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Deepening Democracy for Sustainable Development: An Assessment of the Presidential System of Government in Nigeria.

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Abstract:
Nigeria is yet to utilize its intrinsic potentials for effective transformation of the economy, leading to endless conversations on the possible causation of the absence of tangible development in various aspects of the economy. Nevertheless, there were suggestions that the operationalization of the presidential system of democratic administration impedes sustainable development in Nigeria because of its resultant high cost on governance implications. Recent debates on the appropriate democratic system of administration that the country should adopt have focused more on whether Nigeria should continue with the presidential system or revert to the previous parliamentary type adopted at the wake of independence for sustainable development. In essence, much literature on government and development has not paid adequate attention to the impact of the presidential system on sustainable development in Nigeria. Thus, the inability of the system to transform the economy and activate the necessary economic and political indicators required for sustainable development led to gaps in the socio-economic and political development in Nigeria. Essentially, this study attempts to examine the presidential system in relation to its impact on capital expenditures. Consequently, secondary sources of data collection were used to explore information from government, democracy, and sustainable development literature, journals, textbooks, official documents, news articles, and internet sources. Key informant interviews were conducted with key democratic institutions and individuals, and the gathered data was qualitatively analyzed using the content analysis method. The study shows a significant level of influence of the above identified issues on sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper, concludes that the presidential system of democratic administration in Nigeria is fraught with an overbloated structure that exerts a burden of high cost of governance implications on the economy. However, the reduction in size and structure of the presidential system reduces recurrent expenditure, and funds are saved through increased funding for capital projects. Thus, issues impeding sustainable development are being addressed.
Key words: Presidential System, Democracy, Sustainable Development, Parliamentary system, Government.

Background:

The near absence of development is one of the major challenges confronting not only Nigeria but many other developing countries in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the necessity to address this profound challenge has led to a deep search for effective remedies to this fundamental problem through deliberate government

policies and intervention mechanisms. Among other factors identified as inhibiting meaningful and sustainable development in Nigeria is the presidential system of democratic administration. Essentially, these factors impact the developmental trajectory due to bloated budgetary allocations and their associated high cost of governance. However, the presidential system of government has been identified as one of the key areas in the economy that requires serious attention before meaningful development is achieved across all sectors of the economy.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio-de-Janerio in 2012 had as its overall objective the promotion of a set of universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political, and economic challenges facing the world (UN 2022). Although the SDGs have 17 goals structured around the 5 pillars of the 2030 agenda-People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships. It builds upon the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which focused on how to eliminate all forms of poverty, and the goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, whether poor, rich, or middle-income, to promote prosperity while protecting the planet (UN 2022). However, due to a wide gap in developmental efforts in Nigeria, the presidential system of government has come under serious attack by reformist elements whose shared opinion suggests that for the country to surmount the avalanche of problems hindering its development, the presidential system of democratic administration in Nigeria needs to be reformed. Consequently, there has been clamor from various quarters about the need to look inward and reform the system of administration to enable growth in key areas of the economy for sustainable development. The presidential system of government, with its bloated structure, increases recurrent expenditure budget that has affected capital expenditure. A factor that exerts much pressure on the running cost of governance. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that this paper evaluates the presidential system of government in Nigeria and its impact on the bloated recurrent expenditure which tends to affect democratic dividends with respect to sustainable development in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts

Presidential System of Government: In the presidential system of government, the president is elected by voters under a fixed mandate and is not dependent on legislative confidence and directs government. It

evolved from America as a system of government through which democracy is operated and sustained, and one of the greatest contributions of America to the political system. A close look at the definition of the presidential system offered by Langkham (2007) suggests a kind of distinction between two key roles found in representative government. These roles include that of heads of state and that of heads of government who appoint ministers responsible only to the president and not members of the legislative organ. The countries that operate the presidential system include the USA, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone,Senegal, Malawi, among others (Anyebe, 2016).

Sustainable Development: The United Nations' frequently quoted concept of sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations General Assembly, 1987, p. 1). 1). 45, cited in Emas, 2015). However, in spite of its pervasiveness and the massive popularity it has garnered over the years, the concept is still not clear as it raises questions about its meaning and history, as well as what it entails for development theory and practice (Mensah, 2019).Similarly,the Brundtland Commission Report (1987) conceived sustainable development as the type of development that fulfills the requirements of the present generation without necessarily compromising the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). Sustainable development can be viewed as a development paradigm as well as a concept that is environmentally friendly (Gossling and Goldsmiths, and Chang, 2019). Here, the concept of sustainable development involves a two-way relationship between development and the environment, and it has to do with maintaining a delicate balance between the human need to improve lifestyle and feelings of well-being on one hand, and preserving natural resources and ecosystems for the future.

Parliamentary System of Government: The parliamentary system of government is a type of political administration that has the Prime Minister as the head of government or bears other titles such as Chancellor or Premier (Ajayi and Fashagba, 2012). In the parliamentary system, the Prime Minister is not elected directly by the electorate but by virtue of being the leader of the party in the majority in the parliament. In contrast to the presidential system where the President is elected by the people for a fixed term of four

years in office. Here, neither the president nor his ministers is accountable to the parliament or congress, as the case may be.

Theoretical Perspective

Theory of Unilateral Action: The foundation of presidential success is a function of how much power the president exercises. According to Neustadt (cited in Moe and Howell, 1999), the president's unilateral actions could be determined by the fact that since the turn of the century, strong parties have weakened. Presidents appear to have gained stature and flexibility as entrepreneurial political leaders, and as such, have had the incentives as well as the opportunities to be assertive and to seek the power to accomplish their goals. With the recent increase in popular participation in politics, there is a high level of demand for positive government responses to pressing social problems in terms of development. Consequently, the tendency to hold presidents responsible for the success and failures of government has put much pressure on presidents to expand their power in whatever ways they can. However, this explains the general condition of Nigeria's economy and why political patronage to party members by the government in power inflates recurrent expenditure of the government, leading to a high cost of governance.

Presidential System and Cost of Government:

Nigeria has been spending much on public administration because the country runs one of the largest governments in the world with three levels of government, which consist of the federal and state governments. At the federal level, the president is constitutionally empowered to appoint 37 ministers each from the 36 states as well as Abuja. Similarly, at the state level, governors are constitutionally allowed to appoint not fewer than 12 commissioners. At both levels, the president and the governors find ways of circumventing even these large constitutional limits by adding a coterie of special advisers and numerous idle aides. In addition, the country has over 700 local governments, and when factored in with the vast expenditure of the National Assembly, it is a recipe for economic and financial disasters at all levels of government.[1]

A respondent noted that:

[1] Interview conduct with an officer in National Democratic Institute, Abuja

> However, however, the high cost of governance has been identified as one of the major issues surrounding the debate against the presidential system of government in Nigeria.(KII/NDI/Abuja/2023)

This could be responsible for the call by most Nigerians for the necessity to reform the system because of the cost implications it has on sustainable development in the country. According to Onyishi and Emeh (2013) the federal government maintains more than 23 ministries apart from commissions headed by ministers, which have over 50 departments (parastatals), and about twice this figure of agencies could account for about twice the number of departments. They further observed that MDAs maintain payrolls of several thousands of unaccounted workers (ghost workers), thereby exerting so much pressure on lean government resourcesthrough overbloated civil service system, duplication of offices and functions, as well as excessive political patronage that tends to compel governments at all levels to spend more on recurrent expenditure than on capital projects. As a respondent noted:

> Prof. Anya O. Anya warned the federal government about overspending on recurrent issues. The country was spending more than 70 percent of its total revenue on public administration. However, of the 30 percent balance, which should be used for capital projects, at least 15 percent is lost through policy slippages and widespread corruption.[2]
> (KII/NDI/Abuja/2023)

Perhaps this explains why vital infrastructure projects, such as roads and electricity supply, are in short supply in the country. Also, a respondent observed that

> the presidential system is expensive because of the large number of persons brought into government and the amount they collect at the end of the

[2] An officer in National Democratic Institute Abuja

month[3](KII/PDP/Abuja/2023).

Therefore, many have advocated for the reformation of the presidential system of democratic administration for sustainable development in the country because of its large governance structure leading to huge cost implications on the economy. Again, the election is another area where the presidential system of government drains the economy of the country. Akintoye (2016) was critical of the enormous power of the president or the governor, which appears to explain why the political process under the presidential system appears far more expensive, with country-wide presidential and state-wide gubernatorial elections, and national assembly elections that tend to encourage corruption in the political life of the country. This is because the system has made the positions of the president and governors so desirable to politicians that the quest for them has become a major source of conflict and confusion in the political system. Furthermore, the preponderance of elected legislators across the three levels of government has a negative impact on the economy. Public funds, such as security votes and contingency funds, under the disposal of the president, encourage fiscal indiscipline as they are not subject to legislative scrutiny and public audit. The aftermath of all these inadequacies is reflected in the absence of sustainable development in the country.

Reform and Inclusive Development.

The unique role and structure of a democratic state suggest that the actions and policies of the state have a major impact on the lives of the people and the level of development in such a state (MacLean and Wood, 2010). In addition, those seeking control over the state are often those who seek to implement radical programs of social change (Knuttila & Kubik, 2000). However, there have been various attempts by previous regimes to reform the system and make it more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the citizens. The Buhari administration was committed to radically reform, modernize, and move the nation forward (Buhari Election Manifesto 2015). Also, the Babangida Political Bureau of 1987 was set up to fashion another system of government because of the failure of the 'imported political institutions" to meet the exigencies of nation-building. The outcome of the Bureau's effort was a thorough overhaul of the presidential system in the second republic, instead of the expected outcome of a new model of political administration (Fatile, 2003). According to a respondent,

[3] An official of People Democratic Party, Secretariat Abuja.

> there may be nothing wrong with the Nigerian character, though the country is not doing well as a nation. 62 years after independence, we remain stuck at the level of fundamentals. But what appears to be the issue in nation-building in Nigeria is basically associated with policy somersault (KII/Partners CLEEN Foundation/Abuja/2023).

So, the necessity for government decisions to impact on development corroborates MacLean & Wood's (2010) argument that decisions, actions, and policies taken within the structure of the polity can impact seriously on other institutions of society and also on the lives of the people. In realization of the need for this drastic measure for an effective system of government, a respondent noted that

> the PDP in 2015 promised to reduce the size of government and to restructure too. Also, the APC who are in power now have come back to power again at the center, but how about the restructuring they promised in 2014 (KII/NDI/Abuja/202).

Speaking on the nature of development we have in Nigeria, a respondent noted that:

> development in Nigeria is not yet progressive it appears to exclude than to include the people who are supposed to be the centre of development it impairs by the inherent but resolvable contradictions'[4](KII/NDI/Abuja/2023).

The implication is that we are developing, far below our possible capacity, the development is not as far and fast as possible'[5] with massive impact on the lives of an average citizen in the country. Therefore, it is

[4] Partners with Cleen Foundation a public Affairs Analyst/Freelance journalist in Abuja.

[5] An officer in National Democratic Institute Abuja.

pertinent to understand that the large size of the bureaucracy does not account for the huge cost of running the country. So many unnecessary, wasteful, and ill-advised adventures of government officials contribute to the high cost of governance as well. This is another dimension of corruption engaged by government officials A respondent eloquently argued that:

> why development has become elusive' in Nigeria is because much of what the system allows affects development, which creates enmity among the peoples make it difficult for them to speak with one voice[6] (KII/NILDS/Abuja/2023).

Our analysis reveals one critical issue that will need to be given attention if Nigeria is to achieve sustainable development: public office holders are driven by self-seeking economic and political interests rather than the provision of public goods. This could partly explain why institutional failure characterised the political systemand hinders the achievemnet of sustainable developemnt in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The context under which a system of government operates and sustains development in a democracy is very important. The presidential system of government is quite reasonable for the advancement of democracy since under the system various countries have recorded tangible improvements in major sectors of their economies. Such could be the case with Nigeria when the presidential system is considered on the basis of its objective to improve the basic needs of the people and foster sustainable development.

Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Initiate and enforce legal provisions that make public office less lucrative and ensure their remuneration is on par with that of civil servants. It will help to reduce the cost of governance and save more money for capital projects to boost sustainable development in Nigeria. So, there should be a deliberate effort by the government to encourage and sustain good governance through accountability for those in positions of authority.

[6] An official of the Nigerian Institute of Legislative and Democratic Studies, Abuja.

2. Government at all levels should explore the possibiilty of structural reform in the system of administrstion based on policy areas to ensure that governance responsibilities align with specific functions and priorities such as developmental needs of the people.

3. Delibreate effort by government to promote transparency, accountability, and adherence to legal procedures in the management of government resources to address issues of cost of governance

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