

Democracy and Economic Development in Nigeria. The Benue Experience Since 1999

Bemshima Saka¹, Fatima Abubakar Katcha², Muhammad Abdullahi³

¹Department of Personnel Administration, Makurdi Local Government Council, Makurdi Benue State, Nigeria

²Department of Political Science, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai, Nigeria

³Department of Political Science, Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria

Abstract: The paper examined the extent to which democracy has been able to enhance the socio economic and political development of the people in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Methodologically, the paper used secondary sources of data through critical review of literature and adopted elite theory as a framework of analysis. The paper argued that the problem of development in Nigeria has much to do with the crisis of the state itself. This is a state that is characterized by poor leadership, bad governance, weak institutions and fragile economic foundation. The paper therefore recommended that democratic institutions in Nigeria needs to be strengthened to enable them act and work in cooperation to bring about good governance which herald development. By so doing, the tenets of democracy such as freedom of expression, respect for the rule of law and social justice which are the cardinal principles that govern a true democratic state will be adhered to. More so, political parties should set in motion mechanism that would ensure that only those with clean political dossier who are intellectually sound and capable of delivery the desired development when finally voted into power that should be their flag bearers. More importantly, god fatherism should be jettisoned in Nigeria and Benue political equation such that only those with clear vision and mission find their way into governance. This will no doubt discourage attempt by political heavy weight to insist on unpopular candidate during elections.

Keywords: Benue State, Democracy, Economic development, Leadership, Politics

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is adjudged the best form of government all over the world. This is because it is premised on the participatory opportunity it affords the citizenry in the selection and election of their leaders and representatives. It is this fundamental reason that provides the people with the needed development which cannot be attained individually. Scholars such as Siegle (2006), Molutsi (n.d) and Udoms and Atakpa (2017) have argued that the essence of participatory democracy is its ability to provide ample opportunity for countries targeting economic growth and development. This is because democracy plays a very important and crucial role in promoting good governance and fostering economic development. Economic development of a country can therefore be linked to the nature of democratic practice in operational.

Its origin is traceable to the ancient Greek city state where political franchise was the first property of the citizens

as they had the obligation to discuss public issues (Rosen & Wolf, 1999). These issues considered were principally anchored on how best humanity would experience unhindered development which democracy represents. With the coming into being of the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 which actually birthed modern state system, the need arose for government of different states to put in motion mechanism that would provide the common good through democratic governance. This shows that democracy has gathered momentum across the globe as result of its immense advantages (Bello-Imam & Obandan, 2004).

Today, there is unconditional attachment to democracy as a fundamental factor in the search for development. In Africa for example, the continent was ushered into this obsession of democratic changes through internal and external revolutionary pressures. Bratton & Walle (1997) espouse that in the 1990s there arose protest across the continent of Africa as people expressed discontent with economic hardship and political repression and instead demanded for democratic reforms. This was in response to the years of military dictatorship which had no regard for personal liberty and human dignity. From the external stand point, the West and its collaborating international financial institutions such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) otherwise known as World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have come to linked foreign aid and development assistance to democracy. Therefore, the desire to bring development to the people propelled most of the newly independent African states to design development plans that would stimulate economic growth and development. To achieve this, they needed foreign aid and loans from the industrialised countries. This scenario gave room for the transplanted of democracy to independent African states.

Democracy according to Gana (1996) is described as the government by the persons freely chosen by the governed who also hold them accountable and responsible for their action while in government. The common denominator from the above definition is that in a democracy sovereignty rest with the people. Couched with this line of thinking Okpaga (1999) conceive democracy as any system of government that is rooted in the ultimate authority rightly belonging to the people, that everyone is entitled to an equitable social

economic justice. The import from the above is that people should be treated as political equals.

Generally, it is assumed that democracy has a causal link with development, scholars such as Sen (1999), Cardoso (2001), Jamo (2010), Ugwu (2017), Udoms and Atakpa (2017) are of the view that there is causal link between democracy and development. It is their position that democracy stimulates development, it enhances a country's ability to engender development by providing basic infrastructure such as portable water supply, Medicare, electricity, roads, schools and markets as these infrastructures has the capacity to catapult the society into the frontiers of genuine development and make the people live a meaningful life. Through the instrumentality of democratic principles the citizens are provided with the opportunity to elect their leaders who will in turn provide them with dividends of democracy through good governance.

Conversely, other scholars such as Bardhan (2002) Pzeworski and Lamongi, (2007) Chan (2009) observed that democracy does not translate to development, they maintain that non-democratic states of Saudi-Arabia, Japan, China, Singapore, and North Korea etc have recorded unprecedented development which cannot be equated with democratic states of Africa including Nigeria. To them, it is not about the form of government in operational but it is about the character, function and quality of leadership in place, a leadership that would project and pursue vigorously the values of societal development for the good of all. In nutshell, democracy is not a prerequisite for economic development. There is evidence of mixed feelings among scholars as to whether democracies foster development.

However, the return of the country into a democratic rule in May 1999 heaped a sign of relief to many Nigerians and Benue State in particular, that at last they are now liberated from the shackles of unilateralism and arbitrariness that characterized military regimes. Part of the reason for this show of excitement by the people was that, a time has come for them to elect persons of integrity and impeccable character that would represent them and provide the people with good governance which will enhance socio-economic development of the people.

In line with this thinking Majekodunmi (2012) averred that the need for democracy is a vital instrument that propels the political proficiency, economic development and social stability of any nation state. This is because democracy preaches the rule of law, accountability, transparency, social justice political stability as well as the provision and maintenance of social infrastructure and basic services.

Unfortunately since that time till now, the democratic system, including the structures meant to sustain and consolidate it, have experienced strain and stress (George-Genyi, 2013). Some of the factors responsible for this state of affairs may not be far from the prolonged military regimes whose common feature was, to a large extent, their lack of,

democracy, accountability, good governance and general neglect towards societal development. Suffice it to ask that, what has been responsible for the inability of the Nigeria state to achieve good governance and development over the years? Why has it been so difficult to attain the desired development level in Nigeria and more particularly in Benue State? What needs to be done to surmount those constraints in order to achieve economic development in Nigeria and Benue State? The provisions of answers to these questions form the primary objective of this paper.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Democracy

Democracy refers to philosophy of government where the supreme power is domiciled with the people and exercised by the people directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic elections (Udoms and Atakpa, 2017). One could observe that this definition laid emphasis on competitive, periodic elections. Cassineli in Udoms and Atakpa, (2017) espoused that election constitute an integral part of those officials who possess the real and ultimate governmental authority. Couched in this line of thinking is the idea that democracy is about mass participation, self-determination, collective responsibility and individual freedom (Anger, 2013).

Tobi (1995) in Anger (2013) submit that democratic government is one in which both the government and the governed exercised freedom and participate in the practical working of a government. It therefore, conveys a collectivist connotation or content in the sense of a republican participation in the affairs of government. Democracy is thus an antithesis to despotism, tyranny and totalitarianism. In the words of Anger (2002) "democracy is meaningless in the midst of general poverty, hunger and deprivation of (whatever kind) in a country". Therefore, democracy as an ideal is primarily related to the themes of equality, liberty, citizenship participation and self-determination of members of the society.

To Sokaa (1987), cited in Anger (2013) democracy involves the decentralization of power from the centre to the periphery in the society. It is his belief that, power is solely concerned with resource determination and allocation. What this means is that, in a democracy citizens are equally empowered to make far reaching strategic decisions that could greatly influence fundamental policy matters. This shows that democracy provide the platform for finding solutions to the prevailing economic, social and political problems since it provides opportunity for mass participation in the social economic and political decisions making processes (Hembe, 2003). It should be noted however that, at the centre of democracy is the process of participation. As people continually participate in electoral process, they develop and foster impressive qualities which ensure that good governance is felt. Mass participation therefore negates constraining repression and discrimination by bringing into focus the larger

communal identity of a society for no single group whether be it a majority or a minority, has a right to determine the future that would be for the interest of a common good. Rousseau amplifies this point by stressing that, in a participatory democracy, no individual citizen is allowed to be rich to the extent undermine the views and opinions of others, and at the same time none should be so poor as to be forced or coerced any one to sell himself (Anger, 2013). It is indeed clear that the basic contention is the no compelling justification for democracy could oppose the view that people ought to be treated as political equals (Seward, 1998).

Therefore, democracy in which ever form whether liberal, African or modern must pay attention to popular sovereignty, equal opportunity for all, majority rule, representativeness, minority rights, right to choose between alternatives Programmes, popular consultation, consensus on fundamental issues and more importantly periodic elections (Oke, 2005). By this, people would not only participate in the political process but must equally make effective inputs into the making of binding collective decisions for the good of the society.

Economic Development

The term development has come a long way in the past six decades (Rapley, 2007). As both an enterprise and a scholarly discipline, development became significant in the period immediately following World War II (Rapley, 2007). Defining the concept in a precise manner has been a major theoretical and practical challenge (Matthias, 2008). Commenting on the elusive nature of the concept development United Nations Development Project (UNDP, 1991) cited in Saka & Dajo (2017:39) expressed thus:

Although development has been a constant concern of government, policymakers, economists and other social scientists – and has touched the lives of more people than ever before – there has been little agreement on what constitutes development, how it is best measured and how it is best achieved. One reason for this lack of agreement is that dissatisfaction with the pace and character of economic and social change has instilled a desire to redefine the aims and measures of development.

Despite the lack of consensus as what constitutes the meaning of development, some workable definitions will be offered to shade more light on the concept.

Prior to the 1960s, development was synonymous with economic growth. During this time, development was predominantly explained in quantitative terms (Szirmai, 2005). Even if we restrict the idea of development to the economic realm, it is clear that economic development involves more than just economic growth (Szirmai, 2005).

Economic development does not only mean growth but it also encompasses qualitative changes in the structure of

production and employment, generally referred to as structural change (Kuznets, 1966). The concept of economic development especially when used in the context of developing economies, Kuznets (1966) believes that it covers increases in the share of the dynamic industrial sector in national output and employment and a decrease of the share of agriculture. The import from the above is that, it is possible for a country to experience economic growth without economic development. Two examples will suffice here. First, some countries may witness rapid economic growth without corresponding improvement in the living conditions of the people. Nigeria is a good example of a country that experience economic growth without development. Second, sometimes technological changes can result in new modes of production and new products with no impact on the living conditions of the people (Abramowitz, 1989).

However, during the 1960s, the definition of development from the perspective of economic growth came under severe criticisms. These criticisms came from scholars and institutions such as Myrdal (1968) Streeten (1972), International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1976) and Seers (1969) who argued that developing countries did not experience much change in the living conditions of the masses of the poor in spite of the impressive growth figures in the post-World War II. The crux of their argument was that, development involves more than economic growth and changes in economic structures (Szirmai, 2005). Seer's (1969) was one of those who believed that defining development basically from an economic point of view was too shallow. In this regard, he provided three parameters to help us understand the term development when he posed the following most fundamental questions about the meaning of development: the questions to ask about a country's development are therefore; what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? Seers (1969) explained further that, if all the three above mentioned variables reduce significantly, then one can say that a country is experiencing development. However, in an event where one or two of those variables mentioned above have been increasing, then it would be questionable to say such a country has experienced development even if it's per capita income double. Easterlin (1974) agreed with Seers point of view that, a country can also witness economic growth but its citizens may still be impoverished, unhappy and unsatisfied. The criticisms that trailed the narrow conception of development from the perspective of economic growth led to the formulation of other 'social indicators' for measuring development such as life expectancy, literacy, levels of education, infant mortality, availability of telephones, hospital beds, licensed doctors, availability of calories, and so forth (Szirmai, 2005).

Commenting further, Szirmai (2005) had drawn our attention to other academics and development experts who agree that development is more than just economic growth by reminding us that changes in family structures, perceptions

and mentalities, cultural changes, demographic changes, political changes, and nation building are all essential components of development, not just economic factors. In consonance, Myrdal (1968) posited that, the idea of linking development to modernity was rooted in the principles of different modernisation theories such as rationality, planning for development, political democratisation, increased social discipline etc. According to Myrdal (1968), there was no agreement then among scholars on how the principles of modernisation theories can be applied to engender development but one thing was certain, there was a general agreement among the ruling class in developing countries that modernising the society was the key to development.

The primary objective of development from this perspective therefore involves a change of the entire society in the direction of the modernisation ideals. However, casting our minds back to the development debates of the 1960s to date, it is obvious that, the climate of opinion has since changed and some political leaders in developing countries would now hesitate to use the term modernisation (Szirmai, 2005).

In whatever angle one sees economic development, it is pertinent to note however that any society in the process of economic development is likely to experience three set of changes; an advance in utility with per capita being a major factor contributing to peoples welfare; advance in education, health, energy, skills, knowledge, capacity and choice, self-esteem and self-respect depicting independence from domination by others and the state (Olopade and Olopade, 2010).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elite Theory

This paper adopts the elite theory as it preferred theoretical underpinning. The theory was put forward by eminent scholars such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) and Reberto Michels (1876-1936).

Generally, the word elite represents 'any selected group of individuals enjoying high or privileged status in a society and united by some shared relations, desire or goals (Kousolas, 1975). Couched with this line of thinking, one can quickly identify various special elites who distinguish themselves in different areas of human endeavour in a given society. The central thesis of the theory is that power in every society is exercised by the minority of the people who are members of the ruling class. The ruling class monopolises decision making in the society as result of their influence and control of authority in the political system. In other words, it is a group of individuals who possess and exercise political power to a greater degree than other members of the society. Ololade (2007) therefore notes that what distinguishes the political elite from other elites are the roles they play in

society rather than the position they occupy or the reputation/influence they enjoy or exert on government decision making.

The main interest of Pareto in elite theorizing was in the nature of the governing elite. According to him, top leaders of political parties, an institution of democracy constitute the governing elite. Their power is based partly on force and partly on consent. However, the element of force is more significant. The governing elite use bribery, deceit and cunningness to secure obedience by the use of money, but they must use force to keep the masses under their control (Mahajan, 2008). Gaetano Mosca conceive the elite as powerful minority that performs all political functions, monopolises power as well as enjoy the advantages that goes with it (Varma, 2006). He added that, in every society there are those who rule and those that are ruled. To him, those that rule constitute the political decision making machinery of the state (elite), while the ruled often mediate between the rulers and the ruled (Udoms & Atakpa, 2017). He concluded that a small group is more easily organized than an unorganized majority.

Robert Michel's wonderful contribution to the understanding of elite theory is based on the 'Iron Law of Oligarchy'. It is his position that whatever the form of government in operational whether democratic system, governance is reduced to the chosen few or the oligarchy. Where democracy is in practice, party organization is controlled by a group of leaders who can neither be checked nor held accountable by persons who elected them. Michels regarded elites as oligarchies in every organization or society because its functioning power becomes concentrated in the hands of the elites (Dye and Zeigler, 2003).

According to adherents, the fundamental premise of the theory presupposes the presence of two large groups of people in any society: a select few who are worthy and therefore have the right to supreme leadership, and a vast mass of people who are destined to be governed. The argument here is that every society is dominated by a limited group of people who possess the qualities needed for maximum social and political control.

As a result, the elite remain a vehicle for mass exploitation and repression, as well as primitive accumulation and class consolidation. In reality, in every culture, the degree of advancement or otherwise achieved is a feature of the elite's initiatives. Nigeria's oscillation between political stagnation and governance backwardness represents elite pursuit of personal aggrandizement and promotion of ego-centricism rather than altruistic policies that are people-centric and people-centered.

To further situate this argument in the Benue context, since the return to democratic rule in May 1999, successive governments have designed laudable development plans (Benue Advance Plan (BAP) (1999-2007), Our Benue Our Future (OBOF) (2007-2015) and currently "Our Collective Vision for a New Benue" (2015-date) to serve as vehicle to

drive development in Benue State. But these wonderful development plans instead of facilitating development imitative in Benue State. They have rather been used as strategies to manipulate the masses to achieve their common selfish elite interest. The first democratically elected governor of Benue State during the fourth republic, Dr George Akume put forward a teething form of political practice of democratic principle that promoted 'sharing formulas' that were detrimental to general wellbeing of the society. The sharing formula targeted most of his classmates, friends and colleagues. The idea of uplifting the lives of friends rather than the people evolved in the DNA that has continued to run in the Benue political blood (Ikoye, 2019). The political leaders have created unnecessary bottleneck that seek to recognise their interest as against that of the public thereby stifling economic growth and development in the state.

IV. BRIEF HISTORY OF BENUE STATE

Benue State is one of the States in the North Central Nigeria. The State is named after the River Benue and was carved out of the former Benue –Plateau State in 1976 (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). According to the 2011 population projected estimation by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2016), Benue state has a total population of 4,942, 141 with an average population density of 99 persons per km². The State lies within the lower river Benue trough in the middle belt region of Nigeria. Its geographic coordinates are longitude 7° 47' and 10° 0' East. Latitude 6° 25' and 8° 8' North; and shares boundaries with Nasarawa to the north, Taraba to the north-east, Cross River to the south, Ebonyi and Enugu to the South-west and Kogi to the West (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). In addition, there is also a short international boundary between the State and the Republic of Cameroun along the Nigeria's south-east border.

Most parts of the State are located in the southern guinea savannah zone. The natural vegetation, comprising grasses, trees and shrubs, is currently being used for grazing, firewood, timber, woodcarving, palm products, fruits gathering, building and various construction purposes (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). This resource can also be used for water conservation, erosion control, ranches or game reserves. The succulent grasses are harvested, dried and preserved for dry season livestock feeding. Some of the economic trees commonly found here include locus bean, Shea – butter, mahogany, silk cotton, cashew, mango and guava (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). For climate, Benue experiences a typical climate with two distinct seasons, the wet/raining season and the dry season. The raining season lasts from April to October with annual rainfall in the range of 150 – 180mm. The dry season begins in November and ends in March; however, temperatures fluctuate between 23 to 30 degrees centigrade in the year (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016).

The State is inhabited predominantly by three major demographically significant ethnic groups; Tiv, Idoma and

Igede peoples, who speak different dialects. Other minority ethnic groups in the State include Etulo, Abakwa, Jukun, Hausa, Igbo, Akweya and Nyifon. Benue State possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage which finds expression in colourful cloths, exotic masquerades, music and dances (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). Traditional dances from Benue State have won acclaim at national and international cultural festivals (Dajo, 2019). The most popular of these dances include Ingyough, Swange and Ogirinya among others. The socio-religious festivals of the people, colourful dances, dresses and songs are also of tourist value (Ibid). The Igede-Agba is a yam festival, marked in September every year by the Igede people of Obi and Oju local council areas. Among the Tiv, we have the Tiv Day, marriage ceremonies and dance competitions (e.g. Swange dance) are often very colourful and entertaining. Kwagh-hir is a very entertaining Tiv puppet show (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016).

Benue State with 23 local council areas is blessed with rich agricultural land. Agriculture forms the mainstay of the Benue State economy earning her the appellation of Food Basket of the Nation. Mechanized farming is done by a small percentage of farmers in Benue State (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). Farm inputs such as fertilizers, improved seed, insecticides and other modern methods are being increasingly used in the State. However, cost and availability of these farm implement is still a challenge to many farmers in the study area (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016). Notable cash crops include soya beans, rice, peanuts, mango, citrus, palm oil, melon, African pear, tomatoes etc. While food crops cultivated in the study area include yam, cassava, sweet potato, beans, maize, millet, guinea corn, vegetables etc. The mineral resources in Benue State include limestone, Kaolin, coal and various deposits of feldspar, barytes, wolframite, mineral salt and various precious stones, which are yet to be adequately exploited (Benue State Planning Commission, 2016).

V. DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE SINCE 1999

The Nigerian state's failure to provide rapid development that makes life meaningful for the majority of people today is a direct reflection of Benue State's democratic practice. The claim advanced by students of African politics that governance is one of the major problems facing African states in general, and that the issue of development in Nigeria is primarily a governance problem, fits perfectly into the Benue scenario. This is particularly true when governance is interpreted in terms of equal and equitable resource distribution for the achievement of the State's end or intent, which is the promotion of the common good (George-Genyi, 2013). Since the return to democratic rule in May 29, 1999, the leaders who were elected have demonstrated a desire to handle the affairs of the state by ensuring that the dividends of democracy are provided to the citizens of Benue State.

Since then, three development blueprints have been drawn up: "the Benue Advance Plan"(1999-2006), "Our Benue, Our Future"(2007-2015), and "Our Collective Vision for New Benue" (2015-date). Via a multi-sectoral approach, the synopsis of the three philosophical blueprints for state growth is to recognize underdevelopment differentials and put in motion development possibilities. To this end, the Benue Inland Revenue Services (BIRS) was established to serve as an aggressive mechanism for internally generated revenue, aimed at resolving the weak economic base of the state and at the same time respond to the yearnings and aspirations of the people by providing dividends of democracy using the available resources. The idea was to compliment allocation received from federation account to address holistically the infrastructural deficit of the state which includes highways, electricity, and the supply of water, agricultural inputs and education as well as Medicare which are critical element in development equation (George-Genyi, 2013).

On assumption of office, His Excellency Governor George Akume, who was familiar with the problems the state was facing, swung into action to turnaround the state based on his roadmap, the Benue Advance Plan, after being sworn in and inauguration on May 29, 1999 at the iconic IBB square. The Benue Advance Plan of George Akume outlined critical areas that needed to be improved upon in order to uplift the living condition of the people of the state. The initiative aimed to assist people in exploring their potential by providing them with the requisite orientation so that they can collectively take steps to enhance their well-being. In this way, government would be acting as a catalyst by providing the basic infrastructure and other facilities without which these laudable objectives would not be accomplished (Atim, 2007).

The initiative to assist people in supporting themselves was built on the need for people's dedication and hard work. The State, on the other hand, will create an encouraging atmosphere for people to use the environment for their own good as well as economic development. The import from the above is that government would pay enough attention to the development of critical infrastructure such as rural electrification, roads network, provision of portable water, as well as provision of agricultural input like fertilizers and insecticides. These infrastructural facilities are expected to ease the challenges been faced by the people hence Benue is predominantly agrarian in nature where majority of the people has farming as their major occupation.

At the end of his tenure in 2007, the Akume administration was able to records some achievements (even though there were hiccups) which include construction of both rural and township roads, rural electrification, installation of transformers to boost economic activities of the people, provision of agricultural inputs to the rural farmers for improve yields, initiated and constructed the College of Health Science and Benue State University Teaching Hospital Makurdi, constructed Government Model College Makurdi as well as Owner occupier Housing Estate G.R.A and Nyiman

layout amounting to billions of naira (Atim, 2007). Attempts were also made to industrialized the state with the establishment of Plastic and Juice Company, as well as establishment of 8 new general hospitals in 8 local government areas of the state (Pine, 2010). Annually the sum of 400million was released for the running of Benue State University Makurdi during his administration. The aim was to train man power that can be able to transform the economy of Benue and Nigeria at large. One of the challenges associated with Akume's administration was first, his humanitarian and lucrative contract policy which often pay little attention to supervision of contracts awarded that often left them unattended to by contractors even though money were release for such purposes. Second was his inability to appoint people into position of authority without recourse to competence or merit this category of people lack the knowledge to function maximally.

The Suswam administration (2007-2015) came in with high hopes from the people owing to the fact that he was a young man who has seen the hardship the people of the state were facing. Suswam then outlined his developmental vision for the state in a document titled "Our Benue, Our Future," promising to change the state and take it to new heights that can only be imagined.

Shortly after his inauguration, Governor Gabriel Suswam discovered in a handover note from his predecessor that some township streets/roads awarded by the previous administration, especially in the state capital, were either not completed or abandoned by the contractors. With this information, Governor Suswam demanded that those who took Governor Akume's humanitarian and lucrative contract policy for granted and declined to complete projects assigned to them either return to site or return the funds provided to them by his predecessor. With this warning, most contractors were encouraged to return to site to finish the contracts that had been allocated to them. Couple with his position on massive infrastructural drive the administration recorded much in its first 100 days in office an act that earned him respect by the people of the state.

After 8years in office the Suswam administration was able to achieve the following.

- Construction of seven (7) Rural Highways across Benue state totalling 248.26kms
- Emergency repairs to existing waterworks facilities at Makurdi, Katsina –Ala and Otukpo at the cost of 318,000,000.00.
- New contract for Greater Makurdi Waterworks with 100,000 cubic meters pay day capacity at the cost of 4.9 billion naira.
- New Water works at Katsina-Ala for 1.5billion naira
- Rural Electrification across the State.
- Collaboration with PHCN to facilitate extension of power suppliers, procurement and distribution of transformers.

- Provision of Solar Street light in major Streets in Makurdi.
- Comprehensive reconstruction of and furnishing of Government House; Offices of the SSG; Ministry of Science and Technology; Deputy Governors Lodge, Abuja; Commissioner's quarters Makurdi; Ministry works and Atom Kpera Lodge.
- Construction of Shelling Lodge and Vice President's Lodge, Makurdi.
- Construction of New Ultra- Modern International Market
- Construction of 500 unit of Ape Aku Housing Estate, North Bank.
- Re-designed and completed Benue Television Buildings, equipment's and other furnishing.
- New Transmitters purchased and installed at Redio Benue; AM, FM and sub stations.
- Renovation of over 36 government schools.
- Construction of permanent site of Command Secondary School, Makurdi.
- Funded Benue State University Makurdi Medical and Teaching hospital.
- Renovated and furnished the Benue State Judiciary buildings and offices.
- Renovated Ape Aku Stadium.
- Purchase of Central generating Plant and office furniture's at the state secretariat (Pine, 2010: 119-121).

No doubt, Suswam was one of the first governors in Nigeria to implement the 18,000 National Minimum Wage approved by former President Goodluck Jonathan and commences payment immediately. In his last year before exiting government house, payment of salaries became epileptic. As a civil service state that the people have made it to be, government is by responsibility expected to pay the workers as at when due, something the people only hope and pray. As a result, people have been emotionally defeated, socially withdrawn, and mentally traumatized as a result of what has turned into an unpleasant situation in the state (Ikyolve, 2019). Many have lost their lives because of poverty, hunger and disease. Though, the government was able to score high in the area of infrastructural development.

Governor Samuel Ortom administration of 2015-date has worsen the situation. The administration has further brought untold hardship to the people by deliberately refusing to pay workers their entitlements culminating into five months for state government workers, while that of Local Government and primary school teachers as well as pensioners stands at 12 months, 16months and 36months respectively. The deliberate failure of the government to provide the citizens with the actual wage bill of the state still puts everyone in the dark even though several committees were put in place by the governor to ascertain the actual wage of the state could not yield positive result. This is clear case of lack of commitment

to public will. This administration has not being able to put in place any tangible project that has the capacity to transform and catapult the Benue society into the frontiers of genuine development. Usually governance in Benue has been subjected to blame game where they are quick to criticise their predecessors for their inability to providing good governance. More worrisome is the unfortunate situation where by youth who are supposed to be vanguards against underdevelopment of the state are the ones drumming support for the failed leaders of the state thereby lacking the will power to hold them accountable.

Partisan politics has increasingly taken over, and electorates are more involved in political parties amid their desperate circumstances, which have been compounded by the poor economic situation, as well as the loss of farms and other properties to herdsmen invasion. However the only way development can be felt is when people start holding their leaders accountable and ensure that leaders keep to their manifestoes and promises of good leadership and democratic governance. If this trend continues what that means is that Benue is heading for total collapse with a dissatisfied and traumatized population. Since 1999, the desire of the state and her emerging leaders has only been to develop a self-styled and personalized type of governance that pay heed only to the caucus that they create (Ikyoive, 2019).

VI. CHALLENGES AFFECTING DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE

Nigeria's democracy has all it takes to enhance development for the generality of the people. It has institutions such as the legislature, executive and judiciary which should act as a watchdog over each other for the purposes of equity, transparency and accountability in governance. The civil society organization, mass media amongst others are not left out of this all important function. However, Nigeria's democracy as well as that of Benue State remains unstable since the return to democratic rule in 1999. The political atmosphere has been faced with a lot of challenges in realizing true democracy capable of providing the desired development for the people. These challenges include though not restricted to the following.

The Problem of Godfatherism

One of the major problems bedevils the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and Benue State in particular is politics of godfatherism which has become in norm in Nigerian political calculation. Godfatherism simply refers to process where political gladiators and kingmakers manipulate the electoral process to enthrone their crowned or anointed political apostles. In order words, it is game where political heavy weight at each election decides who take what position and this is usually done without recourse to merit and the person's capability to deliver but for personal gain. Thus, people without vision and mission are smuggled into position of authority regardless to whether they have the competence. These categories of people do not have development on their

agenda due to lack of focus and direction. They operate purely on the detect of their political godfathers. Ogundiya, (2010) in Oyadiran and Nweke, (2017) asserts that godfatherism is both a symptom and at the same time the cause of violence and corruption that collectively permeates the Nigerian political process. He adds that public officers who are clothes with these positions of authority through the effort of their political godfathers incur debts which are often paid throughout their tenure. The treasury of the state is usually personalized. Infact their activities further serves as constraints obstructing every element of true democratic values in the society thereby blocking the selection of visionary and qualified candidates for elective posts thereby making things difficult and more challenging.

This is direct replica of the Benue scenario where people get into leadership positions through imposition of candidate which undermining the electoral process. The electoral process that brought Governors, George Akume, Gabriel Suswam and Samuel Ortom into power can be explained from this perspective. The PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) under which platform they emerged as leaders is known for electoral malpractices (George- Genyi, 2013). This has resulted in lengthy legal battles over the election results, limiting the money available to the government, which could otherwise be used to meet the state's developmental needs.

Lack of Continuity of Policies and Programs by Successive Administrations

Nigerian governments, in general, and Benue State in particular, have struggled with issues of lack of engagement and continuity. This has had an effect on policy and program sustainability, as successive chief executives either abandon or seriously slow down infrastructure programs initiated by their predecessors. A practical example is the tomato Juice Company in Wannue initiated by George Akume's administration which has been abandoned by his successors. This kind of project and several others if completed has the capacity to improve the living conditions of the people thereby reducing poverty in Benue State. However this project has suffered several policy reversals and false starts. Annual budgets however carry these projects without fully executing them.

Lack of Maintenance Culture

Maintenance of government infrastructure is common feature of most administrations in Nigeria and Benue State. Infrastructural facilities in both primary and post-primary school as across the state are dilapidated due to lack of maintenance over the years. Some administrations according to George-Genyi (2013) have visibly display reckless spending of public resources for private personal use. She added further that that the governance project is quite expensive as those in government, both the executive and the legislative engage in scandalous, conspicuous consumption lifestyles at the detriment of the provision of social services to

the people who continue to wallow in abject poverty. The people are also to blame since they cannot protect infrastructural facilities within their domain. Some of the transformers provided by the successive governments in Benue State to boost economic activities are often vandalized thereby frustrating the effort of government in this regard.

Corruption

Corruption has been identified as one of the major constraints to good governance and development in Nigeria. The World Bank (1997) and Kassahun (2011) equate corruption with abuse of public power for private gain, or to place oneself in such a position that gives him or her undue advantage. The country Nigeria has lost a huge fortune to corruption both during the military and civilian administrations (Karl, 2000 and Peel, 2009). This has made John Campbell, USA Ambassador to Nigeria to remark that corruption is a clog in the wheel of any nation struggling for the enthronement and consolidation of democracy and good governance (Oyadiran and Nweke, 2017). Corruption retard development of any society, resources that usually should be allocated for developmental project are diverted by those in position of authority. In 2012, the then Central Bank Governor Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi blows whistle that the NNPC has failed to remit the sum of 20 billion dollars to the federation account (The Nation, 2012). Instead of the federal government to investigate this corruption allegation the CBN governor was rather sacked. The former governor of Delta state Chief James Ibori was convicted by a UK court for embezzling over £50.4 billion from the public treasury of Delta State (Udoms and Atakpa, 2017). This made Transparency International to consistently ranked Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Benue State is also not free from corruption cases the former Governor of the State Senator Gabriel Suswam and his former Commissioner for Finance Omadachi Oclobia appears before the Federal High Court in Abuja for embezzling public funds meant for the development of the state even though these cases has not been proven but it has shown that there was some element of mismanagement of public funds during the last administration in the state.

VII. CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, it is clear that democratic governance in Nigeria and Benue State has failed to achieve the development goals set out in 1999. Political leadership in Nigeria and Benue State in particular must exhibit high sense of sincerity capable of fostering good governance and development. The political atmosphere must be reformed to accommodate the interest of the people rather than the political class. Effort must be made by those in position of authority to surmount challenges affecting the development of the Benue economic. As this will invariably counter poverty, unemployment, and increase the people's standard of living to a large degree. Since the abuse of political power is not in

consonance with the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy.

The Benue State government must ensure that attention is paid to the resuscitation of moribund industries in the state. As a result, the economy will certainly be resurrected, with a multiplier impact on other facets of society.

The National Assembly and the President must be more proactive when it comes to electoral reforms that ensure the prosecution of electoral offenders. As a result, political heavyweights would be less likely to use thugs to manipulate the democratic process to benefit their political allies. This will undoubtedly enable visionary and high-focus individuals to run for office without fear of being harassed by those who feel threatened. By this, only credible persons will find themselves into governance.

It is the responsibility of citizens especially tomorrow's leaders, the youth, to hold their leaders accountable and ensure that they keep to their manifestos and promises of good leadership and democratic governance during electioneering campaigns. By so doing development will not only be heard but seen and felt by the people.

REFERENCES

- [1] Anger, B (2002). Ethnical problems in Nigeria's democratic experience: A critical analysis. *Africa Journal of economy and society* vol. 4no 1&2.
- [2] Anger, B. (2013). Towards a peaceful intral and inter –party relations in Benue State. *Nigerian Journal of Political and Administrative Studies* vol.1 no 1.
- [3] Atim, T. (2007). *George Akume Oasis in the Savannah*. Lagos McDee Communication Limited.
- [4] Bardhan, P. (2002). "Decentralization of Governance and Development" in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*,16(4): 185-205.
- [5] Bello-Imam, I.B., Obadan, M. I., (2004) (ed): *Democratic Governance and Development Management in Nigeria Fourth Republic 1999-2003*. Ibadan, Centre for Local government and rural development studies.
- [6] Bratton, M. & Walle, N.V (1997). *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Cardoso, F.H (2001). "Democracy as a Starting Point" in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 12 No. 1 pp5-14
- [8] Dajo, U. (2019). Civil society organisations and educational development in Benue State, Nigeria. Unpublished PhD thesis Department of Sociology Benue State University Makurdi.
- [9] Dye, T.R & Zeigler, H. (2003). *The Irony of Democracy*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- [10] Gana, A.T (1996). *The promise of liberal democracy in Africa: the Nigerian betrayal*. Jos African Centre for Democratic Governance. (AFRIGOV).
- [11] George-Genyi, M. E (2013). Democratic Governance and Sustainable Development in Benue State of Nigeria Since 1999. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 3 No. 11; June pp155-160.
- [12] Ikoye, T. (2019). *At the tipping point of failed state: the politics of governance and democracy in Benue State of Central Nigeria* retrieve online on the 3rd January 2021 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335834692>
- [13] Jamo, I.A (2010). "Democracy and Development in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges". Proceedings of the 2010 International Conference on the Global Financial Crises and Africa's Quest for Development, Faculty of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- [14] Kassahun, S. (2011). Good governance: An Antidote to Corruption. *African Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 13 (5), 201-224.
- [15] Mahajan, V. D (2008). *Political Theory*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House pvt Ltd.
- [16] Majekodunmi, A. (2012) Democratization and Development in Nigeria: The Fourth Republic in Perspective. *International Journal of Academic Research in Economic and Management Science*. Vol. 1, No 5.
- [17] Molutsi, P. (n.d). *Tracking progress in democracy and governance around the World: Lessons and Methods*. Retrieved February 2, 2021 from unpan1.un.org/.../un/unpan005784.pdf
- [18] Oguniya, S (2010). Corruption the bane of democratic stability in Nigeria., *Journal of social science* 2(4) 233-241.
- [19] Oke, L. (2005). Globalization, Democracy and women empowerment: Issues and Challenges in Nigeria in Olufayo, Olulolu (ed) *Perspective on Globalization and African Development*. Lagos Bolabay Publications.
- [20] Okpaga, A. (1999). "The post –colonial state in Africa and the prospect for development and democracy" in Sorkaa A, P. (ed) *Nigerian Journal of politics and administrative studies* vol.1
- [21] Olodape, B.C. and Olopade, D.O. (2010). *The Impact of Government Expenditure on Economic growth and Development in Developing Countries. Nigeria as Case Study*. An unpublished manuscript.
- [22] Oyadiran, P.A and Nweke, O.I (2017) Challenges of Democratic consolidation in Nigeria 1999-2014 in Ezonbi etal *The fourth republic in Nigeria Governance and development*. Lagos Bahiti & Dalila Publishers.
- [23] Peel, M. (2009), *A Swamp full of Dollar: Pipelines and Paramilitaries at Nigeria's oil frontier*. Ibadan: Bookcraft.
- [24] Pine, A. (2010). (ed) *Millstones in Leadership. Essays in Honor of Governor Gabriel Suswam*. Makurdi, Aboki Publishers.
- [25] Przeworski, A. Alvarez, M.E, Cheibub, J.A, & Limongi, F. (2000). *Democracy and Development; Political Institutions and Well-being in the World 1950-1990*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [26] Rosen, M. & Wolf, J., (1999). *Political thought*. Oxford University press.
- [27] Saka B. and Dajo, U. (2017). The Impact of Nigeria-China Relations on Development in Nigeria 1970-2017. *Zaria Sociological Journal* 5(1) 82-98.
- [28] Sen ,A. K (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [29] Seward, V.I., (1998). *Terms of Democracy*. Polity press USA
- [30] Siegle, J. (2006). Why democracy is central to prosperity and peace. *Auslands Informationen* The Nation, Monday August 13 2012
- [31] Udoms, B.E. & Atakpa, O.E (2017). Democracy good governance and economic development in Nigeria. Challenges and prospects in Ezonbi eta l (ed) *the fourth republic in Nigeria: Governance and development*. Lagos Bahiti and Dalila publishers.
- [32] Ugwu, L.O. (2017) Democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria. The challenges of leadership in Ezonbi eta l (ed) *the fourth republic in Nigeria: Governance and development*. Lagos Bahiti and Dalila publishers.
- [33] United Nations Development Programmes (1991). *Human Development Report*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [34] World Bank (1997). *World Development Report: The State in the changing world*. Washington DC World Bank.