

Integrity and Accountability as Instruments for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria, a land of diverse and multiple ethnic nationalities, has weathered and is still weathering turbulent storms socially, politically, religiously and economically to survive as an individual and corporate entity since being christened a geographical entity in 1914. And in the arduous task of building a virile and egalitarian society like Nigeria, successive leaders both military and civilian had mapped out plans and strategies that have not seen the light of the day because of bad governance, lack of integrity, and accountability. This paper, therefore, intends to discuss how integrity and accountability can serve as tools for achieving good governance in Nigeria using the philosophies of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr Nnamdi Azikwe. The research is both qualitative and descriptive while the documentation method is used to collect data and textual analysis is used to analyse the collected data. The evidence from this study reveals that it is obvious that integrity occupies a pride of place in the reconstruction of the Nigerian public sector. 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.

Keywords: Integrity, good governance, governance in Nigeria, accountability

INTRODUCTION

Presently, Nigeria is faced with the challenge of integrity and accountability among public officeholders. It is important to note that it is difficult for a democracy to thrive in Nigeria in the context of the severe crisis of confidence that afflicts governance and the doubtful integrity of 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. And Nigeria is currently suffering from a serious challenge of bad governance coupled with corruption and lack of accountability in governance. Adamson *et al* identify the following factors as indicative of governance in Nigeria: corruption (the abuse of public office for private gains), democratic dictatorship, economic woes, decayed infrastructural facilities, and poor welfare of citizens.¹ But this loss of perception of what good governance entails in Nigeria is tied to the question of integrity.

Previous researches on governance in Nigeria have largely focused on the apparent problems bedeviling democratic governance in Nigeria², the general processes of governance in Nigeria concerning the political, social and economic infrastructures in the country³, synthesis of donor support to good governance in Nigeria within the context of a political economy analysis of Nigeria⁴, and the democracy-good governance nexus in Nigeria⁵. But these scholars have not linked good governance in Nigeria to the concepts of integrity and accountability. This paper, therefore, intends to discuss how integrity and accountability can serve as tools for achieving good governance in Nigeria and within the ambit of the philosophies of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr Nnamdi Azikwe. This objective is carried out qualitatively and descriptively using the documentation method of research to collate data from secondary sources and textually analysis the collated data. Integrity and accountability are necessary for enhancing resourceful leadership and strengthening good governance in Nigeria. The lacuna in achieving good governance in

Nigeria will be filled when integrity and accountability are in place in the leadership space because they are inherent principles serving as the foundations for effective public administration.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Integrity

There are many contextual definitions given to integrity. Hence, it is necessary to clarify its usage here and as it relates to good governance. The word “integrity” can be traced back to the origin of the word which comes from the Latin word “integer” (adjective) with a meaning referring to the “whole or complete”.⁶ For Noluthando and Zonke, integrity is regarded as the highest honour of honesty and trustworthiness when discharging official duties.⁷ And integrity is said to be best served through a systematic set of legislation, policies, government institutions and non-governmental institutions that were specifically chosen to examine issues relating to integrity in public institutions.⁸ Integrity goes beyond doing the right thing when no one is looking, it is adherence to a moral or ethical principle, this is not simple compliance to a rule, this implies a philosophical understanding of the reason it exists. In another vein, integrity is seen as professional wholeness or responsibility.⁹ Dunn defines integrity as “coherence among a set of moral values, with this set of moral values having consistency with a set of social values, and that integrity further requires congruence between an agent’s behaviour and this set of moral/social values over time and across social context(s)”.¹⁰ In the context of this study, integrity is the highest honour of honesty that is associated with human conduct especially as shown by public officials.

Integrity is an important principle of leadership. It demands truthfulness and honesty. Lack of integrity encourages corruption and undermines its meaningful and effective control in large part which in turn sabotages good governance. For Matsiliza, public officials have a moral obligation to serve the public ethically by instilling an ethical culture and codes of conduct as pillars of good governance.¹¹ The notion of integrity has a relationship with moral conduct, the question of what is right or wrong. Integrity requires that an individual comply with acceptable ethical principles and consistently adheres to professed standards of conduct associated therewith.

Accountability

The concept of accountability has been applied in a variety of ways. Accountability as a virtue is used as a set of standards for the evaluation of the behaviour of public actors and forms one of the key principles of modern public governance. Shafritz, Russel and Borrick, as quoted by Noluthando and Zonke opine that accountability is the extent to which one must answer to the highest authority regarding his/her actions, either legally or organizational or institutional with delegated legislation.¹² Accountability, in its core sense, is the process of being called to account for some authority for one's actions or a process of giving an account.¹³ As Mulgan affirms that in this sense accountability involves social interaction and exchange in terms of rectification and sanctions as a social consequence¹⁴. It can also be linked to being answerable. It implies calling someone to account. Different types of accountability have been identified in different administrative contexts: political accountability, bureaucratic accountability, personal accountability.

Accountability cannot be enforced without the backings of the instrument of law. Accountability pertains to the relationship between citizens and government officials along with a sense of obligation and a public service ethos among officials and the power of citizens to sanction, impose costs, or remove officials for unsatisfactory performance or actions.

Good Governance

There are extensive and pluralistic definitions of the term “governance”. Sharma, Sadana and Harpeet define governance as “how authority, control or power of government is exercised in mobilizing a society's social and economic resources, to add the issues of public interest”.¹⁵ For Nkana, Ekpu and Dode, governance refers to the process of managing the affairs of the state.¹⁶ Hence, governance can be defined as “the process of decision-making and the process by which the decisions are implemented”.¹⁷ Three common elements are key to all the definitions of "governance": first, the process (or manner) through which second, power (or authority) is exercised, and third, to manage the collective affairs of a community (or a country, society, or nation).¹⁸ Governance,

as addressed in this study, refers primarily to governance by political leadership.

Adamson, Godwoli, and Lawal state that good governance means “the use of power by those entrusted with governance at every level of governance to promote democracy, accountability and transparency to formulate and implement good policies and to effectively and efficiently manage human resources to achieve sustainable development and economic prosperity and alleviate poverty”.¹⁹ Onichakwe identifies the following as the elements of good governance: participation, accountability, transparency, rule of law, consensus-oriented, effectiveness and efficiency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and equity.²⁰ Good governance becomes very necessary in Nigeria against the backdrop of deterioration of government institutions, entrenched poverty in the polity, all manner of corruption, increasing unemployment rate, increasing activities of non-state actors, the weakened capacity of state institutions, and the collapse of the moral fabric of the country. Good governance is key to human development.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is the most populous Black Country in the world and it came to be in its present form in 1914 when the two protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated by Sir Frederick Lugard. Although Nigeria was the creation of European ambitions and rivalries in West Africa, it would be an error to assume that its people had a little history before its final boundaries were negotiated by Britain, France and Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. This newly created country contained not just a multiplicity of tribes and people groups, but also many great kingdoms that had evolved complex systems of government independent of contact with Europe.

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited the federal structure of governance from its colonial masters, which was organised around the parliamentary system of government and patterned after the British model.²¹ The government at this period was largely democratic and federal and evidenced by a relative functional infrastructure.²² But this only existed between 1960 and 1966. However, between 1966 and 1979,

the military controlled the political arena and ruled the country through a unitary system of government based on the military's command structure or what Osaghae terms “military/command federalism”²³. This model of governance continued between 1984 and 1999 when the Fourth Republic was birthed. Between 1979 and 1983, then, 1999 and now, Nigeria operated the federal structure of government under civilian administration headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, respectively. This civilian administration was organised around the presidential system of government patterned after that of the United States of America. And as Gberevbie and Iyoha affirm, the re-adjustment of the structure of governance in Nigeria by the military, from federal to the unitary structure has negatively affected governance in Nigeria.²⁴

The evident poor governance in Nigeria led to its categorisation, as of 2016, among the 19 poorest, unhappiest, unhealthiest, and most dangerous nations in the world²⁵ despite being the largest oil producer in Africa. Also, the depreciating quality of governance in Nigeria is largely attributed to the pattern of governance adopted by past handlers of governance in the country. According to Adegbami and Adepoju, the governance method adopted by Nigeria's political leaders negates all known prescriptions of good governance.²⁶ This failure in governance has resulted in the increasingly deplorable state of internal security as evidenced by insurgency, banditry and rising activities of non-state actors; bastardisation of the rule of law; growing external debts; extrajudicial killings; depreciating economy; very hostile business environment; the rising cost of living; poor infrastructure; underfunding of the educational sector; people's mistrust of government officials; dysfunctional electoral system; systemic corruption; and many other preponderant factors of a failing/failed state. We could quickly deduce that the poor state of governance in Nigeria is due to the failure of the political leaders and public office holders who have largely used public office to advance their selfish interests rather than the country's interest.²⁷

Relationship between Integrity, Accountability and Good Governance

There is an unarguable connection between integrity, accountability, and good governance. Accountability is an obligation to ensure transparency and disclosure. Public accountability has been defined as an external control device by which public office holders and institutions are made to give a documentary explanation for their actions and decisions.²⁸ The public office holders are accountable for substantives issues such as those on policy, decision makings, resources allocation, custody, use and deployment. While they are also accountable for procedural issues such as those resulting in abuse of office, abuse of power, unfairness, bias and other grievances.²⁹

Integrity and accountability provide the basis for good policies formulation and implementation and enhance efficient management of resources for the nation's sustenance and general development. Integrity connotes that leaders act according to the code of conduct and act following public trust. In essence, public office holders are to operate in honesty, transparency, and upholding promises made to people.

The concept of good governance is value-loaded and it explains the relationship between those who occupy public offices and the governed, in which good governance depends on the morality of public service. Similarly, accountability is always related to good governance in that managing public trust and national resources require it to be free from abuse and corruption, as well as those that obey the rule of law. Good governance provides an emphasis on achieving integrity because its practice in the public sector is crucial in enhancing accountability in a public sector organisation and a country.³⁰

The existence of effective accountability is one of the elements of good governance, though not isolated from other elements of good governance. Any relationship that involves social interaction and exchange calls for being accountable.

Integrity and Accountability as Tools for Achieving Good Governance in Nigeria vis a vis the Philosophies of Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikwe

Governance can either be good or bad depending on how the concepts of integrity and accountability are applied to governance. Governance and accountability is the flip side of the same coin. Accountability expects compliance with the due process of law and the appropriate use of power and public resources. As Adejuwon states the goal of governance extends beyond efficiency, effectiveness and economy to accountability, responsiveness, empowerment and participation.³¹ In Nigeria today, the level of public accountability is increasingly declining since independence. Hence, the Nigerian government has created some legal and watchdog institutions like the EFCC, ICPC, and Code for Conduct Bureau for regulating and monitoring the ethical behaviour of its public officials.

This scenario necessitates the need to make suggestions for achieving accountability and integrity in governance in Nigeria. Notably, Nigeria had undergone various successive governments both military and civilian since 1960 till date and historians have discovered that nationalists, like Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe, who fought for Nigeria's independence practised and maintained philosophies that promoted integrity and accountability among public officeholders.

Chief Jeremiah Oyeniyi Obafemi Awolowo GCFR (1909-1987) was a brilliant politician, highly cerebral thinker, statesman, dedicated manager, brilliant political economist, a Social Democrat, and a committed federalist.³² Awolowo believes that government should ensure the well-being of the various groups in the society; hence, the reason for the notion that Nigeria deserves the best political order that will promote social justice and engender equity.³³ For Awolowo, good governance can be achieved if public office holders and political leaders have enormous intellectual sagacity because when a person is educated, his mind and body would be developed and transformed; hence such a person would approach issues correctly, rightly and timely.³⁴ This is what Awolowo terms the "theory of mental magnitude". The intellect, which involves

critical reasoning, is superior to the physical element of a person, a belief that places reflective thinking at the heart of human actions.³⁵

The form of education that Awolowo canvassed for is not that tailored towards being literate, acquiring a profession, mastering a vocation, or is versed in the liberal arts. But it is an education that is geared towards aiding alert minds, creating emotional balance, and spiritual depth.³⁶ It is this intellectual depth that will make leaders exhibit self-discipline, which will enable them to avoid the pursuit of selfish interests, but seek to fulfill the desires of the people. So, leaders that have not developed their minds eventually become corrupt and engender bad governance. Thus, he established the popular Universal Primary Education programme as the Premier of Western Nigeria. Awolowo conceptualizes good governance as encompassing: transparency; accountability; social justice; fairness; equity; selflessness; critical observation of the rule of law; purposeful leadership; effective institutions; and a legitimate political, economic and administrative authority.³⁷

Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996), a Nigerian and West African nationalist and first president of Nigeria, popularly known as “Zik” has his philosophy of governance or political ideology embedded in what is term “zikism”.³⁸ It was a reformist ideology postulated against colonialism and the British hegemony. Azikiwe’s political ideology had five canons: spiritual balance; social regeneration; economic determinism; mental emancipation; and political resurgence.³⁹ These canons are all geared towards national integration that sees the exultation of national loyalty and identity above tribal and regional affiliations. Also, he canvassed for an economic system that blends the good components of capitalism, socialism, and welfarism. He termed this “Neo-welfarism”.⁴⁰ This is an economic matrix that enables the state and the private sector to own and control the means of production, distribution and exchange, while simultaneously enabling the state to assume responsibility for the social services, to benefit the citizens according to their needs and officially-specified minimum standards, and without prejudice to participation in any aspect of the social services by voluntary agencies.⁴¹

Azikiwe's political ideology about governance is characterized by pragmatism, gradualism, inclusiveness, and welfarism.⁴² Hence, the political leadership in Nigeria should apply the philosophy of living and let them live in their capacities of governing the people. This enjoins the care for the welfare of every individual and it promotes individual prosperity and collective national wealth. Thus, eclecticism and pragmatism become the philosophical basis for political leadership and governance in Nigeria. The infusion of the workable principles of capitalism, socialism and welfarism with the root principles peculiar to pre-independence Nigeria, is the one political system that can restore the basis for a genuine Nigerian socio-political life.⁴³ Azikiwe's ideology for Nigeria is the entrenchment of true and enduring democratic governance for the country.⁴⁴

The survival of the society is dependent on how its leadership and people are committed to the ideals of good governance where the atmosphere of peace, rule of law, accountability and transparency prevails.⁴⁵ But an accountable leadership that would characterize good governance in Nigeria is inherently absent. Nigerian political elites, almost without exception, have an insatiable capacity to pilfer the commonwealth and leave the people more impoverished. In the first place, many of these elected officials came into public offices through fraudulent elections and so stand on the platform of committing abuses against the electorates and brazenly engage in large-scale looting of public resources. The legislative arm of government that should provide checks and balances is likewise filled with opportunistic politicians. Therefore, the Nigerian state must promote a system that evolves leaders with high intellectual capacity gained through robust education and that are welfarist in outlook.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emanate from the applicability of the governance philosophies of Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe to achieving good governance in Nigeria.

1. Political leaders and public office holders must be properly educated and exhibit intellectual enormity and spiritual depth (not religiosity) before coming into public leadership. Such leaders will be able to rise above corruption and selfishness. An

inefficient education of Nigerian leaders results in bad governance, corrupt leadership style and unsound policies which will be detrimental to the welfare of Nigerians.

2. The political and administrative machinery that bring up political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria must have passed the necessary integrity checks and must be completely overhauled to produce accountable leaders.
3. There should be an effective and accessible reward system for good workers. This will serve as an incentive for leaders to act with every sense of responsibility and upholding the public trust.

CONCLUSIONS

Integrity, accountability and good governance are interwoven parameters that will ensure the development of any entity including the Nigerian state. Achieving good governance in a developing country like Nigeria requires integrity and accountability to the people and which requires the people, especially the leadership at every stratum, to have the systematic capacity to deliver services, maintain laws and 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 structures. Leaders that will enhance good governance in Nigeria will be those who are intellectually sound, have robust education and can implement welfarist ideologies and activities. This will result in good governance and the overall development of Nigeria.

ENDNOTES

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