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## THE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

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### Introduction

This paper examines the concepts of democracy and governance and their affinity or otherwise in our society. It is divided into five parts viz: the introduction, concept of democracy, concept of governance, the relationship between democracy and governance and finally the conclusion.

### Concept of Democracy

Democracy as a form of political organization, like other concepts of its calibre, has not been easy to define without ideological equivocation (Akindele and Obiyan; 1996:84, Akindele and Olaopa; 1997:5, Akindele, 1995b; Akindele and Ajila, 1992:85-86; Akindele, 1992, Akindele, 1993 and Adeyemo 2000). The major problem in this area is that of ideological secretarianism vis-à-vis the nitty-gritty of democracy as a form of political governance hence, as Olowu (1995, *op cit*, 2) once opined, democracy as a "concept of governance has become all things to all men".

This being the case, what actually is democracy? As earlier stated, it is by no means a simple task to give a coherent definition of democracy in view of the different definitions already given. Many normative definitions of democracy had been given. Their general focus had been on value and norms of society. Empirical definitions of democracy, which focused on political reality, had also been given. While the normative definitions focused on shared beliefs and attitudes, the "normative-empirical" definitions combined empiricism and normative aspects of society.

The normative definition of democracy was variously approached by people like Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and John Stuart Mill. This explains why Thomas Hobbes, in his explanation of the social contract and its consequent by-product (state), treated the solitary, nasty, brutish and alienating state of nature as the catalyst for the volitional collective agreement - social contract - between men.

On the same token, Rousseau, in his work, identified people's surrender of "natural rights" for "civil rights" as the basis of the emergence of a social contract which created the general will of the people (Khan et. al., *op. cit.* 27-28). The creation of the general will through the social contract in Rousseau's view resulted in the existing state of nature when men were limited by their individual incapacities for self governance.

In addition to Hobbes and Rousseau, John Locke also theorized about the concept of social contract. However, unlike Rousseau's views of the individual's incapacibilities, John Locke believed that life in the state of nature was pleasant, but men were hampered by the absence of any socially recognized authority to adjudicate and settle disputes and conflicts between them hence the need for democratic government (*Ibid.* p. 20)

As for John Stuart Mills, he believed in the welfare of the individual, as well as individual liberties. Writing on Democracy and liberty, he maintained that the only way power can be, or, should be exercised over any member in the society against his will, is when it can be established that, such individual intends to injure, or, do harm to other (Rejai *op. cit.* 77). He further emphasized the notion of liberty within the framework of representative government. Along this analytical plane, argued, Awa (1997 *op. cit.*: 7, Akindele, 1993; Akindele et. al., 1998), Schumpeter (1955) defines democracy as:

*the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decision, in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.*

Due to the nature of their reasoning, Rousseau and other theorists (e.g. Lincoln) mainly concerned with the welfare of the community as a whole, are classified into the "collectivistic school of thought", while John Locke and John Stuart Mills are classified into the "individualistic school" relative to the emergence of democratic system of government which emphasizes equality and liberty of men.

Representative democracy has been variously defined. In his book, *Democracy*, Burns (1935, 29-46) defined representative democracy as a system whereby "all (i.e. people) elected a few to do for them what they could not do together". On the same token, John Stuart Mill concentrated a significant portion of his writing on representative democracy. While accepting the desirability of equal participation by everybody in the affairs of the government, he nevertheless claims that, it cannot be realized. Instead, he argued that representative government is the perfect form of government (Mill, 1962: 73-74). But, he further argued that, for representative government to be democratic, it must be accompanied by universal adult suffrage, free elections, short terms of office and individual liberty. Without these things, any government will, in Mill's view, cease to be democratic.

Recently, and, in line with the catalyzing principles of the "fight against system of economic exploitation, political repression, cultural oppression" and, their accompanying "moral, political, economic and social decay" (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2001), other scholars have come to increasingly pay attention to the issue of democracy and its propensity for good governance (Ade-Ajayi, 1982; Nzongola-Ntalaja and Lee, 1977; Omoruyi, 1993; Held, 1987; Olowu, Soremekun and Williams, 1995; Olowu, Williams and Soremekun, 1999; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990; Sartori, 1987; Olowu, 1995; Joseph, 1987, Chabal, 1992; Hyden, 1980, 1999; Hyden and Bratton, 1992; Olowu and Erero, 1997; Akindele and Ajila 1992, 1995, Akindele and Obiyan, 1996, Akindele and Olaopa, 1997, Enyinla, 1998; Bello-Imam, 1997; Obadan, 1998, Akindele, 1998, Peter Anyang Nyong, 1987). Infact, this explains why

Olowu et al (1995: IX) once opined that "democracy constitutes both the main buzz-word and activity of these times" in most polities of the world.

According to Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001), "democracy is a universal form of rule" which, even though, "may have variable manifestations in different historical and social settings", have such manifestations tied together by a common thread". Democracy in this sense, according to him, refers to "three basic ideas:"

*- Democracy as a moral imperative, in the sense that it represents a permanent aspiration of human beings for freedom, for better social and political order, one that is more human and more or less egalitarian.*

*- Democracy as a social process, in that it is a continuous process of promoting equal access to fundamental human rights and civil liberties for all and,*

*-Democracy as political practice or a mode of governance based on the principles of popular sovereignty, the rule of law, accountability, participation and alternance (meaning leadership renewal or change) (Ibid).*

In his contemporary contribution to the concept of democracy, Olowu (1995:16), opined that "democratic arrangement constitutes an approach to connecting the rule-ruler-ruled relationship" which forms the core of governance. This probably explains his definition of democracy as:

*a system of governance that underscores the plural nature of politics and hence gives recognition to the diversity of social forces in any political community.*

Olowu (1995:16), re-echoed this position by asserting that, “the bottom line of a democratic regime is that, it serves the citizens rather than the other way round” hence, as Ejituwu (1997) once claimed “power resides with the people and, in a normal democratic situation, it is transferred to the leaders by a process of election.”

In putting democracy into a proper perspective as a mechanism for enhancing people’s right to participate in making the decisions that affect them, Imam (1991), argues that:

*Democracy must include the right of people to have their own aspirations and programmes, not only in political life, but also in economic, cultural, religious and other aspects of life. In other words, democracy includes ending the criss-crossing networks of oppression, exploitation and.*

This position is supported by Omoruyi’s (1993), observation that:

*today, democracy has certain known principles: participation, pluralism and restraint on authority and, (that), these principles are in turn associated with other terms: electoral systems, basic problems such as freedom of expression and association, guaranteed human rights, pluralism, public contestation, constitutional framework. All these tend to conjure for democracy, identical meanings, ideas, institutions and habit.*

This explains why Obadan (1998:24), opined that “democracy and good governance (government) have, in recent years, become increasingly important for efficient economic management and development”. It equally explains Omoruyi’s (1993) position that “both democracy and good governance are necessary preconditions for development and, should therefore, be incorporated into the political systems” particularly in the continent of Africa.

The foregoing, put together, brings us to the analysis of the concept of governance.

### **Concept of Governance**

The concept of governance like most of its kind has not been amenable to easy or simplistic definition. In other words, the concept has not been an exception to the volatility and eclecticism for which the disciplines in the Social Sciences have been globally noted whenever it comes to the conceptualization of core issues.

This notwithstanding, as Hyden (1999:24), once argued, “the concept of governance has come to occupy a more prominent position in the discourse of international development”. According to the World Bank (1993), governance has three dimensions. These dimensions which, Eyinla (1998), equally noted are: “the nature of political regimes; the exercise of authority in the management of social and economic resources and, the capacity of government to design and implement policy and to discharge its functions”.

These dimensions were specifically identified and concretely elucidated by Olowu and Erero (1997) who both conceptualized governance as relating to the “rule-ruler-ruled relationship.” Specifically, Olowu and Erero (*Ibid.*) identified the three dimensions of governance in the context of “rule-ruler-ruled relationship” as inclusive of “functionalism, “structuralism” and “normativism”. According to them, functionally, governance deals with “rule-making, legitimization, and enforcement” while it structurally comprises of three distinct institutions: the “ruler or the state”, the “ruled or the society” and, the “rule of law”. In this regard, Olowu and Erero (*ibid*) viewed governance as the “relationship between state and society institutions”. In the same vein, they claimed that “normatively, this relationship highlights the values associated with good governance”. These values according to them include: “transparency, organizational effectiveness, accountability, predictability, legitimacy, popular participation and plurality of policy choices”.

Within the same context, Boeninger (1992), defines governance as the ‘good government of society’. According to this scholar, governance has three dimensions: political, technical and

institutional. Nkom and Sorkaa (1996), synopsized the interrelatedness of these dimensions thus:

*The political revolves around the commitment to exercise authority or public control in a just, legitimate and rule oriented fashion. The technical concerns issues of efficiency, competence or the capacity to manage public affairs effectively to solve problems, and to produce good results in resource mobilization and public management. The institutional involves options, choices and growth – enhancing activities by the public while ensuring honest or good conduct on the part of the public officials.*

In his contribution to the conceptual discourse on governance, Idowu (1998:74), had this to say:

*governance refers to the functions undertaken by a government maintaining a unified state, defending its territorial integrity and running its economy... It (equally) means the effective and efficient functioning of government towards securing the well-being of its citizens.*

Jega (1999:101), analyzed the concept of governance in relations to the “person entrusted with political power and authority”. In this regard, governance according to him, involves the following:

- (a) responsibility and responsiveness in leadership and in public service;
- (b) accountability in the mobilization as well as in the utilization of resources;
- (c) discipline, effectiveness and efficiency in handling public (as well as personal) affairs;
- (d) Selflessness and impartial service to the people; and
- (e) Popular participation and empowerment of the people in the conduct and management of their common affairs (Ibid).

For governance as the “duty of government to see to the orderly and stable management of the economy” (Ukpong, 1999), to have the foregoing attributes and, be effective, efficient and beneficial for democratic political arrangement, it has to be good. This is more so, since we can, as well, have bad governance.

The possibility of bad governance could be said to be what the World Bank had in mind in 1989, when it began to dichotomize between good and bad governance by “advocating a political reform approach to government as a way of ensuring positive economic growth” (World Bank, 1989, Idowu, 1998).

Infact, the World Bank (1992), identified the features of bad governance as follows:

- Failure to make a clear separation between what is public and what is private, hence a tendency to divert public resources for private gain;
- Failure to establish a predictable framework for law and government behaviour in a manner that is conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of rules and laws;
- Excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirements, etc, which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking;
- Priorities that are inconsistent with development, thus, resulting in a misallocation of resources;
- Excessively narrow base for, or nontransparence, decision-making.

This explains Obadan's (1998:25), characterization of bad governance as a system dominated by "ugly problems like pervasive corruption, lack of public accountability and "capture" of public services by the elites among others".

These, put together, lead us to the discussion of good governance at this point of the paper. The need for good governance is not far fetched looking at the fact that:

*If governance is arbitrary, oppressive and capricious, the collective psyche of a people can be damaged and individuals within the community can suffer various forms of disorientation. If, on the other hand, governance is open, democratic and humanistic, a people can experience a sense of rejuvenation and fulfillment, which can lead to highly positive achievements (Ogunba 1997 op.cit: 1).*

Commenting on good governance, Esman (1997:1), argued thus:

*before governance can be considered good, government has got to be effective. It must first command the respect and allegiance of the people over whom it exercises governance and, must satisfy certain basic collective needs.*

He went further to identify some minimal elements and/or essentials of effective (good) governance as inclusive of: "provision of security for the people", "defence of the territorial borders of the state", "protection of lives and property," "enforcement of laws to enhance predictability" and, "economic development". According to this scholar, "governance requires the ability to ensure the wherewithal of sustained government". He equally asserted that "effective (good) governance requires that public authority be able to raise the revenues necessary to pay for services that must be provided". The essence of this argument is that, "effective governance must be able to make possible the performance by the state of certain basic services" – transportation, communication, education and health services – "relatively cheaply and reliably" (Erero, 1996, Esman *Ibid*).

This is more so, since effective governance means the capacity of the state - through its power of determinism or, authoritative allocation of scarce critical societal resources – to deliver the basic necessities of life to the governed and, equally "facilitate the process of economic development".

These lines of argument tally with those of Obadan (1998:25) and Amoako (1997:10), who have posited that:

*good governance implies efficient and effective public administration, good policies and sound management of natural resources. It calls for the ability of a state to anticipate challenges to its well-being, provide core services with people and then argument these services, act as a catalyst of change, and guide the various forces in a society toward harmony (and national development) devoid of ideological imperialism and multi-dimensional genocidal tendencies) (Emphasis mine).*

Pursuing the same line of argument, Obadan (1998), further claimed that:

*Good governance implies ruling on the basis of equity and social justice, and an end to corruption, nepotism and political manipulation of public institutions. Only when citizens have the belief that their government operates on their behalf, in an open and accountable manner, will government be able to obtain their willing co-operation in, for example, mobilizing resources for development.*

Driving home this line of argument, Obadan (*Ibid*: 34), emphasized that, through good governance, a government should be able to effectively perform, among others, the following tasks:

- Establishing a foundation of law;
- Maintaining a non distortionary policy environment, including macro-economic stability;
- Investing in basic social services, infrastructure,
- Protecting the vulnerable group in the society; and
- Protecting the environment.

Other scholars have considered good governance vis-à-vis the *raison d'être* of statehood in this manner as well (Kaufman, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton, 1999; Corkery and Bossuyt, 1990; Healey and Robinson, 1992, 1994; Bello – Imam, 1997; Ayo and Awotokun, 1996, 1997; Nkom and Sorkaa, 1996; World Bank, 1989, 1992, 1993). These scholars' works on the concept of good governance treat it as a system of rulership that is devoid of political expediency and antidemocratic political ends. It is deducible from their works that, good governance stands for dignified existence of all political animals in democratic political settings within the global political community. According to Obadan (1998:24), "good governance consists of five fundamental elements". He listed them thus:

- Accountability of government officials (political leaders and bureaucrats) for public funds and resources;
- Transparency in government procedures, processes, investment decisions, contracts and appointments. Transparency is a means of preventing corruption and enhancing economic efficiency;
- Predictability in government behavior. This is particularly critical to the carrying out of economic transactions between individuals and in taking investment decisions: governments and public institutions should not be capricious in their behaviour and actions;
- Openness in government transactions and a reliable flow of the information necessary for economic activity and development to take place. Without information, rules will not be known, accountability is low, and risks and uncertainties are many. With these the cost of committing capital is also huge. An open system should, thus, be encouraged to release information to stakeholders and promote dialogue among the people as well as ensure their active participation in the socio-economic development of the country
- Observance of the rule of law must be adhered to by government and its citizens; this means that governments and institutions should be subject to rules and regulations, which are understood by everyone in the society (*Ibid*).

### **Relationship between Democracy and Governance**

From the discussion of the concepts of democracy and governance within the context of this paper so far, we found it innocuous to contend that, the affinity between the two vis-à-vis the governance of men and/or the relational thrust between the "ruler" and the "ruled" within most political systems particularly, the democratic polities of the world, is self evident. Without gainsaying, it is deducible from this discussion and/or analysis that both concepts constitute the traditional and contemporary flashpoints, which cannot but provoke the mind-set of the elites and the laymen in equal measure. The concepts are both fundamental and inalienable vis-à-vis the socio-political and economic systemic existence of all human beings within the various if not all polities of the world today hence, as Obadan (1998:39) rightly argued, "when democracies are working well, they tend to create strong incentives for accountability, good governance and development.

This is particularly so, if as Hyden (1995:58), once opined, “no society escapes its past” and, if “there is a definite path dependency” that “bears on the present”. It is equally more so if “building democracy is not an exercise that starts from a clean state” (but), on the “ruins of the past order”.

The political history of most African states (particularly Nigeria) with respect to the issues of democracy and governance becomes relevant in this regard. For example, as Esman (1997:2) once argued:

*Most African states took over from centralized and unrepresentative colonial ethnic and religious separatism – tribalism – and become victims to centrifugal aspirations of ambitious politicians speaking in the name of ethnic, religious and regional minorities.*

Government (in Africa) at this time was not based on the consent of the governed and, the latter had no voice in choosing their leaders who were not really accountable to them. Joseph’s (1987) study of prebendalism in Nigeria and, his “argument that the rulers in Africa are unable to act independently of the community they serve” echoed this. This explains why Hyden (1999), once claimed that, “the state in Africa failed to live up to the expectation people had in them in the first two decades of independence”. In fact, as Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001) noted, this was the case, because the leaders at that period of time were “more interested in advancing their own narrow class interest whose realization require authoritarian methods of rule and neglect of the general welfare”.

This trend, the reasons for it, and, its consequences which, in part, catalyzed the quest and struggle for alternative paradigm (democracy) vis-à-vis the governance of the African people and, which has attracted the intellectual attention of scholars of repute - (See Migdal 1988; Chabal 1992; Hyden 1980; Rweyemamu and Hyden 1975) – were equally clearly put into perspective by Olowu (1995); Wunsch and Olowu (1990), Hyden and Bratton (1992), Hyden (1999), Olowu and Rasheed (1993), Dia (1993), Makinde and Aladekomo (1997), Erero (1996), Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001). Specifically, commenting on the disillusionment about the inherited legacy of state – based, monocratic or centralized political order adopted in Africa at the inception of independent democratic governance, Olowu (1995), claimed that:

*the monocratic political order (which derives from the Hobbesian notion/conception of the state) not only failed as a system but led to serious and in some cases disastrous consequences for the economy and people of Africa.*

These consequences include: wars, political violence, economic decline, systemic governmental corruption and, social and infrastructural decay.

This failure, according to Wunsch and Olowu (1990), Olowu (1995), Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001), was due to the “premature centralization” and, the “development of democratic process by fits and starts” (Akinkugbe 2001) due to over assumption of its political utility and relevance to the needs of the people.

This, consequently, led to the agitation for democratic political change and good governance in most African states, Nigeria inclusive (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2001). The spontaneous angry reactions, civil disobedience, demonstrations by Nigerians following the annulment in 1993 of the June 12, 1993 presidential election are a case in point.

Democracy as we come to know and think of it today, to be meaningful as a mechanism of governance, it has to encompass the elements and/or essentials of (good) governance as articulated within the context of this paper.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of democracy and governance has been theoretically analyzed in this paper. In doing this, the central thesis of democracy as a form of political organization was examined giving

prominence to its ancient roots, and, the philosophical and intellectual attentions it has attracted over the years.

Against this background, its linkage with the governance of men in the past and current period was theoretically attempted. From these efforts, it was discovered that, practically, political animals, all over the world and, particularly in Africa and indeed, in Nigeria attached serious importance to democracy as a mechanism of political governance. And, that, through it, pluralism, rule of law, legitimate rule, accountability and fair representation of the societal interests could be pursued and made manifest for the betterment of mankind.

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