

The Crises of Governance and the Realization of The Millenium

Development Goals (Mdgs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

From colonialism to date and through various development plans and adoption of various international development blueprints, the nature of the Nigerian state, has impacted negatively on the processes and prospects of development efforts in Nigeria in such a way that the desired developmental outcomes have continued to elude the citizenry. Employing the theoretical framework of dependency, rentier state and prebendalism, the paper contends that the nature of the Nigerian state which has always thwarted efforts towards development through bad governance characterized by corruption, may also act as obstacle towards realization of the Millennium goals. The paper, with the realization of only four years away from 2015 deadline, advocates a change in the character of the state, through improvement in exemplary leadership, socio-cultural value reorientation, effective democratization process whose features include sound legitimation footing, socio-economic empowerment, application of principles of rule of law, transparency and accountability amongst others, in order to enhance the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Key Words: .MDGs .Governing Crisis .Realization .The Nigerian State . Character

Introduction

The nature of governance since independence in Nigeria has raised a lot of questions regarding the essence of the state; because governance has consistently failed to meet the yearnings of the citizenry. The concept of governance has received several treatments by scholars to the extent that some do not differentiate between governance and government. While governance may be referred to as the exercise of executive and administrative functions of the state, for the sole purpose of fulfilling “terms of social contract or contractual obligation to the citizenry”, government, on the hand, refers to the office or position of authority to administer the affairs of the state (Ninalowo, 2004:16; World Bank, 1989). The wrong exercise of the state power on the other hand to serve personal interest and ensuring denial of interest of the generality of the governed, constitutes crisis of governance. Governing crisis has rocked several development policies in Nigeria resulting in, failed development plans, ill-implemented projects, mass poverty and legitimacy crisis.

Development enterprise in Nigeria as in some other developing economies has been traumatic and complicated. The post-colonial political state in Nigeria has been harbouring parochial interests which have manipulated state processes towards consolidating political power for private accumulation, accounts for why politics has become a do or die affair in the country. Conceptually, development itself is not new but it has acquired greater importance since the end of the Second World War (Gaub, 2003; Agagu, 2004:4). Development has been defined by some as a transition from simple to complex forms, from less efficient to more efficient forms, or from ordinary to better forms. Development has been viewed as modernization (Gaub, 2003, Eisensdadt, 1966; Chilote, 1984:15). Hence, modernization has been described as “a process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America, as a model for development aspiring societies of the Third World countries” (Eisensdadt, 1966:1).

Generally, the Marxists and Neo-Marxists conceive of development as negation of capitalism in its entirety. For the purpose of this paper, development may be viewed as empowering the citizens of a country to make their choices and to determine their own destiny in relation to life sustenance. It is concerned with adequate provision of the enabling environment for meeting basic needs as housing, clothing, formal education and ability to freely make political decisions that affect their wellbeing. Development also connotes that political system of a country is strengthened to shield off all vestiges of harmful primordial elements, as the governing aspects to a large extent, determines other sectors of life. It is no development when 70% of Nigerians fall within UNDP's defined poverty level of US\$2 per day (UNDP, 2003).

In both local and international reports, development level has been scored very low in Nigeria. For example, the United Nations' measure - Human Development Index (HDI), has constantly scored Nigeria low on HDI. For example, the HDI which was 0.184 at the country's independence in 1960 stood at 0.400 in 1994 - thirty-four years later! This is a level below the United Nations' 0.421 or less, which is regarded as low HDI level any nation could achieve. Hence, in the United Nations rating of 174 countries in 2000, Nigeria maintained 151st position on HDI ranking (UNDP, 1996:83). The root cause of this ugly state of affairs is traceable to the crisis inherent in governing process in Nigeria.

This background compels discussion towards examining the character of the Nigerian state vis-à-vis project of development, analysis of the past failures at developing and suggestions of the type of governing milieu that may fastract efforts towards realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

Character of the Nigerian State: Evolution, Theory and Praxis

The colonial period marked the beginning of the statehood in Nigeria. The Nigerian state derived its character from the imperialist incursion into Africa for the sole purpose of meeting capitalist challenges of extending economics of Europe. To enhance easy access to the resources in the colony, it was necessary for the colonizers to employ force and arbitrariness to keep in line the local populations. (Ake, 1996:3). Since the over-arching motive of the colonizers was economic, it neglected consideration of the social and cultural composition of the new state; "a neglect that constituted a false start, at state formation" (Agagu, 2004; 16). Scholars of underdevelopment converge on the view point that contact with Europe only distorted, disarticulated and underdeveloped Africa (Frank, 1969; Ake, 1981:138, 1996:2; Ihonvbere, 1989:15). The ensuing post-colonial Nigerian state is essentially a colonial legacy with its bequeathed element of exportation, domination and suppression (Ake, 1996:3).

The character of the Nigerian State may further be theoretically and empirically analyzed. Three theories shall be reviewed starting with dependency theory. The central theme of the dependency perspective is that it is of limited value studying the development of the societies of the Third World in isolation from the development of the advanced societies (Fasoranti, 2003:225). Central to the theory is the argument that the mode of articulation of underdeveloped economies with the world economic system which resulted in transfer of resources from the periphery to the centre and/or distort the economies of the periphery thereby preventing a domestic-free allocation of resources which could produce social development (Wallerstine, 1979). It has been argued that part of the institutions of dependency is the existence of multinational corporations it may be argued that although colonialism played a major role in the current state of underdevelopment, this endeavour equally admits the fact that there are self-inflicted problems inherent in Nigeria's governing process which the subsequent perspectives help to explain.

Two, the Nigerian state has been described as a rentier state. A rentier state is defined as "one which derives more than 55% of state revenue from taxes on profits and from non-tax sources and whose economy is girded to one export-economy. Such economies are further susceptible to severe fiscal crisis in the event of the demise of resource of state rents" (Sambo and Enemuo, 1999:24). This was particularly true if we consider the delay and the two failed attempts (as at December 2, 2008) in the presentation and eventual passage into law of the 2009 budget. The unusual delay for that year was due, mainly, to current

recession in the world economy then, which affected world price of crude oil upon which annual budget proposals are usually based.. The rentier state theory derives its character from the international division of labour and trade competitive advantage doctrine of capitalism, which are all off-shoot of dependency.

Dependence on foreign capital and competition formed the choruses of the Breton Woods institutions before the new independent states of the Third World countries to maintain mono-cultural economy and open up for foreign investment.. However, India and China acted differently (Toyo, 1997:63). The People's Republic of China and India strengthened local production and raised domestic demand instead of prospecting for foreign investment, and relying on unprofitable exports as Nigeria did. A rentier state largely depends on others to develop. Where a country largely depends on foreign direct investment and international aid, real development will continue to suffer as the foreign capital and international donors would normally dictate terms of relations; and are in most instances lacking in financial commitment to poor countries (Goddin and Reinert, 2006:). This is certainly going to be one of the problems that would face realization of Millennium Development Goals, in the developing countries.

Third, the Nigerian state has been characterized as a prebendal state. A prebendal state is a systemic opportunity whereby offices of state are often captured by individuals and their support groups and exploited to favour their interests within the market place of civil society as well as in the appropriation of the resources of the state itself (Utume, 2000). This is the platform through which official corruption thrives in Nigeria as public officers take advantage of their offices to amass wealth to themselves. The character of the Nigerian state seems to describe a pre-occupation of public officers with legitimate and illegitimate prerequisites of office to the neglect of the serious task of genuine development.

Some Past Efforts and Current MDGs' Chances of Survival

The Nigerian economic policy-making since 1960 has responded largely to external influences and intense maneuvering of domestic capitalists who are best described as prebendalists operating in a rentier milieu. Right from the First Republic in Nigeria, several economic policy regimes can be identified, but for space, only those of Balewa, Gowon, Obasanjo, Buhari and Babangida will be discussed in this paper. In the Balewa period, development followed strictly the implementation of First United Nations Decade, 1960-1970 prescriptions, which among others include concentration on agricultural and mineral exports for foreign exchange (Toyo, 1997:63). The emphasis then was international division of labour, trade liberalization, import-substitution, etc but not industrialization as this was bound to contradict the interests of foreign capital. The politics of the First Republic engaged the attention of rulers to the neglect of genuine development efforts; and in attempt to please foreign allies, dependency was continued. The governing crisis has drawn a development path in the early post-colonial era that could not guarantee sustainable human development as attested to by the fall in the export prices of exports and its attendant poverty on local farmers (Williams, 1980:23). Inevitably, the military had to strike in 1966.

The Gowon-Obasanjo-Buhari regimes spanning the periods between 1966 and 1983 were mainly characterized by government embarking on a few industries-cement, iron and steel, machine tools, petrochemical and fertilizer, especially during Gowon -Obasanjo periods (Toyo, 1997:65), while Buhari regime embarked on import restriction policy, unlike the periods before it. It should be noted that import substitution intensified the process of dependency, and the further depletion of scarce foreign exchange earnings. All these point to crisis of governance, not to mention the corruption involved in procuring import licenses in those days. The culture of dependency was re-enacted vigorously by the adoption of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986 during the General Ibrahim Babangida period. Toyo (1997:65) argued that it was a period of return to *laissez faire*. SAP was originally conceived as panacea to the depression and mounting inflation resulting from the mismanagement and profligacy perpetrated during the aborted Second Republic of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), which Buhari regime inherited. Policy recommendations for SAP in Nigeria included among others, abolition of state subsidies, repeal of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Law, and abolition of marketing boards.

For the rentier Nigerian state, “the development led to a drastic fall in oil revenues from a peak of N10.1 billion naira in 1979 to about N5.161 billion naira in 1982, at a time when the import requirements of the economy averaged over N1.0 billion naira per month. Life became harsh. These “crises quickly spread to various sectors of the economy as many manufacturing firms were forced to close down and either send their workers on leave or to early retirement” (Sambo and Enernuo, 1999:23). Nigeria’s external debt situation became deteriorated because foreign experts had recommended short-term borrowing, which the country did and had her socio-economic problems worsened in consequence. Development process in Nigeria with the return of democratization process in 1999 has not really changed, although, there have been changes in political leadership (Agagu, 2004:4). Although, certain foreign and local private sector investments have yielded some results especially in the communications sector (G.SM), the implications of prebendalist inclinations of the stakeholders which comprise the Presidency, the National Assembly, the Nigerian Telecommunication Commission (NTC) and other regulatory agencies, have created an avenue whereby these service providers merely rip off helpless Nigerians.

Direct problems associated with all of the goals may be examined. Regrettably, only two will be considered here. The first is the goal Number One which concerns “eradication of extreme poverty by 2015” The 2015 deadline is only four years away. An index of poverty is poor nutrition expressed in lack of good food on the table of the common man. This goal may be difficult to achieve because since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in the 1970s, commitment to food production and development of agriculture in general, has dwindled. With a population of 140 million inhabitants, and a growth rate of 3.2 per cent per annum, feeding a total rising population constitutes a potential social and political problem (see also Ajakaiye and Akinbinu, 2000:35). Odama (1989:3) noted that “food production grows at about 2.5 percent per annum, while food demand grows at a faster rate of 3.5 per cent per annum”. He asserts that, there is imminent food crisis in Nigeria. It is an indictment on the development strategy and the inadequacy of public policy. There is currently a renewed effort at food production especially since the recent global food shortage signals noticed across the world between 2008 and 2009. The extent, to which such efforts will be sustained in the face of current poor governing process, raises a lot of doubt.

The second is the goal Number Seven which concerns “ensuring environmental sustainability by reversing the loss of environmental resources and reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water, and by achieving significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2015”. Again, this may be very difficult to realize evenly, on time, in the country, due to politicking involved in the oil sector activities in the country. International oil conglomerates still flare gas despite incessant zero-gas flare policy threats of the government. In a situation where flared gas and other outcomes of oil exploration activities cause environmental pollution of water, air and soil degradation in the Niger Delta region (for example) serious doubt is cast on the possibility of achieving the seventh goal especially in that part of the country.

Resolving the Crises

African development problem does not stem from lack of funds as such, but a fundamental one which could be conceptualized within the framework of underdevelopment of the past and the continued primitive accumulative spirit of the ruling elite in various African societies. This raises a lot questions on the leadership,

The Leadership Question

Leadership question is an important aspect of any discussion on Nigeria’s efforts towards achieving the MDGs. For Nigeria as in all parts of Africa, governing crisis nearly approximates leadership crisis since the ruling elite, whether military or civilian, have not lived up to expectation. Leadership has been widely acclaimed as bane of good governance in Nigeria. Leadership is so crucial to the understanding of development because “development strategies and policies are products of the leadership and are implemented by the same” (Agagu, 2004:15).

Proponents of liberal democracy are quick at this stage to point the way through entrenchment of democracy. While the author here does not oppose this, it is necessary to ask what type of democracy? A very important consideration in any democratization process has to do with those who govern – the leadership. Various types of leadership models have been identified in the literature, but only servant-leadership mode which is empathic and selfless, will be of any value to Nigeria. One of the breeding grounds for bad governance and corruption in Nigeria is its concept of leadership which is ‘rulership’ rather than ‘leadership by example’. This accounts for why the do or die struggle for power at all levels including the public bureaucracy mainly, is not, for the purposes of service but for actualizing selfish interests. For a meaningful democratization and development process, leadership in Nigeria must be seen as an opportunity to serve and not for personal aggrandizement. Other equally important points are sketched below.

Socio-Cultural Value Reorientation

Our social values have been battered by our past experiences that negative social values of political thuggery, electioneering violence, inordinate ambition for power, ethnic prejudice, excessive dependence on foreign policies, goods and services, corruption and amassing of personal wealth in the midst of mass poverty, have become the rule instead of exception. There is need for national ethical rebirth through collaborative efforts of all in order to facilitate the attainment of the MDGs.

A Democracy Based on Principle of Good Governance

Through bad governance and poor leadership, mainly, Nigeria has had several failed attempts at democratization since 1960 until the process was resumed in April 29, 1999. Several studies in recent times have demonstrated the relationship among governance, democracy and development (Anifowose and Aiyede, 2004:40-65). The difficulty in providing concise and precise definition of democracy is compounded by the fact that historically the concept itself has been a site of great intellectual and ideological contestations (Williams, 1995:37). That notwithstanding, democracy features popular participation of citizens and their value as individuals in the process of governance which is measured by the extent to which the will of the people has been genuinely realized in the process of governance (Awopelu, 2007:18). This will is manifested when all the process leading to the installation of the government in power is accepted and recognized as been proper (legitimacy) by the people; and those who govern reciprocate by way of meeting people’s socio-economic needs, investing in human capital and social safety and security of human dignity (Onuoha, 2004:115).

Rule of Law

This factor is sacrosanct to any democratic process. Rule of law stipulates that all actions of those entrusted with the business of the state conduct their official duties only as stipulated by law to avoid executive recklessness. A virile, independent and bold judiciary is needed to uphold the tenet of the rule of law and dispense justice on the basis of equality of all before the law, as currently being practised in the manner the judiciary is handling the petitions arising from April, 2007 general elections in Nigeria to date.. This factor also entails restoration of hope and confidence in the judicial system in the country.

Transparency and Accountability

The notion of transparency implies that activities of government are performed in an open and honest manner. It implies freedom of the press and other organs of the civil society, within the reasonable limit provided by law, to freely scrutinize actions of the government. Thanks to the just enacted Freedom of Information (FOI) bill. The idea of accountability is an undeniable principle of democratic ethos as it provides the necessary check against abuse of office through corruption (Ninalowo, 2004:27).

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has not pretended that the goals may be realized by 2015 (Easterly, 2008:3), but has examined the foundation upon which aspiration of achievement may be laid. Thus, the character of the Nigerian State

was forcefully considered in its negative influences. Some reasons for failure of past development initiatives were addressed which all bothered on governing crisis. The paper has discovered that all past regimes have acted with their foreign and local allies to hinder genuine development in Nigeria. The same attitude concerning development is being maintained to date, i.e., harbouring of parochial interest, lack of accountability, preference for foreign goods and ideas, etc.

There is dire need to de-emphasize dependency on foreign assistance. It should be noted that dependency on foreign aids can not take a serious minded country far as earlier noted, as foreign allies will normally dictate direction of policies. The civil society organizations have folded their arms for too long concerning the economic sector of the Nigerian society. As concerted efforts were made after the annulled June, 12 presidential election of 2003 to upstage the military, so should efforts continue in order to monitor the design and implementation of developmental projects in the country in order to realize the country's development objectives. Finally, attitudinal change is essential at all levels.

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