining development as a dialectical phenomenon in which, individual and society, interact with their physical, biological, and inter-human environment to transform themselves for their own good and that of humanity at large. It is the unending improvement in the capacity of the individual and society to control and manipulate forces of nature as well as themselves and other individuals and societies for their own benefit and that of the humanity at large. It connotes having a highly organized economy and political system.

Mirroring Nigeria’s development in this context would mean a situation whereby Nigeria as a Nation will make good and positive progress in different spheres of the society by harnessing human and natural resources to advance socio-economic and political system that would catapult the country to the league of developed countries of the world. The extent to which this has been achieved in Nigeria leaves a sour taste in our chequered history.

NIGERIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION

In principle, democratization means the empowerment of the people in the political, economic and social spheres. In practice, it involves the cultivation of the attitude of mind and heart, the nurturing of the institutions, promotion of forms of social behaviour and generally the creation of an enabling atmosphere for democracy to thrive. Thus, it is hardly possible to have a genuine democratic culture where there is no tolerance, patience, perseverance, and discipline. This is because in a democratic society, there should be respect for due process, freedom of association, every individual has the right to hold and propagate his/her beliefs or opinion, subject only to the laws of libel and sedition.

Democracy requires a free and virile press, a courageous judiciary, an alert electorate, a responsible leadership, and healthy economy, etc., all these institutions have to be carefully nurtured. For instance, without a free press, it will be impossible to propagate ideas and programmes or inform and educate the populace on issues of public concern. It will not be possible to either expose excesses of government or of individuals in governance; such exposure is necessary for transparency and accountability in public domain.

In a democratic environment, there is rule of law, social equality, consent of the governed, separation of powers of the executive, the legislative and the judiciary in order to avoid absolutism and despotism. These principles must not just be vigorously and firmly pursued but established, for without them democratic governance may be an illusion.

Democratization involves the promotion of certain forms of social behaviour and attitudes, for example, consensus and dialogue as means of resolving disagreements over public policy or the commonwealth.

Similarly, persuasion, rather than threat or use of force (python dance or crocodile smile) is not an option in canvassing ones or government views. Even civil disobedience or protest, when and where necessary is conducted as much as possible in a non-violent manner. No one is allowed to take laws into one's own hands. Though this is limited by the need of self-defence, it is achieved by ensuring that fairness and justice result from following the due process of the law (Bello, 2005:46-48).

The question here is, are these principles and processes evident in the Nigerian society? This democratic way of life is far from being fully realized in Nigeria. As one of the nations of the world, Nigeria has a chequered history with regard to democratic ideals since her independence on October 1, 1960 till date, more than half of her years of independence have been subjected under the bondage of military, dictatorship. The years of military junta and dictators were characterized by such features as abuse of human rights, pauperization of the people across board, liquidation of the country's economy and natural wealth. As it was then, so it is now: there is still total disregard for constitutional principles, deterioration of educational health, social facilities and infrastructure in the country. The national treasuring is still being looted though not by generals in army uniform but by snakes, crocodes and other reptiles in Agbada and Italian made suits. In fact the seed of ethnic marginalization which was sown during the military has now blossomed and matured into Iroko trees. Corruption is no more vultures but have transmitted into Eagles and pitch majestically on the moral fabrics of our nation. What could be responsible for this situation, where it has been impossible for us to utilize our natural gifts, resources and God given potentials to the extent that we have been swimming in the ocean of fresh waters for so many years and yet come out very dirty and thirty? (Odogwu 2016). The answer lies in Achebe's book "The Problem with Nigeria- obviously negative attitudes and values. The attitude and disposition of Nigerians towards national development and democratic disposition since independence have continued to serve as impediments to the development of Nigeria. It will be difficult for the country to develop without some fundamental change in the attitude of the people on all spheres of life.

In the area of health- It is said health is wealth, but this sounds foreign to our country. We live in a country where our leaders brandish their score cards to show that there is tremendous improvement in our health sector but when they are sick embarked on medical tour abroad. The raging claim and counter- claim being witnessed or going on between the executive secretary of National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and the board over embezzlement of money is a very sad one. Worst still is the position of the government on such situation is indeed a slap on the sensibility on any right thinking humanity. When some people are prosecuted, reminded in economic and financial crime commission custody to account for the sum of two to three hundred million naira, such an executive secretary suspended from office is given police and army escort to access his office.

Corruption, embezzlement, misapplication and misappropriation of public funds meant for development is no more news but what is news is the impurity attached to this anachronistic behavioural life style. It is in Nigeria that executive director of pension scheme who was declared wanted for embezzling some trillions of pension money meant to pay those that retired having served this country meritoriously would be given a presidential hand shake and promoted with all his entitlements when he eventually returns to office. The lesson is that it pays to steal, cheat in Nigeria as the offence gets weightier, lesser the punishment. If you steal, embezzle, misapply and even misappropriate one naira, you stand the chance of getting ten to twenty years jail term. With 2.5 billion, you can get a plea bargain. But where the funds embezzled runs into 3 to 7 trillion, we will set up a panel whose report or while paper will never see the light of the day.

This is the scenario that cuts across all segments in Nigeria; be it health where due to corruption the recent world health organization (WHO) report ranked the country's lowest life expectancy in West Africa, with men expected to die at 53 years and women 54 not taking into account Nigeria's qualified doctors, educated men and women and our unquantifiable mineral resources at our disposal. Infant mortality is terribly high,

the under-five mortality rate in Nigeria is put at 29 deaths per 1000 live births, meaning one in every five Nigerian children may not make it to the age of five (2018, February 20).

Same applies to education which is the catalyst of development of nations. Education serve as means of enlightening the younger generation yet, this sector is constantly underfunded thereby creating unnecessary tension. It is one union action or the other strikes making education in Nigeria a thing of scorn. Today Nigeria education has graduated from the award of executive masters of Business Administration who entry point is first class- 2 class upper or lower degree to the award of executive West African school certificate (WASC) entry point PSS, FSS etc. Robert Mugabe former Zimbabwe president succinctly captured this embarrassing scenario thus:

African education system has surprising outcome. The smartest students pass with first class and get admission to medicine and engineering schools. The second class students get MBA's LLB to manage the first class students. The third class students enter politics and rule both first and second class students. The failure join the army and control politicians who, if they are not happy with, they kick or kill them... Best of those who did not attend any school, become prophets and witch doctors, and everybody follow them.

Are these principles and processes evident in Nigeria? Have we been able to transcend our primordial life style to engender development? We have, what are the evidence on ground? If not, is the problem in our stars? Answering these questions frankly will enable us re-access, re-evaluate and examine our values and attitude to remodel Nigeria.

REQUISITE OPTION FOR NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT

Many academic and social commentators have tried to diagnose the problem with Nigeria and what is the missing link to its development. Achebe (1983) is of the view that the problem is leadership failure. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership. In addition he mentioned tribalism, unpatriotism, social injustice and the cult of mediocrity, indiscipline and corruption. Nigeria for Achebe can change if it discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision, to navigate its ship.

Omeregbe (2007: 26), is of the view that

The basic problem of Nigeria and other African countries south of the sahara is- the problem of corruption. This is the fundamental problem which underlies other socio-political problems like poverty, unstable economy and illiteracy. He is of the opinion that the best form of government for a corrupt country like Nigeria and other corrupt African countries is selfless dictatorship whose mission statement and operational policy will be "operation save the nation from corruption, and this should be in power as long as it takes to wipe out corruption in all its ramifications.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The main thrust of this paper is that attitudinal change and democratic values are necessary condition for Nigeria's development. As a democratic system it presupposes a high level of moral integrity on the part of the citizens and especially on the part of rulers, a high level of honesty, and accountability. Democratic government is not simply structures or rituals, it is also a model of behaviour and interactions. It constitutes relations as well as values to be internalized. It is a means of social empowerment and with such an amalgam complex composition, democratic governance is not a lopsided static phenomenon to be juxtaposed into a

society. In fact, it is a dynamic process that is enriched with conscious cultivation of good values, habits by the citizens and promotion of democratic values. Nigerian in general and leaders in particular need serious re-orientation of these values and attitude.

Prebendalistic “attitude” or behaviour associated with Nigerian leadership structure must be revalued. Prebendalism is a situation where government worker and the elected officials feel they have the right to share government properties and revenues to benefit supporters, friends, family and their ethnic groups. A situation where a president of a country would respond to a question during an official state visit to America thus:

I hope you have a copy of the election results. The constituents, for example, that gave me 97% [of the vote] cannot in all honesty be treated on- some issues with constituencies that gave me 5% (Sahara Reporters 2015).

That this prebendalistic attitude is demonstrated in the lopsided appointments is not only dangerous but a clear pointer that Nigerian leaders are clueless. In fact this kind of autochthonous attitude must give way to more accommodating and realistic attitude that are in tandem with modernity.

Finally, this paper recommends the use of education which is the most important function of sustainable development (Gimba, 2008; 184) as a tool that will bring about the much needed attitudinal change and internalization of democratic values. We must change our attitude from material, profane things to ideological stand point. Nigerians are scattered all over the globe. They are making their marks in every field of human endeavour but their major constraint is negative attitude and lack of democratic value.

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