

REDUCTION IN COST OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES AND GOVERNANCE: IMPERATIVE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

by

Okoroafor, Ejike. C.

and

Udeh, Shedrack C.

Department of Social Sciences, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.

Abstract

Reduction in the cost of running Nigeria's democratic structures and governance and the attendant impacts on her socio-economic development forms the basis of this paper. Since Nigeria began her democratic experiment in May, 1999, the cost of its operations in the country has been on the increase to the detriment of her development infrastructurally, socially, economically and so on. The paper, therefore, x-rays the definitions/meaning and scope of the concepts of democracy, democratic structures and governance; some facts about the cost of democratic structures and governance in Nigeria such as the effects of corruption in governance, over-budgeting, proliferation of political offices, reform in revenue allocation formulae and electoral process etc. The paper ends with a conclusion and recommendations that include, among others, democratic reforms, elimination of discriminatory remuneration, reform of political process, strong civil society, adoption of unicameral legislative system and cut in number of political appointees and their assistants.

Keywords: Reduction, Cost, Democratic Structures, Governance, Imperative, Socio-Economic Development.

Introduction

The historical trend in the modern world and even in some developing countries, including Nigeria, has favored democracy, a political system that gives power to the people as a whole. Members of democratic societies rarely participate directly in decision making; numbers alone make this impossibility. Instead, a system of representative democracy places authority in the hands of elected leaders who are accountable to the people (Macionis, 2005). Nigeria's democracy is about

twelve years old but still a grown child learning how to crawl. There are a number of challenges confronting her democratic experiment since its inception but its biggest setback, according to this paper, remains the high cost of its operations. In Nigeria, the cost of running democratic structures and governance is alarmingly high considering the nation's economic status. Sani (2011), was so displeased with the situation and states that "what Federal lawmakers earn is shocking, it must stop. With the prevailing level of poverty in this country today, it is very unjustifiable to allocate such huge amount of money to any member of the National Assembly" (The Nation, 2011).

The above statement, only expresses the wastage on the side of federal lawmakers, let alone those of the states and local governments and the huge number of political appointees across the country. In fact, Nigeria's democracy is an on-going huge financial project that is presently yielding little or no significant democratic dividends that can be equated to socio-economic development in any sense. The sad question here is, why should a country like Nigeria that is presently rated among the world's poorest nations, run a democracy that costs twice as much as other countries of her equivalence in population and landscape? This is where the hub of the paper lies: The need to significantly cut the cost of operationalizing democratic structures and governance in Nigeria for the immediate benefit of the nation's socio-economic progress.

The paper starts with the definitions, meaning and scope of the concepts of democracy, democratic structures and governance, discusses some disturbing facts about the cost of democratic structures and governance, and also considers the impact its reduction can have on socio-economic development in Nigeria. It gives conclusion and outlines a number of recommendations that are basically, strategic measures aimed at effective reduction in the cost of running Nigeria's democracy. They include, democratic reforms, balanced remuneration between political office holders and civil servants, reform of political process, vibrant civil society, adoption of unicameral legislative system, cut in number of political office holders, political appointees and their assistants etc.

Democracy: Definitions/Meaning

The idea of democracy, or government by the people, is very old, dating back to ancient Greece. The word itself comes from the Greek words: Demos, meaning "the people", and Kratos, meaning "authority". Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995), defines democracy as "a system of government in which everyone in the country can vote to elect its members, a country that has a government which has been elected by the people of the country, a situation or system in which everyone is equal and has the right to vote, make decisions etc". One of the poignant definitions of democracy is that given by Abraham Lincoln, one time president of United States of America (U.S.A), at Gettysburg. Lincoln was

quoted to have defined democracy as, “government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. However, Hornby (1995), has a broader definition of democracy as “a system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elect, thought as allowing freedom of speech, religion and political opinion...”

Calhoun *et al* (1997), describe democracy as a system in which “the law guarantees extensive civil liberties, including the freedom to associate with whomever one chooses, freedom of speech and press, and freedom from unreasonable search and seizure”. A democracy does not claim exclusive, unquestioning loyalty from its people; in fact, if those in power overstep their authority, the people have a right, even a duty to vote them out of office or impeach them through their representatives. A democracy has a government in which average citizens make the decisions that shape lives. In literal sense, democracy cannot exist, because the people cannot rule. In other words, democratic reality has always fallen short of the ideal (Hauss, 2000). All known democracies have some sort of shortfall because of their failure to exercise in practical terms the characteristics and demands of true democracy. They compel their citizens to do things that they would rather avoid or not prefer, such as, paying taxes, observing curfews, serving in the military, driving at or under speed limit, not drinking before a certain age, huge cost of its operations at the detriment of people centered projects, and so on. All, too, have imperfect ways of holding elected officers accountable, which, after all, should be part of the essence of democracy itself.

The Meaning of Democratic Structures

Having known the meaning of democracy, it is necessary to define what democratic structures imply literally and in the context of Nigeria. The word structure is used in many similar ways and often interchangeably. When we use words and phrases such as superstructure, social structure, infrastructure, structural functionalism, structural adjustment and public service structures, we come to appreciate the meaning of the word structure in different but related ways. Webster’s New Ideal Dictionary (1984), defines structure as, “the action of building; construction; something constructed; something made up of interdependent parts in a definite pattern of organization; manner of construction; makeup; the arrangement or relationship of elements (as particles, parts or organs) in a substance, body, or system”. Perhaps, the phrase “social structure” can to a reasonably extent, help us comprehend the definition and meaning of democratic structures. Hogan (2006), in his Dictionary of Sociology, defines social structure as, “the pattern of interrelated statuses and roles found in a society or other group at a particular time and constituting a relatively stable set of social relations. It is organized pattern of the interrelated rights and obligations of persons and groups in a system of interaction as analyzed in terms of statuses, roles, social norms, and social institutions”. He further

opines that the term social organization is sometimes used synonymously with social structure.

The meaning of democratic structures can partly be derived from the meaning of social structure. Ordinarily, democracy as a form of government is a social experiment. A process which if practiced in its true nature is a people-centered process. Therefore, social structure relates to democratic structure. Democratic structures can be defined as the constituent parts or inter-independent parts that make up the organization of a democratic state. It includes the patterns of interrelated positions and roles found (or in operation) in a given democracy. The democratic structures in Nigeria comprise of the various political positions, offices, obligations and rights of persons and groups, institutions (such as the Ministries, Departments, Agencies, Parastatals, Commissions, Committees etc), as well as roles, terms of reference, and statuses, associated with their functions, duties and obligations. Democratic structures in Nigeria encompass all parts of the organization and management of our democracy. The arrangement, relationship of all the elements of our democratic experiment as it is at present. This definition implies that the democratic structures in Nigeria extends from the various political positions of the three arms of government at the Federal, State and Local government levels, the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA's), institutions working for government, consultants working for government, professionals and other groups involved in the pursuit of democratic goals in Nigeria. It includes the official, financial, corporate and intrinsic patterns of interactions that go on among these individuals and institutions in the course of running Nigeria's democracy. However, the running of the democratic structures in Nigeria (which is quite large in size) is gulping huge sums of tax payers' money. Nigeria's peculiar democratic structures is taking astronomical amount of fund that could have been used more prudently in the delivery of social and economic upliftment of her citizenry.

Governance Conceptualized

Governance can simply be taken to mean the act of providing the services of a government. It has been given many different but related and comprehensive definitions that sometimes appear ambiguous. However, governance is derived from the word govern, which Hornby (1995), defines as, "to rule a country, etc; to control or direct the public affairs of a city, country". The same dictionary also sees governance as, "the activity or manner of governing; government." Webster's New Ideal Dictionary (1984), is more comprehensive and defines it as, "to exercise continuous sovereign or delegated authority over; especially: to control and direct the making and administration of policy in a state". It also sees governance as "the exercise of control: government". These simple and concise definitions of

governance portray a picture of simplicity in the content of what governance stands for.

On a wider context, governance extends from an act to a set of activities that runs into a complex process aiming at providing some services to a polity, political system or nation. It is part of a social contract, of which the government has the role of providing governance to its subjects. The term, governance, is a very broad one in meaning and scope. It is used to refer to the way in which a government discharges its duties and obligations. Governance is seen as the process of steering a state and society towards the realization of collective goals. It points to the dynamic but problematic and often times contradictory relationship between the state and society (Alcantara, 1998). United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2000), defines governance as, “a process of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a political community”. Its component parts are rule making and standard setting, management of regime structures and outcome and results of the social pact. A more realistic and operational definition of governance, according to this paper, is as seen below:

“The United Nations Development Programme (1997) views governance as: the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country’s affairs, comprising of the complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, and mediate their differences. It encompasses the political, economic, legal, judicial, social and administrative authority and therefore includes government, the private sector and the civil society”.

In Nigeria, governance is done through the activities of several Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government, all of which have public funds appropriated to them in each fiscal year for capital and recurrent expenditure. Besides these allocations to the MDAs, a number of them generate income from their activities either through administrative charges or outright fees for services rendered. Constitutionally, the extra income from the activities of the MDAs ought to be paid into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. However, due to the long practice of under funding, pervasive corruption, and inept management of government resources, the capacity of government to effectively monitor the extra income generated by its MDAs is severely weak. Therefore such extra income ends up in the coffers of the MDAs and is never accounted for. This explains part of the huge wastages on the part of government in Nigeria. At this juncture, it is important to consider the cost of running democratic structures and governance in Nigeria for a better understanding of the situation in the country.

The Cost of Democratic Structures and Governance in Nigeria

The true cost of running democratic structures and governance in Nigeria may not be known but an estimate can be obtained with careful analysis. In this discourse, we will not dwell on ascertaining the real cost of running Nigeria's democratic structures but rather identify the fact that it is gulping huge public fund than the nation expects or even knows about. There is no doubt that democracy as a form of government is not cheap to operate. This may be the reason, it encompasses among its cardinal principles, due process, transparency and accountability etc, which may be seen as inbuilt mechanisms for self-control, and adjustments, even in the operation of itself. Whichever way, democracy in Nigeria is a peculiar one in the sense that it is relatively young, has poor scorecard in terms of respect for human-rights, and adherence to rule of law etc. It is also obviously an expensive project, judging from the way it is being run in Nigeria. While many Nigerians will agree that democracy is the best form of government, many are quick to decry the attendant cost of maintaining the present democratic structures of governance at the federal, state and local government levels. At the federal level, the President, Vice President and all the Staff of the Presidency, Ministers, Senior Special Advisers, Special Assistants, Aides of the President, Vice President, Ministers and Advisers are at the helm of affairs. Also at the federal stratum, are the Senators, Members of House of Representatives, their Assistants and Aides, Staff of National Assembly etc.

At the state level, the State Governors, Deputy Governors, Commissioners, Special Advisers, Special Assistants, State Houses of Assembly Members and other political appointees etc. The local governments with the Chairmen, Vice Chairmen and the entire council members, are all funded from the nation's purse. The peculiarities of Nigeria as a federal state, operating a presidential system of government bring with it certain challenges associated with the size of government. The Nigerian federation consists of 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and 774 Local Governments. The three arms of government at the federal level – the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary are also replicated in all the 36 states of the federation including the Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T). The obvious implication of this structure is that adequate budgetary provisions must be made for the proper functioning of the various tiers and arms of government. The cost of running government as provided in our yearly budgets is on the increase in the face of dwindling resources (The Nation, 2011). Considering these above statements, it is mathematically clear (if done) that running Nigeria's democracy is no child's play in terms of funding. The real cost of our democratic structures and governance may never be known even if we consider all facts available. However, certain indicators make it clear that the cost of governance in Nigeria is higher than the average recorded in most other countries with similar socio-political and economic profile (Azinge, 2011).

Cost of Operating Nigeria's Democratic Structures: Some Disturbing Facts

- It cannot be disputed that the cost of democracy in the heydays of the parliamentary system under the 1960 and 1963 constitutions was far less than what it was under the 1979 constitution and presently under the 1999 constitution.
- Corruption increases the cost of governance every where. This is notoriously so in Nigeria due to the double budgeting by Ministerial, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Different MDAs budget for the same thing or different components of the same thing which eventually remains undone because competing MDAs are aware of the situation and each hopes that the other will do what it has obtained budgeted funds for.
- A good example of over-budgeting is found in the desire to determine the number and identity of Nigerians. This issue has been long in the radar of government and has resulted in several budgetary allocations across MDAs in the past 15 to 20 years. Instances of each allocation include: the contract awarded to Siemens by the Obasanjo Administration for the National ID Cards, which resulted in high level corruption for which some highly placed PDP officials and former Ministers were prosecuted. The huge national census under Obasanjo Administration which is the subject of dispute at the tribunals set up for that purpose etc.
- Another example of over-budgeting is the proliferation of political office holders, duplicity of their schedules and the mind boggling immoral remuneration they enjoy. This malady pervades particularly the Executive and the legislative arms of government. Although the constitution allows the president and the governors to appoint special advisers to assist their work, the noble ideas behind the recommendation have been abused beyond comprehension to the extent that the practice pervades the system to the bottom. These array of mostly jobbers and cronies duplicate the work of the line officers in the Civil service and are paid salaries over and above those of line officers and given special privileges for the incessant travels in order to earn estacodes as the case may be.
- The financial resources available to each level of government whether federal, state or local government councils must be sufficient to perform its exclusive functions. This basic underpinning of the doctrine of federalism appears to have been overlooked in the formulae adopted over a long period in the distribution of revenue between the different levels or tiers of government.
- Despite the fact the constitution makes provision for the distribution of any amount standing to the credit of the Federal Account among the Federal, the State and the Local Government Councils, clogs still exist in the wheel of revenue sharing, which are both legal and political, thus making revenue allocation, the undoubted bugbear of our federal arrangement.

- It is imperative for us as a nation to examine our electoral system in the overall effort to assess the cost of democracy. At the moment (2012), the generality of Nigerians appear to abhor the cost associated with seeking elective positions under our democratic system. The mind boggling figures reported to have been expended by politicians seeking elective offices do not inspire confidence in the process.
- The issue of security vote has to be thoroughly investigated and reviewed by the National Assembly and other relevant authorities. The amount allocated to security vote for some political positions (particularly Governors) is quite astronomical and has to be brought down to save funds for Nigeria.
- The office of the First Lady (at the Federal, State, Local Government levels) is unconstitutional. Huge amount of money is spent running these offices across the states in Nigeria. The existence of this office is not really contributing anything significant towards ensuring socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Some extracts from Communiqué: “Roundtable on the Cost of Democracy in Nigeria” by Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Lagos, Nigeria, 17th February, 2011.

Operating Democratic Structures and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

The popular concept of socio-economic development is about development that impacts on the life of people in terms of their social relationship and economic activities. To grasp the meaning of socio-economic development better, one can start with understanding what the word development means. The term development is a dynamic concept that has continued to receive diverse interpretations and explanations among scholars and researchers particularly in the less developed countries, whose development plans are largely under crisis situation. Rodney (1972), conceives development, as a phenomenon which is inherent in all societies. He states that every part of the world, including Africa, was infact developing before the coming of the white man with his colonialism. He maintains that it does not matter whether a society is primitive or modern provided that society is in a position to creatively harness and utilize the objects of nature at its disposal to improve its living conditions on a sustainable basis.

Development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. However, a society or a nation like Nigeria is said to be developing socio-economically when its members jointly increase their capacity to deal with their environment profitably. This capacity for dealing with the environment is

dependent on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology) and on the manner in which work is organized. In a nutshell, socio-economic development is a holistic form of development that encompasses all dimensions of the social life of the people and the capacity to harness their human and environmental potentials towards better living standard for themselves.

Considering what socio-economic development actually means, it is apt to say that it is a process that requires the ingredient of democracy in order to flourish in a nation. For true socio-economic development to occur in Nigeria, it will require among other things, that her democratic experiment is solidified in many ramifications. One basic predicament of Nigeria's democracy today is that it is too costly considering the state of her economy and rate of economic growth. Democracy is no doubt presently the best available form of government but not when the cost of its operations in a country like Nigeria becomes so huge that it undermines her overall effort at socio-economic advancement. Ordinarily, a democracy functioning at even average level, can create adequate room for the growth and sustenance of some degree of socio-economic development but not when it grossly depletes the resources with which it would have enforced its programmes on the nation to yield the much needed democracy dividends that will reflect positively on the life of the people.

The argument here is that the cost of running democratic structures and governance in Nigeria is alarmingly high and it is impacting negatively on her effort towards producing strong, social and economic returns for the nation. Democracy and socio-economic development are two concepts that breed one another. They share common features. It also follows that socio-economic development (the ability of the people to harness their potentials positively) can be better realized in a condition provided by a democratic government on the path of bringing good governance to her people. However, the impediment of high cost has been identified by this paper as one major obstacle confronting the inability of Nigeria's democracy to deliver positive socio-economic change in the country. In democracies such as the U.S.A, Britain, Australia, Canada, that have attained what can be called "appreciable degree of socio-economic development", there has been and will continue to be, efficient and prudent management of government's resources. This in effect supports one of the cardinal principles of democracy, that is, the principle of accountability. A democracy that lacks this principle is incapable of achieving its goals in the long run. The aim of every democracy in the world should be partly to ensure the manifestation in concrete terms, social and economic changes that give her people good roads, stable power supply, clean water, good schools, better healthcare system, and other social amenities that raise their standard of living.

This paper advocates that the cost of running Nigeria's democratic structures must be cut substantially in order to save some of the huge fund it is presently gulping. This fund can then be channeled into infrastructural development which is

currently at its lowest ebb. Nigeria as a young democratic nation must understand that to be democratic should not be a curse but a blessing in reality that needs financial discipline and acumen to nurture and develop. Nigeria must as a matter of urgency, embark on democratic reforms, which must include cutting the cost of running her democratic experiment. It is time to redress Nigeria's democracy to suit her current needs and aspirations.

Conclusion

No true democracy in the world can ignore one of its basic principles, that is, accountability, and hope to succeed. Nigeria's democratic experiment is presently facing the obstacle of running on a very high cost despite the nation's dwindling resources. It is the candid view of this paper, that the cost of Nigeria's democratic structures and governance is considerably high and therefore gulping funds that should have been used for socio-economic development in the country. This paper submits that this high cost should be brought down significantly in order to plough the savings into changing the living standard of Nigerians positively and providing infrastructural development that will guarantee appreciable social and economic returns for Nigeria in no distant future.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are strategic measures that Nigeria can adopt in order to significantly minimize the current huge expenditure on operating her democracy. They include the following:

i. **Enforcing Democratic Reforms**

Nigeria's democracy needs immediate reforms. The reforms must not be done to look like U.S.A's democracy but should be made to meet the realistic contradictions that we have seen in the practice thus far. The democratic reforms should be constitutional and must include the removal of the "immunity clause". This is based on the premise that its removal will encourage political office holders to be more prudent while in office.

ii. **Eliminating Discriminatory Remunerations**

The regime of disparity in remuneration between political appointees and civil servants should be abolished immediately. It is an act of injustice. The mind boggling salaries, estacodes and personal assistants under government pay roll are all issues that need urgent review. This can bring about the necessary change that will lead to saving huge fund for the nation. Such fund can be used for the pursuit of socio-economic development. Political office should be made less attractive by setting salary bench marks of political appointees that is equal to existing pay structures of civil servants. This will

augur well for Nigeria's socio-economic plans and development because of the money that will accrue from it.

iii. **Reforming the Political Process**

The political process in the country, particularly, elections, must undergo some reform in such a way that the scarce resources needed for socio-economic development are not used to sustain an over-bloated government. In order to cut the cost of democracy, there must be strict compliance with expenditure ceilings on campaign funding and financing. Also, elections that normally come up every four years can be done every six years to save more money for the nation. The huge cost of the April 2011 general elections is a reminder that this should be seen as imperative.

iv. **Strengthening the Civil Society**

There is no doubt that the emerging civil society in Nigeria is vibrant, looking back to their effort during the April 2011 general elections and the recent fuel subsidy removal demonstrations. The civil society must continue to shore up its capacity to articulate and organize ideas and programmes, pursuant to providing a counter poise against undemocratic tendencies as well as holding Nigerians who are in custody of public fund accountable. This can help cut cost of democracy in the country by making such political office holders to be prudent, at least for fear of being exposed and prosecuted.

v. **Adopting Uni-cameral Legislative System**

Many well-meaning Nigerians both those at home and in diaspora have continued to call for a single legislative body for Nigeria, arguing that if this is done, the country will save huge fund that can be used for her infrastructural development. The present bi-cameral system of legislature at the federal level, is no doubt very expensive and can be abolished. The fusion of the existing Senate and House of Representative into one legislative body can significantly help to cut the cost of running Nigeria's democracy.

vi. **Cutting the Number of Political Appointees/Assistants**

Political positions in Nigeria are now "hot cake" that everybody desires. Political office holders are today "lords" in the society. They are so powerful that they have many special assistants and advisers who are not only paid by the government, but also enjoy estacodes and other incentives and privileges. Considering the large number of political office holders and appointees, and their assistants and advisers, at the federal, state and local government levels, there is urgent need to cut the number in order to save fund. Also, the office of First Lady at all levels should be scrapped. Security vote must be reduced to a reasonable amount considering the present state of Nigeria's economy. Funds accruing from these measures when put in place can be ploughed into

providing infrastructures that can prosper Nigeria's socio-economic development.

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