

# PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRACY FOR NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

According to the Random House College Dictionary, Democracy "is government by the people, a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system". This paper is an analysis of democracy, and its application thereof. It distinguishes three areas of meaning to include "of the people", "by the people" and "for the people" Democracies. The expression 'the people' which democracy emphasizes refers to the generality of the citizenry and not just to a handful of privileged exploiters and oppressors of the people. The paper identifies "by the people" democracy, which adopts as a criterion of democratic legitimacy the possibility of voting out, as the only authentic form of democracy. The paper argues that for Nigeria to develop socio-economically, it is necessary to inculcate into each and every individual, moral corms, attitudes, values, habits and beliefs that are consistent with genuine democratic principles. The paper maintains that democracy in Nigeria is struggling for survival, against many social problems created by those bent on exploiting others

## INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, most people take words for granted, but in philosophy it is not the case. Philosophy by its nature is a critical and reflective activity. Thus, philosophical analysis, is the intellectual art of logically breaking down any sentence, argument or proposition, to its component parts and rearrangement of same in order to understand its causal relationship. Such analysis plays a crucial role in resolving complex propositions or concepts into simpler ones. Hence the philosophical analysis of democracy in this paper will entail the intellectual art of logically breaking down the concept of democracy, to its component parts and its rearrangement in order to understand and explain what democracy actually consists of and its application thereof.

## PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRACY

The word democracy is etymologically derived from two Greek words "demos and "cratia" meaning "people" and "rule" respectively. This is how the word came to be defined as 'the rule of the people'. Thus, Abraham Lincoln in his famous Gettysburg speech defined democracy as 'the government of the people, by the people and for the people (Flew, 168). According to Ozumba:

Democracy is the rule of the people, unaffected by low birth, low income and low status: where equal participation is ensured in line with each according to his ability for the benefit of all and sundry through majority consent (36).

This definition according to him "constitutes a synthesis of all other definitions with an attempt to make democracy more practical and less problematic" (36). Is this true? Is democracy the rule of the people or the rule by the people? Is it true that democracy, particularly in Nigeria, is unaffected by low birth, low income and low status? How correct is it to maintain that democracy, particularly in Nigeria, ensures equal participation in line with each according to his ability for the benefit of all and sundry, though majority consent? These are critical questions that cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand.

There are two major institutional forms of democracy namely, direct democracy and indirect democracy. In a direct democracy, all citizens participate in the making of important collective decisions. Whereas in an indirect democracy, the role of the citizens is to elect representatives, who are the ones who will take policy and legislative decisions. Historical examples of direct democracy include classical Athens, the Swiss Canton and small scale pre-literate societies. In the twentieth century, however, the dominant form of democratic governance has been the indirect form of democracy.

J.L. Austin picked the word 'democracy' as his example of a 'notoriously useless word' (127). The fact, however, is that the word democracy is not useless, though it may be said to have various or minute descriptive meanings. It is used in many places as a universally accepted and acceptable term of commendation. We can, from Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy, cited above, distinguish, if not three precise senses, at least three areas of meaning for the word democracy. The first is "of the people" democracy. The Oxford English

Dictionary talks of democracy in this sense: "In modern use often more vaguely denoting a social state in which all have equal rights, without hereditary or arbitrary differences of rank or privilege". It is in this sense that people talk of democratizing an educational institution, or a department of state. This is a matter of ensuring that consideration is given to every sort of school and family at every social level. John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* or Stoneman's and Robinstein's collection: *Education for Democracy* contain almost nothing on political arrangement or political training. Democracy here, is in one sense "of the people" but has no necessary connection with political arrangement or political training. It is in this sense that we can refer to the rationalism of Descartes as democratic and individualistic in outline. At the very start of his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes maintains that,

"The power of judging rightly and of separating what is true from what is false (which is generally called good sense or reason) is equal by nature in all men (36).

The central question is: what certainty can the individual human subject have, concerning the world about him. Descartes' answer to this central question is that "whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true". This implies that the "natural light of reason" is capable of shining in the mind of each secluded individual.

The second of our areas of meaning is "by the people" democracy. This refers to the method of making state or group decisions. If some group as a whole takes decisions by majority vote, then that is democratic. The same is true of institutions under which decisions are made by delegates, representatives, or other officers who can, in due course, be voted out. There is a non-paternalist emphasis here upon what the voters themselves decide. This is not the same with what they are, by others, supposed to need or what it may or may not be in their interests to have. The second emphasis here is upon voting out, not in. If a government cannot be voted out by those who voted it in because it does not serve the interests of the people, then it is not democratic. So there is need to adopt, as a criterion of democratic legitimacy, the possibility of voting out.

The third area of meaning is "for the people" democracy. Those devoted to democracy in our second understanding may regard those who see themselves as democratic in this third sense as truly undemocratic. On 11 May 1957, Jonas Kadar in his Address to the Hungarian National Assembly, according to Flew said:

The task of the leader is not to put into effect the wishes, and will of the masses ... The task of the leader is to accomplish the interest of the masses. Why do I differentiate between the will and the interests of the masses? In the recent past we have encountered the phenomenon of certain categories of workers acting against their interests (169).

Another revealing and authoritative statement in this direction came from Abdul Kharume, First Vice President of Tanzania. It was made on July 7, 1967. The Tanzanian government had recently rounded up everyone in Dasr-se-Salaam without visible means of support, and sent them to the countryside to farm. Commenting on this action of government, Mr. Kharume, according to Flew, said:

Our government is democratic because it makes its decisions in the interest of, and for the bent fit of the people. I wonder why men who are unemployed are surprised and resentful at the government sending them back to the land for their own advantage (169).

It is obvious that Mr. Kadar and Mr. Kharume are not pretending to be democratic in any sense of our second area of meaning, where the people themselves have to determine what their interests are. For them (Kadar and Kharume) as is the case for Rousseau's notion of the general will, the important thing is not what anyone actually wants or decides, but what satisfies the need or interests of the people. And for them, it is the party that decides what the people's interests are.

People at times employ expressions like 'a free society' or 'a democratic society' almost interchangeably. The problem here concerns democracy in some sense of our second area of meaning, that is 'by the people' democracy. But the two ideas (a free society and a democratic society) are not the same. The one refers to a way of making and maybe later unmaking group decisions. The other is a matter of the absence of external constraints on individuals. There is, however, need for a logically necessary connection between democracy and certain minimum general liberties. Such liberties are those which are the conditions of its being truly said that citizens made and implemented their voting decisions freely. For instance, it must be possible to get and spread relevant information; to discuss issues with other people and to organize opposition. There is also need for guarantee against intimidation. So some basic liberties must be logically necessary to such democracy.

There is need to observe here, however, that decisions made even by genuine democratic procedures, and also reversible through those same procedures, may nevertheless work against the liberty of the minority. This is because there is nothing in the nature of a majority which guarantees that it will respect or try to cater for minorities. For example, unnatural sexual activities even between consenting adults in the strictest privacy is forbidden and made punishable by a majority decision. So an advocate of equal liberty for all - majority and minority alike - will support democratic institutions only with some reservations. Where there has to be collective decisions, enforced on all, Mill will want these to be democratic. But where there is no such need for collectivism, there he will want all the deciding done by each one of us for ourselves. This is because as

Mill put it:

The people who exercise the power are not always the same people over whom it is exercised; and the self-government spoken of is not the government of each person by himself but each by all the rest (67).

So there is, here, the need to respect and treat each one as a person, be he a member of the minority or the majority; be he from the upper or lower class. A good expression of this is found in Kant's Formula of the End in itself. In Kant, it reads:

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end (96).

This is, in essence, a matter of treating each person as a person with his own aims and purposes in life. A similar point was emphasized in the Putney Debate of 1647 by Captain Rainborough of the New Model Army when he, according to Smith, Volume I said:

Really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he; and therefore truly, Sir, I think it is clear that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do believe that the poorest man in England is not at all bound to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under (301).

An egalitarian of this kind will base his support for democracy not on the false doctrine that majorities are always or most often right, but on the true and right fact that it is everyone's lives which the collective decisions are governing, and that every individual has his own life to live. What contributions can our philosophical analysis of democracy make to the socio-economic development of Nigeria? Before attempting this very important question, let us first of all determine what constitutes Nigeria's socio-economic development.

#### WHAT CONSTITUTES NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Socio-economic development can be described as the process of social and economic growth in a society. Socio-economic development is measured with the help of indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), life expectancy, literary attainments in society and levels of employment opportunities. Positive changes in less tangible factors such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and the extent of participation in civil society, can equally be used to measure the socio-economic development of a given society, nation or state. Economic development, thus according to Edame, can be described as the process of growth in total real national income and of real per

capita income of a developing country over a long period of time (17).

It implies the advancement of the entire society and the attainment of a number of set objectives that can improve the standard of living of the people. Despite the fact that Nigeria is richly endowed with enormous mineral resources and man power, yet inherent in Nigeria's corrupt political system are problems of economic decline, deepening poverty, mass unemployment, and an inadequate capacity for socio-economic management. There are many factors that constitute Nigeria's socio-economic development. But these factors can be summed up under two major factors - socialization and economic empowerment.

**Socialization:** The concept of socialization, according to Ezenibe, generally refers to the ways in which individuals learn skills, knowledge, values, motives and roles appropriate to their position in a group or a society (27).

Socialization can be likened to a symbiotic process in which both the individual and the social group benefit positively. Thus, an individual that has been adequately socialized should be able to perform effectively his or her role, for the betterment of the society. Socialization can, therefore, be described as an interactional process whereby a person's behaviour is modified to conform with expectations of members of the group to which he belongs. Thus, it is a process in which a person by his or her interaction with other persons learns to adapt to one's culture and how to live within it. Socialization provides for the individual the basic resources necessary for actively and effectively participating in life within his or her society. Thus socialization prepares the individual for the roles he or she must play in the society. The society equally, by communicating its moral norms, attitudes, values, motives, social roles, language and symbols from one generation to the other, attains social and cultural continuity.

The principal agents of socialization are most notably, the family, the school, peer groups, mass media, work place, religion and the state etc. There are two main functions of socialization. First, from the societal perspective, it trains the new members to behave in a socially acceptable manner both as individuals and as members of the society. Secondly, from the point of view of the individual being socialized, the function of socialization is the integration of the individual into the group or society at large. According to sociologists, there are six types of socialization, and they include the following:

- (a) **Primary socialization:** This is the process whereby people learn the attitudes, values, and actions appropriate to individuals and members of a particular culture
- (b) **Secondary socialization:** This is the process of learning what the appropriate behaviour is, as a member of a smaller group within the larger society.

- (c) **Reverse socialization:** This is the deviation from the desired or accepted behaviour of the society, especially by the younger generation.
- (d) **Development socialization:** It is the process of learning appropriate behaviour in a social institution. It can equally be referred to as the process of developing one's skills.
- (e) **Anticipatory socialization:** This refers to the process of socialization in which a person rehearses for future positions, occupations and social relationships etc.
- (f) **Resocialization:** This is the process of discarding former behaviour patterns and accepting new ones as part of a transition in one's life. This can be said to occur throughout the human circle, for we drop old behaviour patterns from time to time and pick up new ones, as the need arises.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the concept of socialization plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a nation. Thus, for Nigeria to develop socio-economically, it is necessary to inculcate into each and every individual moral norms, attitudes, values, habits and beliefs that are consistent with developmental purposes. This will indeed enhance the rapid development of Nigeria socio-economically.

**Economic empowerment:** Economic empowerment, on its part, can be described as giving to individuals the financial power to take economic decisions, in matters relating to themselves in relation to their self-development, through an adequate development and regulation of the material resources of the community or nation. The need for economic empowerment in the socio-economic development of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. It obviously impacts positively on the living standards of the people. The rate of economic empowerment in a state, country or nation determines the amount of peace, security and stability in such a country, state or nation. Without economic empowerment, there will be no sustainable socioeconomic growth and development. Economic empowerment has to do with "putting money into the

pockets of individuals" for purpose of self development and social relevance through a fair distribution of the national wealth and provision of gainful employment for job seekers. Hence there is the need for social, economic and environmental sustainable developmental policies. Such must be effectively and successfully implemented by the Nigerian government, in order to ensure better and more qualitative livelihood for the vast majority of Nigerians, living in abject poverty. The attempts by the Nigerian government directed towards raising the country's standard of living are steps in the right direction. Such attempts include the implementation of such economic reform programs as the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). There is a related initiative at the state levels called the State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, by the state governments. Other similar attempts include a variety of reforms such as macro-economic stability, deregulation, liberalization, privatization and accountability in the civil service. These are commendable attempts from point of view of their aims and objectives. But from the point of view of implementation, how effective and successful are they? That is the big question.

These economic reform programs are directed towards addressing basic deficiencies, mostly in rural areas, such as the lack of potable water for household use and water for irrigation, unreliable power supply, decaying infrastructure, impediments to private enterprise and corruption. The Nigerian government, therefore, hopes that these reforms will create more jobs, help in diversifying the economy, increase industrial capacity utilization and agricultural productivity, in the short run. How effective and successful are the above economic reform programs from point of view of implementation? Economic empowerment in essence implies economic development. Economic development implies the advancement of the entire society and the attainment of a number of set objectives, that can improve the standard of living of the people. Thus, economic empowerment implies the advancement of the individual members of society and the entire society at large. Is that the case in Nigeria? The quick answer is, of course, no.

**Table 1: Real Growth of GDP, 1965 -1985**  
(Annual Percentage Change)

Country Group	1965-1973 Average	1973- 1980 Average	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Industrial Capitalist economies	4.7	2.8	1.9	0.6	2.3	4.6	2.8
Developing Countries	6.6	5.4	3.5	2.0	2.0	5.4	4.4
Africa	3.9	2.7	1.7	0.7	0.2	0.7	2.1
China	7.8	5.4	4.9	7.7	9.6	14.0	10.0

Source: World Development report, published for the world Bank by Oxford University Press, London, Etc 1986. p 24 and quoted in Eskor Toyo's Globalization from A perspective Relevant to Africa:

That Capital economies started to stagnate after 1970 and experienced a great depression in 1980 - 83 is reflected by the data on real gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Table I above. The data for China exhibit the contrast between the rest and this developing economy that followed essentially the soviet industrialization strategy in 1950 and aimed from the start at independence and self-reliance and not merely growth. China completely rejects the teaching of economists of the Western globalists on how to grow or develop (23)

Though Nigeria claims to be a democratic nation, democratic principles are obviously not adequately applied to Nigeria's socio-economic developmental strategies.

#### APPLICATION OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES TO NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The realization of genuine and enduring democracy calls for the correct appreciation of the nature and contents of the democracy needed in Nigeria. Multi-partism, political pluralism or Western democracy is not merely what Nigeria requires. These forms of democracy are all silent on Nigeria's socio-economic needs, which include the need for popular participation, economic democracy and cultural democratization. Nigeria needs social democracy which is political, economic and cultural democracy. Democratic institutions are also needed for the realization of democracy in Nigeria. Such institutions include among others, National Assembly or Parliaments, Rule of Law, Independent Judiciary. Most importantly, the funding of these democratic institutions must be guaranteed in the Constitution and not left to the whims and caprices of governments. Democratic social forces are also required to strengthen the division between the state and the civil society. Onimode opines that organizations and operatives in civil society, must have their rights and independence guaranteed as part of democratic rights in the Constitution (8). Onimode then goes on to give a detailed exposition of the norms of social democracy. From the view point of the political, there is need for multi-party, periodic elections, adult suffrage, fundamental rights, popular participation, outlawing of Military Rule and emphasis on the democratic duty of citizens which include among others, defence of the Constitution and public property etc. From the economic point of view, there is need for right to life, provision of basic needs which include food, potable water, housing, clothing, healthcare, education, transport and others. There is need for social security, employment, indexation of wages, duty to perform at one's best, economic rights of women etc. From the point of view of the cultural, he listed the use of mother tongue as part of the freedom of expression, freedom of cultural expression in the form of dress, language etc; choice of developmental path or ideology and provision of minority rights. Next are the major democratic institutions needed. These include such major democratic forces as civil society; Trade Unions;

Students Unions; Social Organizations; Women's Movements; Non-governmental Organizations; Peasant Organizations; Professional Organizations; Community Associations; Civil Organizations etc. The freedom of existence and operation of these organizations are to be guaranteed in the Constitution, as components of civil society (Onimode, 3-9). According to Eskor Toyo,

The definitive content of democracy is the power and authority of the people and service to their interests by themselves. Democracy is counterposed to the power and authority of a minority of exploiters or oppressors of the people or the power and authority of various masters over them, masquerading as servants of society (49).

Emphasis here is on "by the people" democracy. From our analysis above, of the three possible areas of meaning in reference to democracy, it is clear that democracy may exist in many forms. In most cases, it merely struggles for survival against many social hostilities, as is the case in Nigeria. And these hostilities are hostile atmospheres created by those bent on exploiting others. There are discriminations and oppressive inequalities of various kinds. The Nigerian society of today is invariably divided into a rich, big-propertied minority and a crowd of poor nearly property-less majority. The rich dominate the poor and take decisions that affect them without their consent. A genuine democracy requires real equality of the citizens, particularly from the point of view of economic power. According to Eskor Toyo:

If the country is actually commanded from day today by millionaires, or if a society is divided into industrial, commercial, financial and agrarian masters and wage or salaried slaves, the term democracy is wrongly used to describe even the politics of such a regime (49).

Genuine democracy focuses on the power of the people. That is, emphasis is on "by the people" democracy. And the people here refers to the generality of the citizenry and not to a handful of privileged exploiters and oppressors of the people. These exploiters and oppressors of the people confuse the people with carefully planned propaganda network.

Basically social power derives from control of the means of production and exchange. "PDP: Power to the People", "PPA: Prosperity to the People" - such are the slogans of present day Nigeria's People's Democratic Party and Progressive People's Alliance respectively. Eskor Toyo opines that:

The people cannot be said to be in power when the ownership and control of production and finance are not theirs (49).

To be genuine, advocates of democracy in Nigeria must get to the root of the question of power, by addressing the issue of the ownership and control of the means of production. In the words of Eskor

Toyo:

Until modern industry and its financial and commercial con-comitants are owned, managed and controlled by the working people who constitute in all countries more than nine-tenths of the population, whatever political system exists cannot be rightly called a democracy, that is, a regime of people's authority and power (49).

There is need for the working people to be involved in their own governance. This, they can do by voting and being voted for without such obstacles as money, occupational position or ethnicity operating against them. For this to be the case, the armed forces must defend the people against both internal and external oppression. And the law of the land must not operate against the working people in the interest of any exploiter. And, of course, the economic empowerment or enablement of the people must be guaranteed. Eskor Toyo insists that:

To talk authentically about democracy, people must be equal owners of the country, to begin with. This means that land, factories, mines, energy generating plants, transport services and banks must belong to the people, that is the working people, to begin with (49).

Economic and political power always work hand in hand. One's economic power determines, to a very large extent, what level of political power he can attain. In the words of Eskor Toyo:

It has become nonsensical to speak of democracy in a country where millions are deprived of the means of living in order to save profits for a few millionaire parasites. Where is the citizenship of millions of unemployed people begging for a job for months and years in a system where they must earn a wage as slaves of a few capitalists, even to survive? One-man-one-vote means almost nothing in that kind of system. The millionaires pile all the economic votes permanently in their hands, and those are the votes that matter every hour of the day (49).

A country where the fruit of the people's labour is appropriated by a few individuals, cannot talk of democracy with any sense of sincerity. The boards of directors and top managers often use, to their advantage, the income produced by their various companies. Those at the helm of affairs in government use public funds to their advantage. Those at the helm of affairs in religious organizations use money generated by members to their advantage. The working people of Nigeria are given only a minute percentage of what they actually deserve.

Can we genuinely talk about democracy in a country where the same educational chances are not open to all citizens? Can we talk sincerely about democracy in a country where more than 99% of

the electronic media are owned by government? The privately owned media houses are always under surveillance. This makes it almost impossible for people to have access to any information government wants to hide from them. He who pays the piper dictates the tune. You must say what you are told to say or be shown the way out. Can authentic democracy thrive in an atmosphere like ours? The Nigerian electronic media, mostly in the hands of government, have emerged as powerful instruments of information, or misinformation, where such favour government. They are now very powerful instruments of manipulation and control even of the thinking of the people. The proper education of the society, through the educational institutions and the print and electronic media, is of profound importance if the economy, the polity and culture are to be built by the people. And we emphasize the need for equalization of educational opportunities, through equalization of the economic power of the citizens.

## CONCLUSION

From our foregoing discussions, it is evident that if socio-economic progress is to be made within Nigeria's democratic framework, then the people must be regarded as the true sovereign. In other words, emphasis must continually be on "by the people" democracy. For democracy to flourish in the Nigeria of today, Nigeria's democracy has to be re-conceived as a double sided phenomenon; concerned, on the one hand, with voting in the people for democratic governance and, on the other hand, the voting out of people or persons (individuals) when the need arises. Individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives, that is they should enjoy equal rights, and accordingly equal obligations in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them; so long as they do not use this framework to negate the rights of others.

In the area of Nigeria's socio-economic development, new solutions need to be developed in order to create better opportunities, a cleaner and safer environment, and improved socio-economic conditions. For this to be achieved, the Federal, State and Local governments, as well as individuals must be financially disciplined, hence, the need for re-socialization cannot be over-emphasized. The government must stop the unnecessary spending of unbudgeted public money. Thus the war on corruption, ought to go beyond the victimization of individuals who are critical of undemocratic governmental policies. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable socio-economic development, the Nigerian government must ensure that its democratic governance justly and equally serves the people, by creating policies that will reduce youth restiveness and unemployment, strengthen national human rights institutions and also create a zero tolerance for all types of corruption at national, state and local government levels. The government should equally focus on health systems and education, especially at the grass root levels.

In conclusion, without well-reasoned democratic policies, Nigeria cannot achieve political stability and internal civil peace. The government should give attention to human capital development because, there is a shortage of skills in the public sector, for effective economic management and planning. The government, therefore, ought to give high priority to human development because, it is the cornerstone of the socio-economic development of a nation.

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