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### Article

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## ACCOUNTABILITY, ETHICAL ORIENTATION AND DEMOCRACY AS PILLARS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

In the history of Nigeria, there have not been a real and a clear demonstration of accountability, ethical orientation and democracy in Nigeria's to embrace sustainable development. If Nigeria is experienced governance, why should they strongly to survive for development. It is essential to achieving social sustainable development if and only if these three pillars are properly guarded. Accountability, ethical orientation and good governance are ensuring that leaders are responsible for their actions and decisions. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the needs of accountability; ethical orientation and democracy are properly effective to guides decisions-making, promoting integrity and fairness. The three pillars are its principles of participation and transparency that allows citizens to hold their leaders responsible. The paper adopts analytic method and stress the need of a prospective relevance for Nigeria's sustainable development. The paper, argues that the three are inseparable; and where they are divorced, the consequences can be catastrophic. It further argues that democracy constitutes more than just voting. This is possible if citizens exercise their rights as well as impose principles that promote and strengthen democracy. The findings of this paper reveal that it is obvious that accountability, ethical orientation, and democracy occupy a pride of place in the reconstruction of the Nigeria's public sectors. In this light, it is recommended that for Nigeria to function properly, trustworthy leaders who have robust education and have risen above corruption and selfishness are needed to achieve good governance in Nigeria. For this articulated reasons, the paper concluded that, it is reasonable for citizens to expect professional behaviour from public

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officials, especially the President and his cabinet ministers. For this to happen there is need to establish an ethical foundation or moral framework in government, which goes beyond ethical codes of conduct.

**Keywords:** Accountability, Ethics Orientation, Democracy, Good Governance, Sustainable Development

### **Introduction**

Presently, Nigeria is facing the challenges of accountability, ethical orientation, democracy and good governance among public office holders. It is important to note that Nigeria will find it difficult to thrive with the context of the several crises that could affect accountability, ethical orientation, good governance and democracy in today's leaders in the public sectors. This situation is at variance with the philosophies and legacies of past leaders and nationalists who have contributed to the development of democracy in Nigeria. The world we live in is guided by rules and regulations. They are meant to measure the level of human compliance of our interaction with one another. The institutionalization of this basic legal system contributes greatly to the wellbeing of man in his immediate society. No wonder man is always at the centre of every human activity. When dealing with ethical issues one is faced with the task of appraising, evaluating and analyzing the actions of others.

In Nigeria, majority of the citizens are beginning to give upon the country for very obvious reasons. There is high spread of unethical practices in the country. All the ills are possible because of the presence of corruption. But issues of good governance and public service predate the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is evident in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, respectively, translated by Lee (1988) and Ross (1992). In the Republic, Plato defended the necessity of government by stating that it enforced laws and resolved disagreements among citizens. For Lee 1988; 2014, Government also makes deliberate decisions about public policy. Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics maintained that there is a relationship between politics and ethics. For Aristotle, human beings are social and political animals; therefore, it is necessary to live and participate actively in the society and influence public policy. Taken this idea from Aristotle's prescriptions on how politics and ethical presentation seems to believe, it means that Nigeria should embrace some instance of living in Aristotle's presentation. In the Nicomachean ethics, Aristotle understands and defines politics simply as the highest good attained by action. Therefore, action is the final end for citizens or humans to flourish. For him, human flourishing meant the good life or living well. Held (2008) argues that for ancient Greek philosophers, citizenship had everything to do with active participation and involvement in government matters which will attract sustainable development.

### **Clarification of Concepts**

**Democracy:** Etymologically, the term "democracy" is a combination of two Greek words, *demos*, meaning "people" and *kratein* meaning "the rule" (McNeese 2015:1). Thus, the original meaning of democracy was the "rule of people by the people" (McNeese 2015). Understood from this perspective, democracy involves the will of the governed through active participation. However, as much as democracy seems to be the generally accepted system of governance, this has not been always the case, especially in the time of the Ancient Greeks. For instance, Plato and Aristotle among others had their reservations about adopting democracy as the best system of governing and for the good reasons (Held 2008). Therefore, people should not naïvely accept that democracy which is the best system of governing. Democracy as a system of governance

ensures that citizens participate in decision-making and hold their leaders accountable. It provides mechanisms for citizens to express their opinions choose their representatives and participate in the legislative process. Democracy also fosters transparency and accountability as elected officials who are directly responsible to their people. The concept of democracy is arguably that which is most used in politics and social philosophy and many other disciplines. However, democracy is not easy to define as there are many definitions as there are political systems.

One of the most eminent political scientists of all time, Machiavelli (1983), concluded that all systems of government could promote a tenable political system which is civic in nature. Therefore, it is practical to use the plural form and refer to “democracies”. Consequently, Akindele et al (2012) correctly assert that democracy means different things to different people given their diverse socio-political, socioeconomic, ideological and cultural backgrounds. In his work entitled *Strategic Political Planning*, Duvenhage (1998:2) rightly observes the interconnectedness between democratization and democracy. According to him, democratization means transformation brought about by a government when moving from an undemocratic dispensation into a new democratic order. Duvenhage (1998:11) further articulates that a democratic dispensation is characterized by the following: limited government; responsible government; constitutionalism; political and other freedoms as well as regular free and fair elections.

**Ethical Orientation:** Ethical governance is the foundation of responsible and fair decision-making. It involves upholding ethical principles, including justice, equality, and rule of law. This includes maintaining the integrity of public institutions and promoting good governance practices. This three pillars such as accountability, ethical orientation, democracy and good governance work together to create a system where governance is responsive to the needs of the people, promotes social justice and fosters sustainable development, by ensuring, that leaders are accountable, ethical and democratic in nature. Nigeria can build a more sustainable and equitable society for all its citizens. Democratic ethics can also be viewed as ethics of democracy, this can be defined as “those considerations of morals and rights upon which democracy must be founded and according to which it must be built to be right or wrong” (Clancy, n.d.) Democratic ethics are the ideals, principles that guide the practice of democracy in any human society.

**Good Governance:** Good governance is a way of managing public affairs and resources to ensure equitable and sustainable development while upholding human rights and the rule of law. It involves transparent and accountable processes, participation of all needs of the society. Ultimately, good governance aims to create a just and prosperous society through effective and ethical leadership. In essence, good governance is about creating a system where power is used responsible, resources are managed effectively and all members of society have a voice and a state in their collective future. There are extensive and pluralistic definitions of the term governance. Sharma, Sadana and Harpect define governance as authority, controls or power of government is exercised in mobilizing a society’s social and economic resources, to add the issues of public interest. As governance, leadership and development in Nigeria strives to meet with its expectation, the attachment of good governance will definitely propel it to the forefront. There is the need to apply new public management. Good governance entails balance governance with conducive and uninterrupted relationship between the government and the civil society as active player. The challenge of good governance requires government activities to be reinvented, bureaucracy to be re-positioned, civil society activities to be re-energized with

a social motive. Re-invented governance should be visionary, egalitarian and energized in a manner with less machines like and less hierarchical structure and procedure. To be true, most countries in Africa is not developing but under developing: for the little development in Nigeria is fast dilapidating

**Accountability:** This is the principle that requires that leaders should be held responsible for their actions, decisions and the outcomes of public policy. It includes the promotion of citizen's rights. Accountability promotes transparency where information is accessible to the public and allowing them to scrutinize government actions. There is no way good governance can be discussed without introducing the ethical principle of accountability. This point to the importance of accountability in modern democracy and the role it plays in promoting good governance. The absence of accountability in talks on democracy is like running a motor-vehicle on a flat tyre. What then is accountability, and what role does it play in modern democracy? Put differently, what does it mean to say citizens should hold government accountable? To answer these questions, it is necessary to begin by defining the concept of accountability. This section interrogates the concept of "accountability" within a moral and legal framework. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 subsections 91(1) and 92(2) calls for accountability from the President, Deputy President and cabinet ministers as individuals and collectively. For the sake of clarity, the Constitution states: The President and the deputy President and each minister are individually accountable to Parliament and the entire nation for the exercise and performance of their power and duties. The Constitution is explicit about what individual accountability entails. According to Rautenbach & Malherbe (2004:178), individual accountability entails the following:

- i. A duty to explain to Parliament how the powers and duties under his or her control have been exercised and performed.
- ii. A duty to acknowledge that a mistake has been made and to promise to rectify the matter.
- iii. A duty to resign if personal responsibility has been accepted. Hossain (1999:84) contends that accountability means the ability to "accept responsibility for decisions and the foreseeable consequences of actions and inactions and for setting examples for others". Accordingly, wherever, the term "accountability" is used, it will be in accordance with these two closely connected definitions. Accountability implies that Parliament must be provided with full disclosure in order for citizens to know the truth. In any society, holding citizens responsible for their actions in public service and the private sector is significant to ensure some level of accountability. With regard to public officials participants pointed out those mechanisms must be devised to hold leaders responsible when they use public resources in ways that society considers unacceptable. To that end, they noted that any public accountability system should include periodic competition and a clear set of rules and expectations. Participants emphasized the notion that the principle of accountability essential to democracy requires exposing the truth with stated and enforced consequences for violating the rules without exception even for those in power. The lack of accountability in Nigeria has led to the gross misuse of public resources. For example, single-party systems in Nigeria do not allow for much in the way of accountability. The effect has been rampant corruption and the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions—indications that people in Nigeria were governed without being able to control their governors. One participant argued: "Besides financial and economic accountability, there is also a need for electoral accountability for the right to recall representatives if they do not deliver on their promises and don't govern well."

### **Lack of Accountability and Transparency**

Lack of accountability in politics in many cases causes distortions. In the end, such distortion in combination results in unsatisfactory representation of interests of broad groups of voters. Their relation with the establishment is severed at best, and negative in extreme situations. This unwillingness to take core decisions in the contemporary Western world is referred to as political inertia. Transparency is a value which is it impossible to overemphasize. It is a precondition for real democracy. Voters can only make an informed choice if they are informed about the management of public funds. Publicized information improves not only political competition but also the quality of the decisions. The lowest quality of the decision is associated with deprivation of necessary information, which leads to the collapse of active processes of oversight. In practice, the unlimited right of the public has many restraints. There are legal restrictions and these can be circumvented, e.g. by populist reclassification of information as secret or confidential. After all, unlike a free market, the government processes some elements of secrecy. The process of regulation in a pluralist democracy should be open to full debate, but governments cannot govern effectively without a degree of confidentiality.

### **Ethical Practice, Morality and Democracy**

Tracing the etymology of these concepts Grenz (1997) had written “Ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means custom or an invocation of the way of life of a given people, while morality is derived from a Latin word *moralis* which means custom or habits. Ethics and morality is often used by scholars interchangeably to mean the something. This usage in ordinary communication may be allowed, but technically they have different meaning. In ordinary language, ethics and morality both mean custom or habit. In order to appreciate the interactive effect of ethics on the practice of democracy, it is imperative to understand the relationship between ethics, morality and democracy. Those who do not link these three variables tend to simply cry of poor governance in Nigeria. Most Nigerians attempts to link democracy with freedom. Freedom is understood in Nigeria as “the opportunity to do what anybody desires”. This way of conceiving freedom is erroneous and must have come from ignorance which is the portion of majority of Nigerians. It is based on this misconception that the thread running through the three key concepts must be identified and given the needed interpretations.

To leave the interpretation at this point is to complicate issues. In order to delineate our minds from the outstanding confusion, it is important to state that ethics which is theoretically based is concerned with the use of philosophical methods of investigations to establish rational grounds for either approving or disapproving human actions. According to Cyril O.Imo (2007) morality deals with norms governing human conduct while ethics is the effort to reason or justify these norms”. Anjov (2008) writing on this relation argued that “both ethics and morality are critical tools for evaluating the rightness or wrongness of human conduct as such conduct relations to the individual or members of the whole community. What actually makes this study interesting is the fact that it is situated in Nigeria where the people are notoriously religious and indeed epitomizes what John S. Mbiti (1991) wrote of Nigeria: He carries it to the fields where he is sowing the seeds or harvesting a new crop, he takes it with him to the beer parlour (*burukutu joint*) or to attend a funeral ceremony and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the University, if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament. The attitude of the Nigeria reveals that religion permeates the whole of human existence. Every word or deed a person performs is weighed by using the religious scale. This is the bases for which S. N. Ezeanya (1980) summed up the relation of life and religion for

the Africans in these words, “life is religion and religion is life”. Relating our understanding of religion and life with what we said of ethics and morality earlier, then it is not out of place to state that religion is a unique determinant of human conduct. Any attempt to remove it from the way we behave, the basis of life and survival is destroyed. There is a very strong assumption that democracy is both a way of life and a form of government. Considering the objectives of our study, we would prefer to go with the description of democracy, “as a way of life”. This stand is taken for very obvious reasons. Ethics, morality, religion are all variously considered as “way of life of a people”. For all the family social, political, purely religious, interest of this secular life and the permanent enjoyment for every believer in the hereafter, all are embodied in a great complete organ, being protected by Islam and breathing its spirit into it.

Going by this understanding, it becomes symmetrically impossible to divorce ethics, morality and religion from the practice of democracy at least in Nigeria. The simple reason is that ethical practice; moral, religious and democratic values are one and the same thing. When the ethicist, theologian, and political scientist speak of transparency, equality, consultations, fairness and so begin to emerge for proper purposes. They are not dealing with different values. Thus, these values are central to the ethicist, theologian and practitioners of democracy. According to Watt (1977) these values add to the value of human dignity. Hear him: Basic human individual freedom is prerequisite for a healthy well-balanced society and Islam encourages the establishment of such a society in which the following of human personality from types of bondage and slavery is manifested. It declares in the most emphatic terms that no human being has the right to endorse others.

### **Philosophy for Good Governance in Nigeria’s Social Development**

Philosopher in the society should make deliberate efforts to address this challenge from the home to the society at larger. In view of the pervasiveness of bad governance in Nigeria, it would take a long time to overcome it. In addition, Philosophers in institutions of higher learning especially should be intentional in re-orienting the youth to desire to change the society for the better and to maximize any future state leadership positions as means of achieving the great objective. In this regard, youth should be encouraged to imbibe discipline and sacrifice, thinking of ways they can make significant contributions to their societies. This is also indicated that youth should be equipped to know that indulging in anti-vices would hinder them from personal development as well as their future usefulness to their societies because they are the future of tomorrow. Social development is a very broad concept requiring impacts from various disciplines. Philosophy underscores the improvement of life for the people of any given society to the development and advancement of the society. Social development requires motivation especially with reference to re-orientation. This is a legacy with Philosophy has bequeathed to history and it is the essence of social development. Philosophy in its practical dimension identifies with the context in which it functions and air at bringing significant to the people and their situation. People needs to be motivated so that the will key into the re-orientation efforts so that the effort would have impact on the society. Philosophy can help in the re-orientation process of the society re-orientation relates to human values which is a part of domain of Philosophy. Several Philosophers has contributed in discussing on how to improve in the political conditions of the times with a few formulating political for governing societies for the time of plate. The higher order thinking speaks of critical thinking, the capacity to ask fundamental questions about realities the development of any society is dependent on quality of their thinking and articulation this ability to think down to the root is a task proper to philosophy.



### **Nigeria and the Democratic Experience**

Democracy in Nigeria has been paradoxical. It means that bargaining and maneuvering are allowed in the contemporary society, particularly among the various interest groups who claim to be born to rule. It means that in Nigeria the few does what smooth the collective interests irrespective of the feelings of the masses. In contemporary Nigerian society, the nation's law-makers are so incompetent and they are corrupt in themselves that they have lost of moral legitimacy to compel Nigerian presidents to make amends. Existentially, democracy is described as the highest form of civilization. For democracy to work there must be a clear expression of the right to freedom of expression, independence of the judiciary, an unhindered opposition and a periodic return to the electorate for assessment in the form of an election. Dividends of democracy are the proceeds for the voters (electorates) who have given something (his/her vote) earlier and must be given something in return. Democracy is based on the tenets of liberty and equality. Equality is the cornerstone of every democratic society which aspires to the attainment of social justice and human rights. The popularity of democracy would suggest that the principles of liberty and equality on which it is based are not just accidents or the results of ethnocentric prejudice, but are in fact discoveries about the nature of man. Democracy is based on the desire for equal recognition or recognition by equals' Democratic constitutionalism as characterized by the principle of liberalism.

### **Implications of Ethical Lapses in Democracy for Nigeria's Sustainable Development**

The problem of development in Nigeria does not result from lack of competent personnel or absence of adequate financial resources. Rather it is more associated with lack of democratic ethics, which is an ethical lapse in democracy. To start with, our democracy is not people-oriented. Democracy is viewed as "a government of the people, by the people and for the people. However, in the Nigerian context, there seems to be an exception to this definition. The people who are supposed to be the fulcrum of democracy are not only marginalized, but also thoroughly alienated. The democracy in Nigeria is therefore, a government of few families, their friends as well as their business collaborators" (frarrington 2011), as opposed to the democratic virtue of popular participation. These few people live in extreme affluence while the majority of citizens wallow in abject poverty as opposed to democratic virtual of welfarism. Yet, it is business as usual. According to Ayobolu (n.d.) "there is no clear demarcation between democracy and oligarchy in Nigeria. And, there is always an agreement amongst the colluding business class and the ruling elite on how to share the boot of government or what is commonly referred to as the proverbial national cake.

Nigeria's fortune is depreciating, some few individuals at the corridors of power and their cronies are growing fatter at the expense of Nigerians". Another ethical lapse in Nigeria's democracy is the inability of the electoral body to conduct free and fair election. Free and fair is one of the virtues of democracy. Every contestant is determined to rig the election in his own favour. And, where rigging is made impossible, violence, arson, kidnapping and murder of opponents are introduced into the electoral game (Ajayi, 1998). Electoral competition then becomes "a do or die affair" as witnessed in the elections of 1964, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007 and to date. In this regard, electoral process becomes an avenue for manipulations and all sorts of electoral malpractices. Electoral officials are bribed before elections so as to guarantee their partial support. The security agents are also bribed to ensure peaceful atmosphere for stealing of peoples votes. Refusal to accept electoral defeat in good faith is a lapse in our democracy, and the absence of rule of law also serves as ethical lapse in Nigeria's democracy. It is to be noted that in Nigeria, democracy has not achieved much success in bestowing to the people

their basic needs or even the requirement of participation in decision making. Neither has it been providing the peaceful atmosphere that can bring about development and the well being of the people (Agagu, 2004). The democratic experiments we have had in Nigeria are only democratic in name and on paper without ethics by which it can be driven. Neither do they meet the demands of liberal democracy foisted on the country by the western world let alone of the inclusive nature expected of a developing country under unique circumstances. The type of democracy operating in the country does not concede any aspect of decision making to the masses. Even the common one which is that of electoral choice is often derived through rigging and harassment. It is not surprising that our own form of democracy does not in actual sense grant concrete political social and economic rights. It is a democracy that heightens conflict crude use of force, intimidation and discord and the underdevelopment of the state and the citizenry (Agagu, 2004).

### **Recommendations**

Accountability, ethical orientation, democracy and good governance are interwoven parameters that will ensure the development of any entity including the Nigerian. Achieving good governance in a developing country like Nigeria requires accountability, ethical orientation and democracy to the people and which it requires the people, especially the leadership at every level to have the systematic capacity to deliver services maintain laws order and manage the myriad of natural human and capital resources effectively. Good governance minimizes the persistence of bad policy and also enhances policy implementation which depends upon the quality of a public institution and better accountability structure. Leader to enhance good governance in Nigeria will be those who are intellectually sound that have robust education and can implement welfare ideologies and activities and this will result in good governance the overall development in Nigeria. Democracy is development imbued. The more democratic ethics in a society is higher the dividends of democracy; is better to the level of sustainable development. Development can hardly be felt or achieved when democratic ethics are not imbibed and adhered to the leaders and administrators. This is because the accommodation of ethics and democracy enhances performance and facilitate development. Democracy, ethical orientation, good governance and accountability are inseparable for developmental sake in Nigeria. This components of development such as; discipline, commitment, honesty, transparency, accountability, ethics, and good governance etc are peaceful co-existence. The success of one leads to the success of the other and vice versa.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, accountability, ethical orientation, good governance and democracy are essential as pillars of sustainable development in Nigeria and this contribute to the social sustainability by promoting transparency, fairness and public participation. By strengthening these principles, Nigeria can build a more just, equitable and stable society for all its citizens. This paper concludes and argued that ethical orientations, democracy, good governance and accountability are integral parts of promoting and sustainable in social development in Nigeria. The paper further stresses the importance of the active participation of citizens which is essential in sustaining and strengthening democracy in Nigeria. Absence of democratic ethics and norms has really affected development in Nigeria. The country principally has remained a third world and dependent country in crisis of various kinds which is not making any progress forward or development. The furore over resource control, power shift, revenue allocation, Sharia issue, rotational presidency, creation of more states, terrorism, insecurity etc. are evidences of lack of democratic ethics and norms in Nigerian society. It is therefore the contention of this paper that



for development to thrive in Nigeria, the attitude and orientation of its political elites must be changed. Both the leaders and followers must learn the art and discipline of democracy cultivate the habit and virtue of honesty and imbibe democratic ethos as these remain the only antidote to the crises of Nigeria development.

Nigeria government should achieve this aim and affirmed it. Virtue that is learned through practice until excellence is achieved and becomes habitual. It has been argued that ensuring good governance and democracy imposes obligations on both government officials and citizens must actively play their roles. The moral and political obligation for government is to make deliberations that would benefit larger society; whereas citizens are required to participate actively and challenge governments to explain their decisions and actions. The ideal of good governance through the appointment of competent ministers has been argued for since deficiency in competence undermines good governance and accountability. In order for government officials to abide by the rules, there must be a structure in government that is strictly appointed for advising the president and his cabinet. Also discussed in this paper, is the value of ethical orientation and a virtuous leader in promoting good governance and the view that good leaders come from a good society.

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