DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND CHALLENGES OF LEGISLATIVE POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

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Abstract
Democracy is consolidated when the three organs of government (especially the legislature), channel their functions towards socio-economic and political advancement. These advancements especially the aspects of employment creation, provision of good road networks, electricity, pipe borne water and other infrastructural developments, would alleviate hardship on the citizenry. Most of these amenities are provided with the assistance of the legislature. The presence of these, suggests a real democratic consolidation. Therefore, this paper examines democratic consolidation and challenges of legislative politics in Nigeria from 1999-2011. Methodologically, data for this paper were generated mainly from secondary sources of recorded human documents. Accordingly, democracy in Nigeria cannot be consolidated amidst high level legislative bickering and hooliganism that characterized the nation’s parliament. Hence, it is a game of selfishness versus furtherance of one’s economic aggrandizement amongst the legislators, living the innocent citizens to die in cold blood with irrelevant bills passed almost on daily basis. As such, members of the National Assembly are not helping the country in any way due to the fact that 28% of Nigeria’s overhead cost is been spent on them, thereby leaving most sectors of the economy to suffer untold setback. Finally, the paper suggests that a true federation, institutional rebuilding and effective distribution of social welfare, should be adopted and practiced as conditions for democratic consolidation in Nigeria today.

Keywords: Legislature, Democracy, Political Economy, Politics, Nigeria, Oil.

Introduction
Democracy is not inimical to any-well organized chosen form of government, but legislative ineptitude, anchored on administrative quagmire and unprecedented quest for personal aggrandizement, are profound enemies of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which are symbols of democracy. Democracy in Nigeria was first shabbily operated in the first republic (1960-1966), under a parliamentary institution that was characterized by legislative contrapuntalities (Godwin, 2003:45). The collapse of civil democratic rule after independence in January 1966 was followed by 13 years of military rule. Civil rule resumed for four years (1979-1983) after hand-over in
1979, only to prove another brief civil interregnum, to be followed by 16 straight years of harsh military rule. According to (Okongwu, 2006:87), that period, the second bout of military rule (1983-1999) was home to the most traumatic period of our country, since the tragic civil war. It witnessed three military coups (1983, 1985, 1993), three attempted coups (1985, 1990, 1997), an annulled presidential election (1993) and the death in office of a sitting military head of state (1998). After all these tumultuous events, the Nigerian military had sapped itself and burnt its goodwill over a costly political escapade.

Accordingly, there was again another civil rule that came up, following political elections conducted in 1999 by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar’s Government, in which Olusegun Obasanjo was elected the president. The Obasanjo’s government operated with the full swing of a two-chamber legislature that superintended over fundamental issues of national importance. The legislature being the institutional pillar of democracy is well recognized in any democratic setting. This is as a result of the critical role it plays within the framework of separation of powers. While it’s primary responsibility is of law-making, the executive implements and the judiciary plays the role of the adjudicator in disputes between the other branches of government, so critical is the role of the legislature, that emphasis can be made without fear of contradiction that the history, growth and consolidation of democracy anywhere is intricately tied with the role of the parliament and how legislative assemblies attempt to give meaning to peoples’ political power (Bankole, 2009:12).

Also, the Legislature has an important responsibility in the creation of people-oriented public policy, and in the monitoring of the implementation of such by the Executive, because it is only when it works in unison, devoid of rancour, that it can actualize the greatest possible good for the greatest number of people, within the shortest period of time. The immediate responsibility of the Legislature, if it is to play its expected role in consolidation of democracy, is to strengthen and build its own internal capacity in several domains. These include building its capacity especially the key legislative committees to effectively engage in policy analysis, budget analysis and monitoring, and in the oversight functions of the Executive, etc.

Further, legislators (individually and collectively), are constitutionally charged with the responsibility of appraising themselves in the area of law-making, representation and oversight functions, aimed at ensuring a virile democracy on ground. More essentially, the Legislature plays the role of deepening democracy by ensuring that citizens and the civil society are brought into the mainstream of public policy and are given the fair hands to execute such policies (as and when due). Consolidation of democracy requires the strengthening of democratic infrastructure: Subordination of the polity to the rule of law; Strengthening of party politics and political education; Supporting electoral institutions; Encouraging debate and dialogue in the resolution of disputes; Provision of some social services and Liberalized economy.

However, in Nigeria, as democratic forms of politics were re-introduced on the back of the collapse of military and single party rule in 1999, greater political premium was placed on the national assembly placing tremendous consent on its role, in the building and consolidation of democracy in the country’s politics and governance. Implicit in this was the position, broadly, shared by Olufemi, (2010:45), that the legislature is the embodiment of the sovereignty of the people in any democratic setting, such as Nigeria. In this respect, it constitutionally makes laws for the welfare of the generality of the populace and also serves both as a democratically-
empowered agency of restraint on the executive arm of government and a forum for the mobilisation of popular participation in the broad governmental process.

The fundamental issue is that: Has the Nigerian Legislature put in its best to consolidate democracy in the country? This consolidation if not channeled towards improving the socio-economic and political well-being of the citizenry, can lead to mangrove anarchy.

**Conditions for Consolidating Democracy**

Democracy is one of the strongest pillars of actualizing a lasting development in the post-colonial state Africa. Hence, Ogunjobi, (2007:43), postulates that it does not exist nor vibrantly operate in a vacuum; there are certain conditions that copiously embellish its operational mechanism and attendant stability in expected areas of human development. These conditions however are sharply different from the basic characteristic features of a true democracy. The implication of this however, is that these conditions, if taking into considerations, enhance the harmonious stability of democracy, viz-a-viz the socio-economic and political platform upon which it operates. Such conditions as postulated by Bankole, (2009:23) are as follows:

- **Facilitating economic growth:** Consolidation of fundamental democratic infrastructure is largely dependent on the ability of the government to improve the economic condition through economic growth, investment in the productive sector, provide equal opportunities to its citizens, and provide employment opportunities within a globalizing world. In this regards, the government is committed to fostering a new economic order that will provide the necessary support for consolidation of democracy in the country.

- **Globalization:** Any discussion of economic growth today and investment drive has to take into account the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization, as observed by some scholars, is the intensification of the integration of the world economy, accentuated by the growth of global financial market; the cessation of the cold war; the growth of corporate activities of multinational companies, information, communication and transportation technology revolutions; internationalization of environmental problems; increasing intervention of the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organization (WTO) in national and regional economic and trade crises; and the assertiveness of the UN in resolving world political, social and economic problems. The world economy is completely integrated.

With globalization, national economic policies are largely determined by outside institutions, namely IMF, World Bank and WTO that are taking keen interest in national policies and are very forceful in their prescriptions. In most cases, agenda of these institutions or their focus on micro and macroeconomic policies does not take into account residual social policies, which might have serious political consequences for the body politic. For instance, is the withdrawal of oil subsidy by Nigerian government on 1st January, 2012. This policy generated a tumultuous scenario such as general mass protests across the country, nationwide strike by the Nigerian Labour Congress, Arson, looting , to mention but a few.

However, Nigeria, which is the least beneficiary of globalization, can, with entrenched democratic values and improved investment climate, participate fruitfully in the globalization process.
• Guaranteeing peace, security and containing conflict: Peace and security are fundamental for consolidating democracy. These two pillars of any development process have been of serious concern to any government of the day. Soon after the establishment of democracy in the country, religious and ethnic crises began to re-emerge with intensity. Religious and sectarian crises emerged in Kaduna, Jos, Kano, Adamawa, Niger, Kebbi, Gombe, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Borno and Benin. Ethnic crises in Lagos, Benue and Taraba while restiveness continued in Niger Delta. The magnitude and intensity of the clashes were unprecedented. Although the clashes are seen to be either ethnic or religious, they are in reality political, promoted by various forces and interests.

So far approaches to containing ethnic crises have been using either the military or the traditional and community rulers to intervene - another approach which seems to be promising is investing in democracy. It has been observed that the situation of conflict in Nigeria can only be contained with entrenchment of democracy in the country.

• Professionalizing the military: In its effort to professionalize the military in Nigeria, the civilian government first retired 93 senior officers who had held political appointments during the previous military regimes, whose continued retention in the services was considered not conducive to the grooming of a new and truly professional armed forces. Many of the retired officers served as ministers or as military governors of the 36 states. Furthermore, in 2001, three service chiefs were retired and replaced with Major Gen. Ogomudia as Chief of Army Staff; Rear Admiral Samuel Afolayan as Chief of Naval Staff and Air Vice Marshal Jonas Wuyep as Chief of Air Force. Between 2001 and 2011, the office of the president- Commander in Chief of Armed Forces mof the Federal Republic of Nigeria, has appointed and retired other service chiefs and top military officers with Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika, Gen. Azazi, etc as some current service chiefs. Again, all legitimate professional needs of the military, notably adequate funding, proper equipment and training on the use of modern weapons are given special attention. By this, the military is expected to limit itself to its constitutional role of defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. All these, is to make a stronger situation for the military to accord legitimacy to the democratic government of the day, other than plotting coups to topple the government of the day.

• Capacity building for Bureaucratic Development: One disturbing observation is the seemingly weak performance of civil service in new democracies in advancing the fight against poverty. This has implications for consolidation of democracy. To this extent, Efficient and effective civil service, guided by professionalism and ethical conduct, is necessary for consolidation of democracy. They implement all government policies, including the process of liberalization of the economy and privatization of government parastatals. A weak, corrupt and demoralized civil service cannot cope with the challenges of development. In order to boost the morale of the civil servants and to enhance their financial status to face the challenge of democracy, a democratic government would always deem it necessary to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the working class in Nigeria polity. Hence, the withdrawal of oil subsidy on Jan 1st, 2012, was a sharp misrepresentation of the interest of the working class by government and a total situation of welfarist insensitivity by the so-called democratic administration of Goodluck Jonathan.

The legislature has operated in Nigeria between 2003 and 2011 under Obasanjo, Yar’adua and Jonathan’s Administrations’ respectively. A comprehensive report of the activities of the parliament between 2003/4 and 2007/8 has shown that a total number of 1,384 meetings were held by various members of house committee of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Out of this number, the senate committee holds a total of 969 meetings, while those of the House of Representatives held 415 meetings (Adetola, 2008:54). There was a rapid increase in the number of meetings. The senate committee met 45 times in 2003/4, about 60 times in 2004/5, 143 in 2005/6 and 751 times in 2007/8. Equally, the number of committee meetings increased at the lower house from 61 in 2003/4 and 74 in 2004/5, to 81 in 2005/6 and 199 in 2007/8. Between 2005/6 and 2007/8, the senate committee on rules and business met the most in 2007/8, with 181 meetings. The senate passed 272 bills, while the house of representative passed a total of 431 bills in the period under review. The 703 bills, which represented over 29% percent of the bills received in the period, included those presented to the National Assembly by the members and the executive. The senate passed 159 executive bills, and 113 members’ bills out of the 1,198 bills received from the executive and members respectively. The House of Representatives also passed 198 executive bills and 231 member’s bills out of the 342 and 827 bills which it had on its floor within the period, from the executive and members respectively (Bassey, 2009:32).

Between 2007 and 2011, the senate received 539 bills. Out of this, 89 bills were passed. Members bills presented were 399, while 41 of this were passed. In the same period under review, 140 executive bills were presented and 37 out of this number were passed. Agena, (2010:37), relates that the senate between 2003 and 2009 referred 340 bills to the various in-house committees, while 63 bills were transmitted to the lower house for concurrence. Equally, at the House of Representatives, 731 representing 99.6 percent of its total bills of 734 went through first reading while 568, about 77.4 percent beat the second reading. With 23 bills withdrawn by the lower house 27 were negative bills. A total of 461 bills, representing 62.8 percent were referred to house committees and 35 were transmitted from the senate for concurrence. Twenty-one senate committees had a total of 34 public hearings in the 2007/8 parliamentary years. While that on judiciary human rights and legal matters had the highest number of five women and youth development, national security and intelligence followed with four and three hearings respectively. Most of the committees had one hearing each within the period.

Between 2007 and 2008, 45 members of the senate committee held a total of 335 interactive sessions with public accounts, federal character and intergovernmental affairs and appropriation having 52, 30 and 30 interactive sessions respectively. In 2010, the 45 committees in the lower house had a total of 66 interactive sessions. The Senate committee on the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) recorded a whopping 1,500 petitions out of the total 1,950 petitions received between 2007 an 2008. Petition received by 12 committees in the House of Representative between 2007 and 2010 were about 620. The committee on public petitions expectedly received 407 petitions out of the number (Suberu, 2007:18).

Nigerian democracy and its institutions have managed to survive for past twelve years, though is democratically limping in all spheres of socio-economic and political endeavours. Between June 2007 and June 2011, the senate and National Assembly, witnessed some measures of socio-political and economic instabilities. The bills the senate received comprised executive and members bills including those from the House of Representative for concurrence of the 514 bills tabled before the senate 458 were read for the first time, 130 bills passed through the second
reading stage, while four were dropped during the period. Meanwhile, between the 1999 and 2011 legislative years, the National Assembly passed a total of 703 bills out of 2364 bills which it received in the period.

However, about 98.2% of the past bills represented the selfish interests of the national assembly members, executive arm, multi-national co-operations and other major players in the nation’s economy. The yearnings and aspirations of the down-trodden were swept under the carpet, hence, giving rise to unmanageable situation of unemployment and other forms of socio-economic hardships on the citizenry. With this scenario, would Nigeria still claim that it is democratizing? Would the National Assembly members claim to be representing us selflessly and with profound dedication? How would the working class survive in this era of unconsolidated presidential democracy?

The effort to establish the House as a major institution of democracy in service of the Nigerian people has proved to be a slow and difficult one. Having inaugurated the Seventh Session of the House of Representatives, we hope that effective measures would be taken to meet and surpass the expectations of the people as to represent their utmost interests. According to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aminu Tambuwal, the Seventh House of Representatives seeks to build a new image for the legislature – a strong, vibrant and effective legislature, able to assert itself as an important partner with other arms of government in the delivery of good governance, due process and rule of law. The legislative agenda of the House will aim at reviving and diversifying the economy, generating employment, strengthening our national security, curbing corruption, tackling the electricity crisis and general infrastructural decay that confront us, improving our health and educational sectors and work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The agenda will also emphasize the importance of amending the Constitution to address several areas of concern, will be people-centred and correspond to the expectations of Nigerians.

The following issues, he further states, will be the priorities of the Seventh Session of the House of Representatives:

1. Initiate a new order that would foster transparency leading to institutional integrity through efficiency of public expenditure management.

2. Restructure management and functions of legislative committees towards adequacy in capacity and improved productivity.

3. Design and implement the e-parliament blueprint that would elevate National Assembly to international best practices and ensure public access to parliamentary information and processes.

4. Review legislative branch budget in line with the requirements of openness, effectiveness and accountability.

5. Review the constitution in all relevant areas to facilitate the implementation of the House of Representatives legislative agenda and in line with the aspirations of Nigerians.

6. Engage actively with other arms of government to restore public order and national security, and
7. Institutionalize mechanisms that will facilitate more effective engagement with various stakeholders including constituents and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The Seventh Session of the House of Representatives recognizes the concerns raised by Nigerians about the cost of running the National Assembly. The House, he maintained, will be more transparent regarding all public funds spent for the purpose of paying the salaries and allowances of legislators and ensure that distinction is sufficiently made between what a legislator actually earns and what is spent to run and implement legislative business and Committee activities. The watchword in financial issues will be fiscal conservatism.

The promotion of a viable and robust national economy form the focus of the House of Representatives as it works to support the emergence of a strong Nigerian economy. The Seventh Session of the House of Representatives will put in place legislative measures to achieve the best development outcome from government spending, including promotion of economic growth and social welfare.

The thrust of the national budget should be:

– Effective prioritization of spending on programmes within the national budget

– Ensuring that adequate resources are available for spending on priority capital projects

– Adoption of an effective Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)

– Effective monitoring of spending and of outcomes achieved – value for money.

The monitoring of budgets to achieve value for money and delivery on promise will be of importance to the House and mechanisms will be put in place to achieve best practices based on the following: The House will also emphasize on a budgetary process that improves efficiency. The emphasis will be on planning as a guide in the preparation of the annual budget. The sanctity of the budget and full implementation thereof will be an important aspect of the legislative agenda of the Seventh House of Representatives.

The constitutional provisions affecting the budgetary process and impacting on the application and implementation of the budget, including the provisions of section 81(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, that allows the President to lay the budget at anytime during the year, will be considered and proposed as part of constitution amendment process. The amendment is necessary to achieve the internationally recognized best practice of laying the budget before the Parliament at least three months before the end of a fiscal year.

All these measures, according to Tambuwal, are geared towards responding urgently to the dire yearnings and aspirations of the poverty saddled 75% greater majority of Nigerians who have been living between the hand and the mouth, amidst abundant natural resources.

The Role of Legislature in the Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria

Consolidating democracy is much more difficult than establishing it. Democracy was first established in Nigeria at independence, in 1960 and lasted until January 1966, when it was overthrown by military dictatorship. The military ruled until 1979 when it handed over power to
a democratically elected government of President Shehu Shagari. From 1979 to 1983, democracy was restored for the second time (Ayede 2009:68). Again, the military took over at the end of 1983 until 1999. Nigeria had worked so hard to establish a lasting democratic system: Various transition programmes by various military regimes were initiated and implemented. While some succeeded others had failed.

The difficulty of consolidating democracy in Nigeria can be attributed to certain basic facts: First, the military have tested political power and have overstayed in government, which made it difficult for them to easily disengage. The country has witnessed more dictatorship than democracy. The vestiges of military heritage still exist and it requires enormous effort to dismantle them. Second, managing democracy requires immense financial resources to sustain it in the face of inadequacies and crushing debts. John, (2004:54), emphasizes that the legislature and the electoral institutions have to be adequately funded to ensure the smooth running of the system. Besides, Nigeria operates presidential system of government which is more expensive to run than the parliamentary system. Further, the country is a federation of 36 states and the federal capital territory and 774 local governments. Both the federal and state governments have their own executive, legislature and judiciary. In addition, the federal government controls all the armed services. These require colossal expenditure to maintain.

The democratic institutions that are being consolidated are: the constitution, the legislature, the judiciary, political parties, electoral institutions, the press and the civil society. According to Joseph, (2008:19), democracy is being consolidated in Nigeria to ensure the realization and sustenance of the following:

(a) Guaranteeing of freedom for all against all forms of dictatorship. In a word, freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from disease as well as other forms of freedom associated with democracy.

(b) Transparency and accountability in the conduct of government business.

(c) Provision of equal opportunities to the citizens for their social, economic and political development

(d) Enhancing national unity

(e) Continuous improvement in the building of democratic institution as there is no targeted end of democracy.

Ordinarily, the important role assigned to the legislature in the renewed quest for democratic governance in Africa, and the high hopes of the populace in the office of the elected representative are issues which should be considered a routine part of democratic politics. However, in the context of Africa, they carried an added significance deriving from the fact that the legislative arm of government was perhaps the biggest loser from the decades of military and single party rule that pervaded Africa from the second half of the 1960s to the mid-1990s. All over the continent, as political authoritarianism took hold, the legislature was either proscribed out rightly or completely subordinated to the executive arm of government; legislative politics came to be severely underdeveloped in every sense. It is in part because of this underdevelopment that many (donor) initiatives were introduced in the period from the 1990s onwards to “build the capacity” of parliament in different parts of Africa. No doubt, there were, indeed, technical capacities in need of being developed. But clearly, the issues arising from the weaknesses of the legislature are not simply or only technical in nature; in fact, they are mainly – and perhaps overwhelmingly political in nature. These problems have manifested themselves in a variety of ways, including through the struggles for relative autonomy from the executive,
tensions arising from the tendency towards presidentialism in Africa’s new democracies, the
instability and fragmentation of political parties, the poor structuring of the relationship between
elected legislators and party bosses, the easy vulnerability of electoral systems to various kinds
of manipulation, the frequent resort by the executive to a “security” cover for riding roughshod
over parliament, the under-funding of parliament and poor harnessing of the funds available for
deepening the foundations of democratic politics, the erosion of the domestic policy environment
by donor conditionality, etc. In many ways, the institutional experiences of the legislature in the
contemporary quest for democratic renewal, both mirrors and summarizes the entire record of the
politics of the democratic process itself (CODESRIA Bulletin, 2006).

Therefore, the intricate legislative politics that characterized Nigerian democratic governance
from 1999 to 2011, has shown that the working class, the unemployed including students and
pupils, need a special grace to survive in this country. Hence, the politicking is deepening as the
days go by, strongly jeopardizing the chances of democratic survival in a specially blessed
country like Nigeria.

Democracy and the Nigeria Economy

Democracy is generally defined as a form of government in which the masses have equal say in
decisions that affect their affairs. These include equal participation in the proposal, development
and passage of legislation into law, likewise social, economic and cultural conditions that enable
free and equal practice of political self determination. Democracy must have as one of its basic
attributes a free and responsible press. The press in a democracy must be free in the sense that it
must not be the organ for the articulation of the interest of only those in power, but shall be
advocated of higher national interest that retard, undermine or decree the social weal and the
unifying bond that holds society together and guaranteed its solidarity integrity and sovereignty.

Previously hindered by years of mismanagement, economic reforms of the past decade have put
Nigeria back on track towards achieving its full economic potential. Lewis, (2011:32), states that
Nigeria’s GDP doubled from $170.7 billion in 2005 to $374.3 billion in 2010, although estimate
of the size of the informal sector put the actual numbers closer to 520 billion. Correspondingly,
the GDP per capita doubled from $1200 per person in 2005 to an estimated $2,500 per person in
2009 (again, with the inclusion of the sector, it is estimated that GDP per capita hovers around
$3,500 per person). It is the largest economy in the West Africa Region, 3rd largest economy in
Africa (behind South Africa and Egypt) and on track to becoming one of the top 30 economics in
the world in the early part of 2011.

Nigeria is making progress with economic reforms that are delivering strong economic
fundamentals. The government has maintained prudent macroeconomic policies, strengthened
financial institutions and, albeit slowly and unevenly, is undertaking reforms to transform the
economy structurally. The reform effort aided by revenue from high oil prices, in the views of
Ake, (2007:66), has led to significantly improved macroeconomic outcomes, including weaker
inflation and strong GDP growth. Real GDP growth rose from 7.0% in 2009 to an estimated
8.1% in 2010. The robust growth in 2010, the aftermath of the global financial and economic

Although much has been made of its status as major exporter of oil, Nigeria produces only about
3.3% of the world’s supply, though it is ranked as 15th in production of 2.2million barrels per
day (mbpd), the top 3 producers Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United States produce 10.7mbpd (16.8%), 9.8mbpd (15.4) and 8.5mbpd (13.4%) respectively, collectively accounting for 63.6mbpd (45.4%) of the world’s total production. To put oil revenues in perspective at an estimated export rate of 1.9mbpd, with a projected sales price of $65 per barrel in 2011, Nigeria’s anticipated revenue from petroleum is about $52.2billion. This accounts for less than 14% of official GDP figures (and drops to 10% when the informal economy is included in these calculations) Dike, (2011:23).

The oil revenues and the ensuing resource problem have also profoundly affected the political economy of Nigeria, both in economic and political terms. Excessive dependence on oil revenue has led to deteriorating social services, increased poverty, weak institutions, military coup and maladministration. Although a wide range of economic and political reforms have been formulated and implemented, most of them with donor support, the deep structural problems of the resource curse have hindered their efficient implementation and production for tangible outcomes.

In post independence, output in oil rose slowly to a modest source of income for the government. Soares (2007:171-172) affirms that during the oil boom years of the 1970s, Nigeria joined OPEC and billions of dollars generated by production in the oil-rich Niger-Delta flowed into the coffers of the Nigerian State. The 1980s were, however, a bleaker period for Nigeria in economic terms. Nigeria’s manufacturing sector declined sharply in the 1980s and the country, which was once a large net exporter of food, became importer of many of its food products. From 1973 to 1987 employment in all sectors were contracted, the only exception being the service sector, which includes government employment (Robinson et al. 2005:464). When the oil prices soared again in the early 1990s due to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, Nigeria’s oil production reached its peak.

Today, petroleum still plays a large role in the Nigerian economy, accounting for 40percent of GDP, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and about 65 percent of government revenues. However, despite the billions in oil profits generated for the country over the years, there are few signs of multiplier effects from the oil industry. Instead, the growth in poverty level has been catastrophic. The proportion of households living below the Untied Nation’s absolute poverty line of USD1 per day has grown from 27 percent in 1980 to 71 percent by 2011. Among those who live below the 1USD per day poverty line, over 65 percent are women (Humphreys et al. 2011:242).

Further, Nigeria has some of the poorest human development indicators in the world. Adejunmobi, (2010:22), affirms that one in five children dies before the age of five and almost 40percent- or 8million- of primary school-aged children are not in school. Almost 3million people are living with HIV/AIDS- the second largest number in any country in the world. Some states in Northern Nigeria have among the worst maternal mortality and girls’ primary school enrolment rates in the world. The prevailing economic conditions are characterized by a rural economy in extreme poverty and the absence of basic infrastructure and services (power, water and sanitation, roads, rails, primary health care).

In the early 2000s, with president Obasanjo and the civilian administration of the fourth republic, Nigeria started some substantial economic reforms. A variety of measures have been undertaken; including macroeconomic stability, deregulation, liberalization, privatization, transparency, and
anti-corruption. Obasanjo started the reforms by arresting officials accused of misdeeds, and in 2005 Nigeria began the slow process of recovering millions of illicit funds that had been deposited in Swiss banks by the military dictator Sani Abacha. In 2006, Nigeria also cleared the bulk of it debts owed to the Paris club, and all of its bilateral external debts were later repaid. The country then had a current account surplus and built up economic reserves, which were inadvertently mismanaged by the same administration, in the course of running a half-hazard presidential democracy (Pierre, 2009:28).

Again, there are no tangible signs that Nigeria’s economic growth and development are moving beyond petroleum exports (and the oil-dependent state administration) into manufacturing and industrial production, trade, and services. Nevertheless, about 75% of Nigerians are still wallowing in abject poverty, despite several palliative measures adopted by various administrations to cushion the effects of poverty in the country for instance; a well designed poverty alleviation programme was introduced in 2003 but was met with disdain and discord. This was no success, however, and the strategy lost momentum. Okonkwo, (2011:19), opines that more symbolic action was taken in 2008 with the so-called Nigeria vision 20-20-20, which is a magnificent vision (or rather delusion) envisaging that by 2020 Nigeria will be among twenty (20) most industrialized country in the world, thereby establishing itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena.

Further, on 1st January, 2012, the federal government of Nigeria announced the withdrawal of oil subsidy, arguing that the country loses about 1.3 trillion naira annually to that effect. The question is this: who is fooling whom, is it the government or the citizens. This particular question generated industrial actions by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and protests of all kinds in various quarters of the country. One is worried whether Nigeria is really democratic as it claims amidst the deplorable state of its economy which is hitting the citizenry very badly.

Conclusion

Nigerian economy remains confronted by serious challenges arising from democratic instabilities that have characterized the country for more than a decade. Structural imbalance and lack of diversification- with excessive dependence on oil has prevented the nation’s economy from rapid democratic development. High unemployment rate, poor infrastructure facilities and widespread insecurity are some of the key challenges the democratic government of Nigeria would address, in order to ensure democratic consolidation, devoid of inextricable legislative politics, anchored on the tendencies of selfishness and quantify corruptocratic practices. The arrogant display of mostly ill-gotten wealth by political office holders in Nigeria continues to attract indignation and hatred from the masses. The morbid symptoms of such a display are those of polarization and a general crisis of the state and of political authority to a nation. Members of the National Assembly seem to have forgotten or deliberately refused to admit that we have so many problems that need their attention as lawmakers. For instance, we have an educational system essentially elitist but advertised as popular and mass oriented which guarantees that most Nigerian young people cannot realistically hope to have more education than is necessary for them to join an exploitable labour reserve in the rural and urban countries. We must be able to ask our elected representatives the kind of policies they are formulating for us in terms of education, health care and infrastructural development as well as the integrity of elections and legitimacy of authority in all the three tiers of governance.
The democratic development potentials of Nigeria rest with its capability to withstand the pressure for extraction (privatization and usurpation of the oil wealth and public money) and favoritism (clientelism, patronage, elitism). Henshaw, (2010:27), relates that the solution to the resource problem lies in particular within the institutionalization of public control mechanisms and in the ring fencing of informal practices. That is, the solution will have to include institutional checks and balances free and fair election, human rights and horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms.

The National Assembly should be willing to make sacrifices at any point in time and not just allocating 28% of the nations overhead cost to themselves. Government should address key reform issues in order to advance infrastructure development and broaden the economic base through enhanced private sector participation. Members of the National Assembly should make the right policies that will enhance the welfare of the electorate.

Finally, Legislative engagement and partnerships with the civil society provide the keys to ensuring that citizens become part of the process of change that is envisaged, for them; they can be initiators and executioners of the development in which they are the principal beneficiaries. Democratic gains and consolidation will then be the overall outcome. What would guarantee democratic consolidation in Nigeria will be a confluence of three things. First is re-examining the idea of a true federation, as presently practiced in Nigeria. In terms of political and administrative management, Nigeria currently tends towards a unitary state. The federal idea should be reclaimed with considerable degree of political and economic decentralization to sub-national units. The second dimension is to begin to rebuild institutions and strengthen them. The two foregoing issues will have to be accomplished through a process of constitutionalism. The third dimension of democratic consolidation has to do with the economic bases of society (Thompson, 2011:76). The triple cord of economic growth, distribution and social welfare must go hand in hand. Extreme and pervasive poverty constitutes a threat to democracy. It is when this socio-economic context is re-engineered, can the politics of constitutional democracy, begin to germinate and take firm root in Nigeria.
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The Legislature in Africa’s Democratic Transition

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