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## Democracy, Education And Sustainable National Development In Nigeria

Adeline Nnenna A. Idike

### Abstract

This paper postulates that sustainable national development has remained an elusive desire in Nigeria. The paper further argues that despite the multiplicity of attempts to rescue the Nigerian state from the debilitating effects of underdevelopment; and set it on the path of sustainable national development, the ailing nation-state has refused to respond to treatment. Specifically, the objectives of the paper were to (i) examine the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development, in Nigeria (ii) demonstrate the result of the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development, in Nigeria and (iii) make recommendations on how to improve upon the results of the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria. The elite theory is the theoretical framework for the study. The methodology employed is logical argumentation. It is contended in the paper that the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria is not only disjointed but also crises-prone. It is further concluded that education revalidates democracy; hence, it is education that points the way to sustainable national development. The paper opines that in the organic link among democracy, education and sustainable national development, it is the position of education that is of the most significant import. Accordingly, the elusive desire for sustainable national development in Nigeria is attributable to elite insensitivity in education. The paper finally recommends that as a matter of urgent national importance, an inclusive national conference on democracy, education and sustainable national development be convoked by the Nigerian state actors. The focal point of the conference should be the democratization of access to qualitative education. In other words, the conference should focus on the bringing about of an educational system that is not elitist in both content and access; the type of education that reduces inequality and poverty.

**Key Words:** Democracy, Education, Sustainable National Development, the Nigerian State, Elite and Elitism, Political Liberty, Political Elite, Educational Elite, Poverty, Inequality

### Introduction

Sustainable national development has been an elusive desire in Nigeria. Several studies have shown that despite the multiplicity of attempts to rescue the Nigerian nation from the doldrums of underdevelopment and set the state on the path of sustainable national development, the ailing Nigerian nation has refused to respond to treatment (Ugwu, 2002; Anya, 2008; Onuoha, 2008; Ogundiya, 2010; Offiong and Chikwem, 2011; Ebohon and

Obakhedo, 2012; Ibeanu, et al, 2012). There is truly, no automatic connection between democracy and development (Ogundiya, 2010:201). However, proper democratic practices are obviously critical to the attainment of national developmental goals. Invariably also, development provides a productive ground for the practice of democracy. Education in addition, is a critical factor in the process of national development. In fact, in the views of Anya (2008:02), the keys to the doors of Africa / Nigeria's development are held by education and scholarship. Development on the other hand, enhances the chances of the availability of opportunities for education. There is in essence, the supposition of a dialectical relationship among democracy, education and development. It does appear as if in the Nigerian situation, the dialectics of democracy, education and national development have left the Nigerian citizens, rather poor and bewildered. What therefore is the true nature of the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria? How have democracy and education impacted on sustainable national development for the benefit of Nigerian citizens? What possible policy measures may be taken, for democracy and education to purposefully impact on sustainable national development in Nigeria? These are the central research questions on which the study centers.

Hence, the specific, objectives of the study are to (i) examine the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development, in Nigeria (ii) demonstrate the result of the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria and (iii) make recommendations on how to improve upon the results of the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria. The theoretical framework for the study is the elite theory. The methodology adopted is logical argumentation.

## **Conceptual Issues**

### **The Concept of Democracy**

Democracy is truly, a difficult issue to conceptualize. However, according to Osakwe (2011:1), democracy is a political system in which the people in a country rule through any form of government they choose to establish. In modern democracies, supreme authority is exercised for the most part, by representatives elected by popular suffrage. Hence, democracy is rule by the people. Democracy is not for instance, rule by the elite, even when representatives elected by popular suffrage have formed part of the political elite. Democracy is not essentially rule by elected representatives. Democracy is rather essentially rule by the representatives of the people. Central to the concept and practice of democracy therefore, are the wishes and the will of the people. Thus, democracy in the people's reckoning means improvement in their circumstances (Abati, 2006:2).

Whenever an attempt is made to re-conceptualize democracy, the effort ends up reaffirming that people are central to the democratic concept and practices. Awotokun (2004:131) for instance has contended as follows: By democracy I do not mean something as vague as 'the rule of the people' or 'the rule of the majority'; but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, i.e., the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permits public control of rulers and their dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers (Awotokun, 2004:131). Besides the express mentioning of 'the right of the people' in this contention, it stands to reason that 'the ruled', upon which emphasis is placed in this attempted re-conceptualization, also refers to 'the people'. Democracy is essentially, people-centered. Laski (2008:17) posits that the

democratic form of government is doubtless a final form of political organization in the sense that men who have once tasted power will not without conflict, want to surrender it. The issue of whom the power would have been surrendered to, however remains outstanding. In all, the contention of Laski (2008:17) refers to the primacy of the people in the democratic concept.

In all societies of the world today, argues Ogundiya (2010:204) the issue is not which political system is appropriate but rather when will society become democratized or fully democratic. According to Owolabi (2003) cited in Ogundiya (2010:204), the democratization project is therefore, regarded as the age of civilization, that every society should strive to attain, rather than a political option among many others. Democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way, through which a society can be administered (Ogundiya, 2010:204). However, according to Laski (2008:17), democratic government is less a matter of eulogy than for exploration. Positive democratic impact must be located in the relationship among democracy and other variables, inclusive of education and sustainable national development. For the positive impact to be located, the meaning of education must be clearly understood by both the facilitators and the beneficiaries.

### **The Concept of Education**

Education is the initiation of the individual into activities or modes of thought and conduct considered worthwhile by the society... an educated man is not only knowledgeable but is also committed to the ideas and norms of his society and to standards of performance. Education induces a holistic dimension to the individual that goes beyond mere skills and competence (Anya, 1993; cited in Anya, 2008:03). Education can refer to a process, a product or a discipline (Nwuzor and Ocho, 1985:1). In this essay, the concept of education is focused upon, in these three contexts - a process, a product and a discipline. Ukeje (1985: v) has pointed out that education is not a transportable commodity. Consequently, for an effective education, the raw materials may be borrowed but the finished product must be indigenous. Okeke (2007:6) further opines as follows: education in its broadest sense encompasses all the processes individuals go through in life to develop and optimally utilize their potentials through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that are necessary for effective living in society. It is a process that starts from birth and ends with death, which means that education is a life-long process. Every experience one goes through in life, affords the person opportunity to advance in education, that is to say, gain knowledge and skills to grapple with challenges of life. Education therefore is a vital aspect of human enterprise and cannot be left to chance. That is why societies and nations take time to organize their education system for maximum benefits (Okeke, 2007:6). This maximum benefit must include sustainable national development, as desired by all the citizens and striven for, by their legitimate leaders.

### **Sustainable National Development**

According to Imhonopi & Urim (2010), cited in Imhonopi & Urim (2013:79) national development is the ability of a country or countries, to improve the social welfare of the people, namely, by providing social amenities like good education, power, housing, pipe-borne water and others. The components of national development include economic development, socio-cultural empowerment and development; and how these variables impact on human development. Without human development, which is the development

of the human capital of a nation or its citizens, national development can be thwarted or defeated (Imhonopi & Urim, 2013:79). Sustainable development, argues Osadebe (2012:158) could be termed the lasting improvement of the social, physical, economic, cultural and institutional well being of the people for a more meaningful leaving. The United Nations (1997) cited in Onah (2011:133) define sustainable development as development that not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, that regenerates the environment rather than destroying it, and that empowers people rather than marginalizing them; development that gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect their lives. Sustainable national development therefore is the development with regenerative national impact. As a matter of fact, in this paper, sustainable national development is all about development that leads to decreases in poverty and inequality levels in the society. The role of the elite must be critical to the coming into effect of such state of affairs.

### **The Elite and Elitism**

Ebohon and Obakhedo (2012:13) explain that the term elitism is the belief or attitude used to describe a situation in which power is concentrated in the hands of a limited number of people with special privileges and responsibilities in the hope that this arrangement will benefit humanity or themselves. The central theme of elitism is predicated on the axiom that all societies are split into two; namely: the haves; and have not or the elite and the masses; the governor and the governed, etc. This formulation was expounded by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Italian thinkers, Pareto (1935) and Mosca (1939). Therefore, the concept of elite denotes a select group of people with intellect, wealth, influence, power, prestige, authority, education, specialized training or experience, or other distinctive attributes, who determine how the society should be ordered and the *modus operandi*. Indeed, they are those whose views on a matter, are to be taken the most seriously or carry the most weight; whose views and/or actions are most likely to be constructive to society as a whole; or whose extraordinary skills, abilities or wisdom render them specifically fit to govern. They may rely on some identifiable personal attributes, commonly purported by elitist theorists to be characteristic of the elite; namely: rigorous study of, or great accomplishment within a particular field; a long track record of competence in a demanding field; an extensive history of dedication and effort in service to a specific discipline or a high degree of training or wisdom within a particular field (Ebohon and Obakhedo, 2012:13).

According to Duru (2012:1/2), the core of the elitist doctrine is that there may exist in many societies, a minority of the population which takes the major decisions in the society. Because these decisions are of such wide scope, affecting the most general aspect of the society; they are usually regarded as “political decisions”, even where the minorities taking them are not politicians, in the usual sense of members of a government of legislature. For some, elites are the decision-makers of the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society. For others, elites are the sole source of values in the society or constitute the integrating force in the community without which it may fall part (Duru, 2012:1/2).

Thus, in line with the foregoing, this study is also about the actions and inactions of the elite; more specifically, the actions or inactions of the political and educational elite in the Nigerian state and how these actions and inactions have impacted on the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in the Nigerian state.

Indeed, the study is about the actions and inactions of Nigerian elites as decision-makers of the society, whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society (Duru, 2012:2).

### **The Dialectics Of Democracy, Education And Development**

Anya (2008:03) describes education as an instrument for inducing social change. Education therefore is an instrument of inducing positive change in the processes of democracy. On the other hand, devoid of democracy, education becomes only indoctrination. But to Ozigi and Canham (1979:10), education is more than indoctrination. Whatever education may be, good citizenship is clearly a part of it (Ozigi and Canham, 1979:13). In this regard, citizenship has been defined as the contribution of one's instructed judgment to the public good (Laski, 2008:114). It follows therefore that in the democratic process, the demands of citizenship is compelling on both the vote-seeking politician and the voter. In a democracy, the demands of citizenship are compelling on both the elite and the masses. The demands of citizenship can be supplied by education. In deed, in the views of Laski (2008:17) the problem of democratic government is not less a problem of finding men apt to the use of its machinery than the problem of a monarchy is to find a race of kings fitted by their endowments to benefit the state. Consequently, the capacity building requirements of the two systems - democracy and monarchy - are functions of education.

Furthermore, Laski (2008:17) contends that the administration of a modern state is a technical matter and that those who can penetrate its secrets are relatively few in number. Those who can penetrate the secrets of the administration of a modern state are of course the elite. The fewness of this number is anti-democratic and one potent instrument for increasing the number of those who can penetrate the secrets of the technical matter, inherent in the administration of a modern state is massive education which the elite may not be interested in bringing about. The elite are naturally interested in elite education, for the children of the elite; not the type of education that is the instrument for inducing social change, the type that leads to sustainable national development. Where the required education continues to be of sub-standard value, the state is open to the risk of stunted progress - dearth of development. In Nigeria, the result of the relationship among democracy, education and development has become the impoverishment of the citizens and the consequent increases in inequality and poverty rates. In the consequent inequality that the relationship breeds, the elite do not see that the national economy is headed in the wrong direction. The World Bank has in this regard declared that 100 million Nigerians are living in abject poverty (Adoyi, 2013). But the political elite in Nigeria thinks that the World Bank is brandishing wrong figures about the state of affairs in Nigeria (see Okidegbe, 2013).

To move a modern state forward requires massive functional education, which is antithetical to elitism. Asobie (2008:44) also opines that the decisive factor in development is human resource but sees human resource as referring to leadership. Human resource that is decisive for development is seen in this paper as having to do more with education. However, Asobie (2008:45) further posits that there is a correlation between democracy and development or more specifically, between types of democratic states and development. Indeed, the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development is a relationship of correlation. This correlation requires the cooperation of the political and educational elite.

**Democracy, Education, Sustainable National Development And The Nigerian State**

The relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria, is rather disjointed and crises-prone. Ogundiya (2010:205) has opined that almost two decades after the “third wave” of democracy has blown across the continent of Africa, democratization has not produced the expected result in countries of the continent, Nigeria inclusive. Rather than engender development and good governance in Nigeria, democracy has led to political assassinations, ethno-religious conflicts, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment. Hence, general economic and political decay have been the major dividends of democracy since 1999 when the country returned to democracy (Ogundiya, 2010:205). This suggests that the practice of democracy in this period has been elitist - elevated above the reach of the average citizen and accordingly has not positively impacted on national development. During this period in Nigeria, the major dividends of democracy, have not covered education and development. Thus, nothing can be more defective than the pattern of democracy that can not encourage education and development. According to Laski (2008:17) the defects of democracy are most largely due to the ignorance of democracy and to strike at that ignorance is to attack the foundation upon which those defects are built. In the presence of that ignorance, it is inevitable that those who can afford the luxury of knowledge will alone be likely or even able, to make their desires effective. Those who can afford the luxury of knowledge are those who can acquire education. Hence, a state which fails to offer an equal level of educational opportunity to its citizens, continues Laski (2008:17), is penalizing the poor for the benefit of the rich. Truly therefore, to penalize the poor for the benefit of the rich is indeed, the height of state irresponsibility. Indeed, there can not be a responsible state until there is an educated electorate. But even an educated electorate will not secure the essential conditions of state responsibility in isolation. The individual in a modern state is, after all, a voice crying in the wilderness; unless he acts with those whose interests are kindred to his own (Laski, 2008:17).

The role of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is considered germane at this point. In the first instance, her members to a large degree possess kindred interests. In addition, ASUU members belong to the cream of the citizens who can afford the luxury of knowledge and accordingly fully understand the defects of democracy, which are most largely due to the ignorance of democracy. ASUU members equally possess the capacity to strike at that ignorance which is to attack the foundation upon which those defects of democracy are built. In the presence of that ignorance, argues Laski (2008:17) it is inevitable that those who can afford the luxury of knowledge will alone be likely or even able, to make their desires effective. Hence, for democracy to engender the type of education which can lead to sustainable national development, the role of the elite is important - patriotic elite - the type that are not yet known to be found in the Nigerian state. The intermittent disputes between ASUU and the Nigerian state- actors therefore, is an attempt by the educational elite to defend its constituency against the perceived insensitivities of the political elite. One of such disputes arose with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2013 and had entered its 7<sup>th</sup> month in the course of this research (Philips, 2013:1). The implication is that publicly owned universities in Nigeria, at federal and state levels, have not been in session for a period of seven months. Thus, when the occasioning dispute remains too prolonged, in a democratic dispensation, we begin to see the scenario of disjointed relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development. We begin to see the role of the embattled Nigerian elite in the society and their actions and inactions as decision-makers of the society, whose power is not subject

to control by any other body in the society (Duru, 2012:2). Thus, the political elite can allow the ASUU strike to linger, because their children do not attend public schools in Nigeria.

The University system is generally accepted to be at the apex of the educational enterprise and we can draw further illustrations from this apex setting. Hence, in the University setting in Nigeria, it is becoming increasingly discernible, except to the political elite, that the available education is of sub-standard value. According to Anya (2008:17), can the university still pledge its confidence in the character and learning of her wards in this age of evanescent cultural mores and shifting fashions, as well as pluralist conjecture of values hastened by the ubiquitous presence of the evanescent visual image and sound bite? In other words, for education to lead to development, it must be the functional and relevant type of education, not the type that has been overtaken by evanescent events. The turbulent environment of teaching, research and learning in the Nigerian university system is suggestive of state irresponsibility. State irresponsibility is coterminous with elite irresponsibility. In the matter of sustainable national development, it amounts to elite irresponsibility for the elite (political and educational elite); to promote the type of education that negates national development and leads to increases in poverty and inequality levels.

Okoye (2012:1) argues as follows: here in Nigeria, mechanical engineers can't repair their cars, not to talk of manufacturing simple tools. The economy is solely based on crude oil revenues. The nation's inability to diversify the economy is intrinsically linked to its dysfunctional education system. Okeke (2007:12) also submits as follows: education statistics of Nigeria reports increase in enrollment at all levels of education as well as increase in literacy rate yet we are still far from being a developed nation. Certainly, increase in enrolment and/or possession of literacy and numeracy skills on their own; have not proved sufficient to bring about national development. After all, what divides the world today into "developed" and "developing" countries is the level of science and technology development. Of a truth, rapid and sustainable development of any country can only be achieved through scientific research, rational applications of science and technology, knowledge and skills. But how will these be translated and made to reach and influence the life of citizens (Okeke 2007:12)? It is only through education. Where democracy can not engender the type of education that would bring about the rational application of science and technology and make same to reach and influence the life of citizens, such democracy must be considered defective and its relationship with education considered disjointed. It is this type of democracy, as practiced in the Nigerian state that leads to endless sessions of disagreements between the political and educational elites, represented respectively by Nigeria's political officialdom and ASUU leadership. Where however, the constituency of ASUU leadership is manifestly the field of education, the interests that the Nigerian political elite protects in the field of education is unclear. Thus, the actions and inactions of the political elite, in matters of education in Nigeria, may represent state irresponsibility.

Incidentally, the solution to state irresponsibility in education is political liberty which only democracy again can provide. Laski (2008:147) thus argues that democracy and political liberty are interwoven and for political liberty to be real, one essential condition is that the citizen must be educated to the point where he can express what he wants in a way that is intelligible to others. Political liberty is therefore necessary for sustainable national development. Democracy, political liberty, education and sustainable national

development are therefore interwoven but to the extent that education is the interlocking factor.

### **Recommendations**

It is therefore strongly recommended, as policy option in this paper, that as a matter of urgent national importance, an inclusive national conference on democracy, education and sustainable national development be convoked by the Nigerian state actors / the political elite, in collaboration with the educational elite. Delegates to the conference should necessarily include key state actors, from the three arms of government; at the national level and also include delegates from Defense and Industry; delegates from the three arms of government at state and local government levels; and from the pre-primary, primary, post-primary and postsecondary levels of education; all notable unions at all the levels of the education sector; faith-based organizations, youth and women organizations, etc. The focal point of the conference should be the democratization of the quality of education. Thus, under such a dispensation, the type of education that is good for the children of the elite will also be available to every child. In other words, the bringing about of an educational system that is not elitist in both content and access. The outcome of the recommended conference should be backed by a national legislation, which shall be domesticated by the various States' Houses of Assembly and where appropriate, the relevant Local Government Authorities. Such a conference is a necessary requirement for the freedom of the Nigerian state, from the quagmire of crises, bedeviling the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development in Nigeria. Such a conference is a pointer to the road the Nigerian state must take, in order to achieve the elusive desire of sustainable national development for the citizens.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Nigerian State, it appears, places limited emphasis on democracy. In the process, the political elite deemphasize the other areas of the socio-political economy. Although democracy may have become the most fashionable form of governance in the world (Ogundiya, 2010:204) and the democratic form of government may doubtless be the final form of political organization (Laski, 2008:17), Anya (2008:16) has also highlighted that education is the only instrument that man can utilize to build a sustainable economy and a viable society. Education therefore, revalidates democracy. Hence, in the relationship among democracy, education and sustainable national development, it is education that points the way to sustainable national development. But it is not the type of education that is marred by elite insensitivity.

Thus, the elusive desire for sustainable national development in Nigeria can only be achieved when priority is given to education by the Nigerian state. The political and educational elite must work together in creating the policy options for the management of the relationship between democracy and education; for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Sustainable development can not be achieved by the current state emphasis on democracy in isolation. Hence, this paper is of the opinion that in the organic link among democracy, education and sustainable national development, it is the position of education that is of the most significant import. In this regard, this paper agrees with Okoye (2012:1) that education is critical to the development of countries; that most of the technologically advanced first world countries, owe their breakthrough and successes in the field of science and technology to robust and functional educational systems. Sustainable national development of the Nigeria state must toe the line of education; the

type of education that is not elitist in both content and access; the type of education that reduces inequality and poverty.

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