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Ugochukwu M. Ifoh
Nigeria

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DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: WHAT AFRICANS REQUIRE

Ugochukwu M. Ifoh

Director, BERYL EDUCATIONAL CONSULT (BEC), Lagos, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

According to the 2009 African Governance Report (AGR II), by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), many democracies in Africa are suffering from an authoritarian hangover. Many African countries adopted the system of democracy because it enjoys global endorsement as the best form of government and panacea for underdevelopment. But it is a truism that development in Africa remains impeded. This is because many African leaders are ignorant and negligent of the philosophical principles upon which democracy is formed. This paper seeks to discuss, within an African framework, the link between democracy and development. The clamour for democracy all over the globe is not accidental. Those who go about agitating for democracy are convinced that no society desirous of development can ignore democracy. The democratic experience of developed nations lends credence to the truth of this claim. There is a close link between democracy and development. This is not to say that a country cannot develop without democracy, but where both exist, the outcomes are better.

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Of Greek origin, the word 'democracy' is derived from two words, "demos" which means "the people" and "kratien" which connotes "to rule". Put together, it is "demokratia" which means "rule by the people".

Pericles - an Athenian Statesman in 431 BC provides an elaborate picture of this concept: *"Our Constitution is named a democracy because it is in the hands not of the few but in the hands of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes and our public opinion welcomes and honours every branch of achievements..."* (Macridis, 1982).

In the modern era, democracy is defined as a system of government in which the whole eligible members of a state hold supreme power through their elected representatives. A better clarification can be derived from Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy as a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Democracy has its fundamental principles, features or characteristics. Various definitions of democracy are formed from these fundamental features. The features include equality of men, individual rights, free existing political parties, consensus or majority rule, separation of power, checks and balances, the rule of law, freedom of the press and judicial autonomy.

Equality of men

This is the fundamental tenet of democracy. It stresses that all human beings are born equal. In this sense, equality simply means equal opportunity for all and a rejection of inherited political principles, elitism and classes.

Individual Rights

Democracy considers the dignity and integrity of every individual as sacred and inviolable. These rights are the rights that the law accords to all individuals. They include the right to life, private and family life, freedom of expression and fair hearing.

Free Elections

This is another core feature of democracy. Free elections give the people the chance to choose good leaders of their choice. In line with democratic ideology, voting decisions are based on the rule of the majority. This implies that if only two contestants are involved in an election, the one who has more than half the number of votes cast becomes the winner. The principle of simple majority.

Existence of Political Parties

This is a necessary feature of democracy. This would enable voters to vote for the political parties they want in specific offices. In America, for instance, there are two main political parties, the Republican and Democratic parties.

Majority rule, Minority Rights

According to Irish and Prothro, "the majority and minority relations in a free election are, when you stop to think about it, the most valuable aspects..." (Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1967). This feature points that the majority rule holds, yet the minority rights are protected.

Separation of Power

According to Lord Acton, "all power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Separation of power means that power is shared among the three arms of government; the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

Checks and Balances

Ensuring a separation of power means that the principle of checks and balances is provided for and prevents the abuse of enormous power by the various arms of government. Adhering to the principle of checks and balances is essential to ensuring that no arm of government dominates power.

The Rule of Law

Respect for the rule of law by both the leaderships and the citizenry is the basis and foundation of a prosperous democratic state. This would imply that no person is above the law.

Freedom of the Press

The press is described as the fourth estate of the realm of government behind the executive, legislature and the judiciary. Since the press is the means to a reliable "spotlight and microphone" in any government, there cannot be a true democracy without a free press.

Judicial Autonomy

This is referred to as "independence of the judiciary". It is the duty of the judiciary to protect the integrity of the law as enshrined in the constitution. The judiciary is the vital link and nexus in the uneasy but necessary relations between the executive arm and the legislature. Democracy therefore needs a judiciary that is courageous, impartial, resourceful, unbiased, reliable and above all, independent.

A democracy that does not have the above features is not a true democracy.

DEVELOPMENT

The term development has no universally accepted definition, yet it is an unavoidable datum of life. Many scholars have attempted to define the concept of development. For instance, Labret defines development as "the ascent of man, maturation, growth and creativity of all human potentials achieved at the lowest possible cost in sacrificed values and human sufferings" (Marcel Onyibor, 2003).

An African philosopher, Pantaleon Iroegbu, also attempted a working definition of development. For him *"development is the progressive unfolding of the inner potentials of a given reality. It is to de-envelop, that is, to bring out to light, the existential, functional and epistemic, which was enveloped, folded or hidden. As it applies to a people, development is the integration of different givens: national, physical acquired and human, of a people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively, of their being as persons of their community and of their real productivity"* (Owerri, 1994).

Be it as it may, development is the growth or formation and change of something over time. It is the gradual growth, increase and change of a particular phenomenon over time. It must be about man because he is the agent and purpose of development.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

Rich continents tend to be more democratic than poor continents. Understanding the link between democracy and development could be more crucial for policy making at the national and continental levels. Besides giving citizens more political freedom, democracies are, on average, less likely to be at war with each other than dictatorships. A lack of democratic governance structure could prove an obstacle to sustainable development.

In the United Nations Secretary General's 1994 Agenda for Development, it is stated that: *"Democracy and development are linked in fundamental ways. Because democracy provides the only long-term basis for managing competing ethnic, religious and cultural interests in a way that minimises the risk of violent internal conflict. Because democracy is a fundamental human right, the advancing of which is itself an important measure of development"* (UN, 1994).

Democracy is an important way to reassure freedoms and is a vital requisite for the economic development of any continent. Thus, this paper posits that developing and strengthening a democratic system is an essential component of the process of development.

WHY DEMOCRACY HAS FAILED IN AFRICA

Democracy has failed in Africa because African leaderships lack the moral courage to live up to its expectations. Characterised by greed, ignorance and negligence, many African leaders do not practice democracy in the light of the foundational principles upon which democracy is formed. John Locke and other pro-democracy philosophers had based the ideals of democracy on the principles of discipline, tolerance, truth, nobility, restraint, justice, selflessness, self-control and equity.

These principles have helped Europe and America develop. African leaders lack the moral courage to live up to expectation; hence, they drift from the path of democracy without difficulty to satisfy their own whims and caprices, ending up practising pseudo-democracy.

WHAT AFRICA REQUIRES

Having studied the relationship between democracy and development, it will be pertinent to note that a democracy premised on the principles of selflessness, nobility, tolerance, truth, equality, justice, honesty, self-control and restraint, will promote the social, economic and political development of Africa.

Hence, Africa requires genuine operators of democracy. There is need for leaders with the moral courage to meet democratic expectations. Africa requires leaderships that will embrace true democracy and practise it in the light of the solid foundational principles upon which pro-democratic scholars had based the ideals of democracy.

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