

## Accountability in Governance in Nigeria and National Development

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### Abstract

*Good governance is the ingredient required to make the governed enjoy the benefits of government. Good governance is that which completely accommodates accountability. Accountability is said to be in place when there is transparency, responsiveness and answerability in governance. The presence of these three ingredients in governance makes it workable, thereby making the governed to gain the utmost benefits of governance. On the other hand, lack of good governance sets the whole economy of a nation backwards and makes it a peril for the governed to taste the dividends therein. In Nigeria, the object of governance has been so elusive over the years. Governance in Nigeria over the years has been fraught with so many anomalies so much so that good governance has become an illusion and depriving the governed of the desired benefits. Successive changes in governments over the years seemed not to have helped matters. Being that a new regime has just begun in country, expectations are high, to seeing positive outcomes of good governance at the end of it all. Time will tell*

### Keywords

Governance, Good Governance, Transparency, Responsiveness, Answerability, Dividends

### Introduction

The essence of governance is to have an orderly manner of doing things for the progress and development of the people of a state or community. In the course of governance, certain categories of people are put in positions of authorities to guide the affairs of the state in order to have progressive development in all ramifications. If governance is properly carried out as intended, the community or state grows from one level to the other for the benefit of mankind. Good governance

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brings about peace and tranquility in the society. Good governance encourages democratic ideals where all the apparatus of democracy works perfectly for the benefits of the society as a whole. The Oxford dictionary defines governance as “the action or manner of governing a state, organization, society and so on”. The definition stretches that governance should be a more responsive system that guarantees growth and development of the society at large. It says that governance embraces all the “checks and balances” that are put in place to make a system work. On the hand, accountability means being responsive and accountable to the society being governed. Accountability is a feedback to the people being governed in the true sense of it. It is showing the people the true state of affairs without reservation. When accountability is inculcated in governance, the onerous objectives of growth and development of the society are easily achieved. Accountability makes the governed to feel the pains and gains of governance. According to Oxford Dictionary, accountability is synonymous to responsibility. In other words, where there is accountability, there is responsiveness.

## **Theoretical Discourse and Conceptual Framework**

In the words of (Matthew, 2022), Governance refers to “the exercise of political and administrative authority at all levels to manage a country’s affairs”. He further emphasises that governance entails the proper management of state institution and structures to enhance socio-economic and political transformations of the society. Government on the other hand refers to the people that govern. It is a collection of the people who are placed in position of governance. Such people are either democratically elected or self-imposed on the positions of authority to govern certain people, example which is military rule.

The common system of governance all over the world, in recent times, is the democratic governance. A system whereby people are deliberately chosen or elected to administer governance is referred to as democracy. According to (Gyong, 2021), when citizens surrender their rights to an elected group who in turn work for the interest of all and sundry, it is referred to as representative democracy. "This modern democracy is mainly associated with Abraham Lincoln’s Getty Hurb address delivered in 1864 at the height of American civil war, in what he called government of the people, by the people and for the people” (Gyong, 2021). Of a truth, it is only in a democratic system that accountability can thrive. In the case of Nigeria, the country has had a chequered history of democracy. The country had it first democratic set up when the colonialists handed over powers to a few selected elites in the 1960. The first major elected leaders emerged in 1965 before it was truncated by military coup six months after, (specifically January 15th 1960). The military held on to power till 1979 when democratic hopes were renewed with the coming in of Alh Shehu Shagari, a democratic President. This again, lasted for four years before the military took over. The military rule lasted for another twenty years before returning the country to democratic rule and values in 1999 when President Olusegun Obasanjo took over on May 29th.

Since then, there has been successive changes of democratic governments. Presently, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu took over the democratic reigns of governance on May 29th, 2023.

The challenges of democratic governance as they are experienced in Nigeria notwithstanding, the gains therefrom cannot be overemphasised – especially as they relate to accountability. The bugging question is whether accountability is practicable in the current democratic setting or not? It is hoped that efforts made here will expose the level of accountability in governance in the present dispensation in Nigeria.

## **Theoretical/Conceptual Discourse on Accountability in Governance and National Development**

A key requirement in governance is accountability. For any governance to be regarded as successful, there must be intentional accountability by the persons involved in governance. Accountability is required in both Private and Public Sectors. Gyong, (2014), asserts that “an organisation or institution is accountable to those that will be affected by decisions and actions”. He continued by saying that “accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and rule of law”. He emphasised that the process of accountability involves different stages of answerability and enforcement. Whereas answerability refers to the obligation of government, its agencies and public officials to provide sufficient information about their decisions and actions and to justify them to the public and those institutions of accountability tasked with providing oversight, Enforcement means that the public or institutions responsible for accountability can sanction the offending party or remedy the contravening behaviour. In Gyong’s words, accountability is important for evaluating public officials or public bodies in order to ensure that they are performing to their full potentials in instilling confidence in governance..

Matthew, 2022, sees public accountability as which makes the government and its employees accountable and makes their activities open to public glare. He emphasised that the main objective of all public accountability initiatives is to ensure that public money is spent most economically and efficiently in order to minimise wastage or theft. Accountability is said to be more than mere answerability for one’s action or inactions. It extends to the fact that the beneficiaries can hold the providers of services responsible for actions or inactions. It involves a process that allows the voices of the governed to be heard. It therefore beholds that accountability gives room for reprimand.

Suffice it to say that the level of accountability in the Nigerian public has declined overtime, (Matthew,2022). The outcomes are what the country is experiencing with respect to decline in economic growth and ineffective delivery of public services over the years. Likewise, the country is experiencing high unemployment rate, gross corruption in the public service and so on. The establishment of watchdog institutions such as EFCC, ICPC, Code of Conduct Bureau and so on notwithstanding, accountability in public service seems not have improved. The adoption of multiparty institutions has not helped matter either.

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## **Accountability Types and Usage**

For better understanding of the workability of the concept of accountability, it is necessary to fashion out the various types that maybe be applicable in desired respective situations. Therefore, we have:

- Horizontal Accountability
- Vertical Accountability
- Political Accountability
- Legal Accountability and
- Social Accountability

The horizontal accountability talks about sideways checks and balances. It is when certain agencies of government are established to check other agencies of government in order to achieve accountability.

Vertical accountability is the system of accountability that gives room for civil society, citizens and mass media to act as a check on the activities of those that govern. In this system, the people are free to voice their opinions as well as make demands on people that are in charge of governance. Those that govern cannot readily ignore the yearnings and aspirations of the people because they know that they are answerable to them.

Political accountability strictly acts the role of check on the executive. This can be achieved by the oversight role of the parliament on the executive. Usually, the parliament is aided by anti-corruption agencies such as Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Coded of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Matters Commision (ICPC) and so on, in the case of Nigeria, (Gyong, 2022).

Legal accountability: whenever the Judiciary holds the executive accountable according to the law, it is called legal accountability

Judicial accountability: This occurs when the judiciary holds the executive accountable. The judiciary can adjudicate on cases that concern government in order to ensure rule of law. Judicial intervention helps to curb excessiveness of those that govern.

Social accountability: This is civic or civil engagement whereby society participates directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. According to (Gyong, 2022), good governance may be seen to the extent to which a country has made progress in terms of meeting the yearnings of the majority of the people in the areas of social, political and economic advancement. It is expected to that poverty should be at the lowest ebb, quality of life is enhanced, equity and justice is seen to in place and so on. Citizens are expected to exercise their franchise in electing their representatives to governance and thereby involved in decision making and governance. Good governance therefore encourages separation of power

Summarily, governance that is accountable is seen from the perspective to which it is able to meet the political and socio-economic needs of the people. In this wise, poverty should be at the lowest ebb, quality of life should be seen to have reasonably increased and there should be manifestation of equity and justice in the polity. Likewise, citizens should be seen to freely exercise their franchise politically and elect their choices. If all these occur, the voices of the people cannot be claimed to be alienated. Unfortunately, the above measurement parameters cannot be said to be operational in the Nigerian polity thereby terming accountability in governance of Nigeria to be very poor.

### **Accountability in Governance: The obvious challenges in Nigeria**

No doubt, democracy prevails in Nigeria with all the democratic apparatuses put in place to enhance good governance and accountability. For example, the executive and the judiciary arms of governments are succinctly put in place to enhance checks and balances in governance. The extent to which these arms of government perform their respective roles of accountability is the big question. First and foremost, over the years, it has been difficult to have fair and free elections where credible representatives of the people are selected. In most cases elections held in Nigeria since the advent of democracy have always been marred with violence and fraudulent practices where candidates forced themselves on the electorate against their wish. The implication is that the wishes of the electorate hardly see the light of the day. Those that force themselves into positions of authorities do what they like with such positions without considering the yearnings of the people. By so doing, accountability to the people becomes highly elusive.

Secondly people who impose themselves in the electorate through shoddy elections make corruption their way of life. People in government create communication gap between them and those governed. This gives them room for edemic corruption by misusing the resources available to the state. Obviously the effect of their actions is felt in all aspects of the economy with all parameters going downward trend. Those in governance resort not to be committed to those being governed resulting in little or no improvements in the living standards of the people.

The third major challenge when there is lack of accountability in governance is insecurity. What has transpired in the last eight years of Mohammadu Buhari's administration in Nigeria is a typical example of the outcome of bad governance that was not accountable. Insecurity rose to it's peak in Nigeria. There had been communication gap between those that governed and those were governed. Frustration made many people to take arms and commit all sorts of crimes. It was as bad in the southern part of Nigeria where youths took to internet frauds as well as the northern part of the country where youths and the likes took to arm struggle in the name of "Boko Haram", terrorism and banditry. Security tracks put it that 63,000 lost their lives due to the insecurity in the eight years of Buhari's regime.

Another challenge of lack of accountability in governance is the loss of businesses in the economy. It is on record that many small and big businesses closed up because of the prevailing harsh

economic policies such as the incessant increases in petrol prizes, removal of subsidies from fertilizers and so on. It is a well known fact that the cost of petrol (PMS) affects the cost of every item in the country. Many businesses have over the years, resorted to total closure because of inability to meet the requirements of doing businesses and breaking even. Resultantly, unemployment is on the upward trend. This has contributed to the numerous vices and criminalities being experienced all over the country.

In all, the above challenges would have been surmountable had there been a formidable accountable process of governance in place. While people that govern work for their selfish interest and keeping the governed at bay, the governed lament in isolation, rejection and poverty.

Accountability in governance: way forward Achieving accountability in governance in Nigeria requires concerted efforts of the three arms of government to succinctly play their roles to the later. It therefore calls for credible people to occupy the positions of authorities in the three arms of governments. To a very large extent, the electorates are only onlookers in the governance of the country. Unfortunately it is the electorate that bear the consequences of unaccountability in governance. The voice of the electorate is hardly heard even when it is raised. Therefore, the following must suffice if the benefits of accountability in governance must be achieved; there must be sound democratic principles which must be implemented to the later especially as regards to democratic elections. Such principles should provide that elections must be free and fair for the emergence of representatives.

There must be sound economic policies which should give room to stimulation of all sectors of the economy in terms of growth. This is more important in the area of helping to grow the small and medium scale businesses of the economy. Such sound economic policies should include waivers of taxes for small and medium scale businesses as well as introduction of policies that will enable businesses to revive and survive.

Conscious attention must be paid to the calibre of representatives/people that lead the country. In other words, strict criteria should be set as hurdles for would-be leaders to cross before they contest elections. The need for quality leaders and leadership cannot be overemphasized when accountable governance is desired.

## **Conclusion**

The need for good governance in any country cannot be overemphasized. The much needed good governance cannot be achieved without adequate accountability. In Nigeria today, good governance is yet a myraid. The downward trend of all economic yardsticks speaks volume. Expectations of the people are high with keen interest in the new administration of President Bola Tinubu. The end of this administration will further reveal possibility of good governance in Nigeria or otherwise.

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