

PATRON-CLIENT NETWORK AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: AN X-RAY

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ABSTRACT

Patron-client network is a negative force in the strides to the attainment of good governance, as seen in the way leaders attain political positions. Power seekers are willing to do whatever it takes to obtain and maintain power and relevance in the political terrain. This paper sought to investigate the patron-client relationship, not from the orthodox godfatherism perspective but from the viewpoint of vote-buying. The article blames the emergence of patron-client relationship on corruption, the quest to obtain and maintain power, as well as the need to amass wealth. To prevent the decay of good governance in Nigeria, as it relates to patron-client relationship, the paper recommends that all parties involved; the candidates and the voters have to be properly enlightened on the law dealing with vote buying and informal exchanges in Nigeria. Also, law enforcement agencies should be given autonomous power to address cases of vote buying and other informal activities of patron and clients without recourse to fear or favor.

Keywords: *Good governance, Vote-buying, Power seekers, Nigeria system, patron-client network*

INTRODUCTION

Patron-client network or the politics of clientelism constitutes a lethal clog in the wheel of developmental strides in most countries of the world today particularly Africa and most especially Nigeria. As argued by the exponents of the utilitarian school “the essence of government is to provide greater happiness for the greater number”. In most cases, this idea of greater happiness and the concomitant oversight functions of government represent the whole gamut of governance which constitutes the basis of social contract between the political power holders or power seekers, as it were, and the populace. The contractual framework becomes laden with a lot of expectations and feelings on the part of the populace who are therefore hopeful for the government to perform.

Most times, these expectations are illusive due to the extant relationship between politicians (who constitute the patrons) and their clients (whom are mainly members of the impoverished class). The pattern of relationship permeates a scenario in which the politicians are tied to their subjects by mutual rights and obligations specified in an informal contract which automatically becomes self-enforcing along informal mechanism (Kirsten and Voigt, 2006). Although, informal pattern of social relations does not create itself. Rather, as Sekeris (2010) argued, weak institutions and structures, mostly in developing countries, create a vacuum to be exploited by obnoxious power seekers who take advantage of their affluence and the masses' impoverishes to maneuver their way to power position and thus rely on clientele's network to sustain it.

Sekeris' position serves as a proper description of the Nigerian System. The country is a pluralistic ethnic composition with enormous human and natural resources to attain a level of socio-economic and human capital development. Also, the nation is tagged the giant of Africa and as such should be a force to be reckoned with in terms of the provision of good governance. Despite these accolades, the country keeps lagging behind whenever the thought of good governance and development are mentioned. Informal practices in Nigerian political terrain, ranging from legislative norms to clientelism and patronage, have had a profound and systematic effect on political outcomes thereby hindering service delivery (Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2013). In an ideal democratic set up, the choice of who becomes the ruler is an unfringeable right of the electorates with no other form of external interference and influence whatsoever. Such a right ought to be expressed in an electioneering process through voting. However, such an ideal philosophy is totally an illusion as far as Nigeria is concerned. The ideal has been replaced by patronage and cooptation.

Patron-client relationship has crippled good governance in Nigeria that the palliative measures to remedying the predicament is presently not in sight. As Adetula (2008) observed, the extant governance status in Nigeria today is the consequence of the outrageous funding of electoral process by inordinate politicians who then spread their tentacles for embezzlement by the time electoral outcome works in their favor. Corroborating this view, Shopeju and Ojukwu (2013), in their study of patrimonial rule in Nigeria, opined that the country is devoid of good governance as a result of too many mouths waiting to be fed due to the onslaught of clientelism.

Nigerian elites see politics or power as a lucrative venture which one must acquire in order to gain relevant height and affluence in the society. Therefore, the pathway to attaining such height is to leave no stone unturned by utilizing different methods to ensure that the phrase “the end justifies the means” is not left redundant. Most of them indulge in violent acts while others spend a whole lot of money to buy over clients thereby culminating in Patron-client relationship. In most cases, the both usually go together. The end product of such network is a situation where power holders amass wealth while good governance and service delivery suffer.

Against this backdrop, the focus of this paper is to elucidate the concept of patron-client network or clientelism as it affects the rendition of good governance in Nigeria while shifting attention from the usual Godfatherism syndrome to the relationship between power seekers and their clients from the perspective of vote buying. The paper seek to provide answers to questions such as: why do the elites in Nigeria always resort to patron-client relations in order to attain power having presented themselves as servants? Why does patron-client network thrive so much in Nigeria? Who benefits more in patron-clients relationship and lastly, how does this pattern of relationship impacts good governance? To achieve this, the paper is structured into six sections, following the introductory section is the second section which points out the theoretical and conceptual understanding, the third section discusses the history and trends of patron-client networks, the factors that encourage the emergence of patrons are examined in section four, while section five explains the impact of patron-client network on good governance in Nigeria, and section six concludes with some way forward.

CLIENTELISM: A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The phenomenon of clienteles’ politics is hinged on the theoretical foundation of ‘social exchange theory. According to Emerson (1981:32), one of the simplest definitions of social exchange is that it involves two persons, each of whom provides benefits to the other and contingent upon benefits from the other.

The social exchange theory emerged within the family sciences in the latter part of the twentieth century particularly in 1960s. It arose out of the philosophical traditions of utilitarianism, behaviorism, and neoclassical economics. Early social exchange theory applications in family science arose out of the work of sociologists (Blau, 1964; Homans,

1961; Thibaut& Kelley, 1959) who focused on the rational assessment of self-interest in human social relationships. At its most basic form, social exchange theory may be viewed as providing an economic metaphor to social relationships. The theory's fundamental principle is that humans in social situations choose behaviors that maximize their likelihood of meeting self-interests in those situations. Taking its perception from mainly human social interactions, proponents of the theory discussed some key assumptions that facilitate the application of it to reality. First among them is that social exchange theory operates on the assumption that individuals are generally rational and engage in calculations of costs and benefits in social exchanges. In this regard, the theory sees humans as rational actors who endeavor to maximize relations through exchange.

Secondly, social exchange theory builds on the assumption that exchanges between or among two or more individuals are efforts by participants to fulfill basic needs. Needs in this aspect involves ambitions and interests of the parties involved in the relationship. The patrons on one hand seek to hold on to or assume power positions whereas the clients on the other hand who constitute the lower class see it as the opportunity to earn a living. Thirdly, the social exchange theory assumes that exchange processes that produce payoffs or rewards for individuals lead to patterning of social interactions. As (Homans, 1961:68) pointed out, "These patterns of social interaction not only serve individuals' needs but also constrain individuals on how they may ultimately seek to meet those needs. Individuals seek interactions that promote their needs and desires but are also beneficiaries of others' behaviours that also maximize their own goal. The last assumption of the theory is hinged on the fact that individuals are goal-oriented in a freely competitive political system. The political system in modern democratic dispensation is highly competitive that it fulfills basically the doctrine of survival of the fittest. Due to its competitiveness, exchange processes lead to differentiation of power and privilege in social groups to the extent that power in social exchanges lies with those individuals who possess greater resources that provide an advantage in the social exchange. As Blau (1964) noted, those with more resources hold more power and, ultimately, are in a better position to benefit from the exchange.

Thus, the thrust of the social exchange theory is regarded as reciprocity in human relations- an idea that when individual or a group of individuals receive favour from another individual or groups, tendency exists for a state of discomfort to set in as a result of perceived level of indebtedness. When such happens, the person or persons involved will feel undue pressure to reciprocate such act in any manner whatsoever so as to restore equilibrium in the relationship (Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Greenberg, Block and Silverman, 1971; Roloff, 1987).

In line with the above, clientelism is a complex chain of personal bonds between political patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers. These bonds are founded on mutual material advantage: the patron furnishes excludable resources (money, jobs) to dependents and accomplices in return for their support and cooperation (votes, attendance at rallies, etc.) (Kettering, 1988). In modern politics, most patrons are not independent actors, but are links within a larger grid of contacts, usually serving as middlemen who arrange exchanges between the local level and the national center (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002). As Lemarchand (1972: 69-70) noted, “patron-client network is a ‘personalized, affective, and reciprocal relationship between actors, or a set of actors, commanding unequal resources and involving mutually beneficial transactions that have political ramifications beyond the immediate sphere of dyadic relationships’”. To Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) patron-client relationship is an ex-change relationship between roles (may be de-fined as a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his own influence and re-sources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.

It is pertinent to note that patronage relationship involves an informal exchange in an unequal or lopsided relationship in which there is a mutual benefit. Clientelism is a transaction between politicians and citizens whereby material favours are offered in return for political support at the polls. Clientelist links rest on a rational economic calculus more than on blind or reflexive personal loyalty (Sousa, 2008). It can be thought of as a type of instrumental friendship though not an evenly balanced friendship because patrons target the poor and take advantage of their limited information and autonomy. All the same, each participant in the

exchange does get something of value (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002). According to Kaufman (1974:285), clientelists' activities are manifested in (a) the relationship that occurs between actors of unequal power and status; (b) the principle of reciprocity; that is, it is a self-regulating form of interpersonal exchange, the maintenance of which depends on the return that each actor expects to obtain by rendering goods and services to each other and which ceases once the expected rewards fail to materialize. (c) Particularistic and private relationship, anchored only loosely in public law or community norms.

PATRON-CLIENT NETWORK AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA: HISTORY AND TREND

Historically, the manifestation of patron-client politics in the Nigerian political system dates back to the advent of colonialism. Prior to the inculcation of colonial imperialism, the influence of money in electoral processes and the election itself were alien thoughts as pre-colonial Nigeria traditional systems possessed unadulterated means of leadership succession. In the Benin pre-colonial system for example, succession was basically achieved through 'primogeniture' in which the first son of the king succeeds him after his demise. Also, in the Yoruba traditional system, the group of seven kingmakers was usually available to exercise their traditional responsibility of crowning the next king. So, basically, hereditary, primogeniture, gerontocracy, appointment were the trending concepts in the Nigerian political terrain. Although, the kingmakers could be given gifts and other aids by the soon to become rulers but that does not alter the tradition as any attempt to deviate from the established norm could attract ancestral punishment. Thus, vote buying was never visible in that era (Ayoade, 2008; Kura, 2014).

Therefore, the concepts of elections, electioneering campaigns, voting and political parties were introduced to Nigeria politics by colonial masters. However, it should be noted that politics in the colonial period was not a cash and carry phenomenon as a result of different reasons adduced by Ojo (2008:113). First among them is the notion that there were few and relatively small political parties. Also, competition for power was not as keen as it is now. Third and most importantly, political and politicians operated under the watchful eyes of the colonial masters superintending over elections. Fourthly, the colonial economy was completely agrarian to the extent that the degree of monetized economy as it is not was unimaginable. Lastly, the operating political structure as at then was less expensive to

politicians. Thus, they only campaigned by putting forth logical argument on the basis of a well-structured manifesto. With the low intensity electoral contests, influence of money or patron-client relations in terms of vote buying was minimal.

In this regards, the first competitive election in Nigeria under colonial rule was held in 1922 after the elective principles was introduced by Clifford's constitution. In this election, patron-clients relations were mainly manifested when politicians involved were seen dolling T-shirts with party symbols, foodstuffs and other sundry things to the populace to canvass for votes which was only restricted to the two Nigeria coastal cities of Lagos and Calabar. Also, the emergence of tribal Heroes of ethnic figures dominated successive elections that were held after (Sha, 2008).

From Independence in October 1st 1960, the trend metamorphosed into the politics of money and the emergence of moneybags who did not hesitate in converting competition to finance. The new trend became the reality of A.E Davies quote which read "*money itself has become a dominant factor...money seems to have taken the center stage in Nigeria political process as it is sadly now playing an increasingly critical role...it is now a critical variable when assessing the level political corruption in the country*". From this period also, the Filipino trait of "utangaloob" (debt of gratitude) became prevalent. With independent and the consequent attainment of a republican status, competition became keener as numerous nationalist leaders had the intention to take over the reign of government. The gap between the rich and the poor was further created. The rich politicians began to see money as a means to achieve their interest and to do this, a kind of financial exchange has to be put in place which will be facilitated by agents.

Between 1960 and 1966, the atmosphere was marred with activities of clients who were acting for their patrons to mobilize support with money and promise of rewards ranging from employment and other financial emoluments coupled with lucrative positions. From this period, financial inducement became the driver of voting pattern and the lubricant of support from the electorates. This should not be viewed as a surprise because Aristotle (cited in Baker, 1952:182) predicted long ago that when the poor depends on the rich for survival while the rich predominate in politics as gladiators, the poor become either onlookers, apathetic or instruments in the hands of the rich to achieve their political ambitions.

Corroborating this view, Ojo (2008) argued that vote buying in the first republic elections in Nigeria was a situation of the poor being confined to mere voters while political career became the privilege of those who are wealthy enough to afford the leisure to devote to politics. The over-whelming influence of vote buying manifested by clientelist's network in the first republic was one of the key factors that led to its demise.

The period from 1966 and 1999 in Nigeria witnessed a whopping twenty five years of military interregnum and the historical period of oil boom. The attempt to return the country to civilian rule in 1993 witnessed an abrupt end as a result of the decision to annul the election. One of the reasons for the annulment as given by Ibrahim Babangida was that there were authenticated reports of election malpractice against agents, National Electoral Commission (NEC) officials and voters. He also pointed out that there were proof of manipulations, offer and acceptance of money and other forms of inducements (Nwosu, 1996:78). As Ojo (2005) observed, evidence available to government put the total amount of money spent on those forms of illegal exchanges by the candidates and their parties at over 2.1 billion naira.

The juntas continued with leadership in the wake of the annulment. However, democracy returned to the country in 1999 and the sleeping dog of clientelism was reawakened in the 1999 elections. This chain of illegal and informal exchange continued in 2003, 2007, 2011 with the most recent one coming in the 2015 general elections. It should be noted that informal network is not limited to only presidential or federal elections. There are influxes of manifestations in the states and local government as well. In the various elections, clients are usually seen around giving financial inducement to voters in order to influence their choice of party and candidates. According to one of the major party's agent in the 2015 elections, the sum of #50,000 (Fifty Thousand naira) was given to each client in a particular ward to be shared to the electorates so as to influence their votes. At the state level, trailer loads of rice and other food items are usually distributed to prospective voters before the election just to buy their votes for the candidate and political party which the agent represents. During the 2015 presidential elections in Edo state for instance, virtually every one that was asked if they were given any cash confessed to have taken money from party's agents in order to vote their candidates. Some others claimed to have collected certain amount but ended up voting for the candidate of their choice. When asked the motive behind the illegal collection, majority of

them responded by saying that is the only means to get their own share of the national cake. Mainly because, after voting the politicians into power, the people no longer hold any value. Therefore, it is better to eat from them now.

Patron-client politics in the area of vote buying has been dynamic in the Nigerian political terrain. While it is neither system specific nor space bound, it is only a tool to further confine the poor while presenting the platform for the rich to excel in their political career.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF PATRON-CLIENT NETWORK ON GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

The relationship between patronage networks and governance cannot be over emphasized. While the former has usually been viewed as informal exchange in a lopsided affair, the latter is seen as the process of decision making and implementation. Our basic interest in this study includes the process through which the political patrons attain power positions to exhibit the act of governance. However, it is imperative to render a succinct conceptualization of the terms: governance and good governance so as to create the platform for easy understanding of the impacts of clientelism.

Governance as a concept is all encompassing and covers a wide range of political activities including socio-economic variables. According to Ikelegbe (2013:217) “governance essentially refers to the mechanisms, processes and institutions for determining and managing public affairs and society”. Governance permeates broad aspects including the extraction of resources and its distribution, resource control, policy making, participation, electoral processes and the management of public affairs. Good governance on the other hand means effectiveness in the management and determination of public affairs. It also involves effective service delivery and coordination of governance. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) report on good governance, the concept has eight major attributes: participation, consensus oriented, accountability, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, lastly, follows the rule of law.

For analytical purpose, and the need to ensure specificity, the eight parameters of good governance given above will be measured against the Nigerian system in order to understand the impacts of patron-client network.

In this regard, the first on the list of the United Nations' elements of good governance is the attribute of participation. For governance to be regarded as being good, it must ensure free participation of both men and women and other social groups in the society. This act of participation also includes electoral choices and support ranging from voting to organized behavior to support a particular candidate. Electoral participation is the basic concern when the issue of patron-client network is thought about. It is this area that vote buying, which is the main focus of this work predominates. As such, clients who are working for their bosses embark on the task of mobilizing passive and active supporters on issues. This scenario also cuts across several dimensions in which groups and individuals are offered financial inducement to participate in a certain manner or not to participate at all. It is pertinent to think of the former strategy as 'participation buying' while the latter is called 'negative vote buying' (Ojo, 2008:111).

Apart from the fact that clients influence electorates' choice of candidate, deceit and unfulfilled promises by political leaders also constitute a source of discouragement to a number of Nigerians from participating in election and other political activities. As Falade (2008) argued, that patrons make series of promises during election campaign which are not fulfilled after they had been voted in to power. The resultant effect of this is the perpetual loss of interest to participate in subsequent political processes. One of the respondents interviewed during the 2015 election expressed that "I have come to the sun to suffer even though I am not benefiting anything from the government...I don't even have confidence in them because they have been failing us generally therefore, I have to collect whatever is given to me because after the elections, I won't see them again". Elbert Stiffing Foundation conducted a research on the 2011 election in Ondo state and identified, election violence and politicians' noncommittal to their campaign promises as major reasons for voters' apathy in the country. The major reason for their noncommittal to campaign promises majorly hinged on the desire to accumulate the funds that was spent to attain the position (Odebode, 2011; Adelokun, 2011).

Political participation is a crucial element in the discourse of good governance. The level of political apathy in Nigeria is mainly the outcome of clientelism manifested in vote buying. The consequence of this is the inability of the masses to have a link between their state of underdevelopment and their nonparticipation in the electoral process (Fabiya, 2010).

Secondly, good governance is consensus oriented. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in an issue bearing on the best interest of the whole society and how this can be achieved. This is needed because there are several actors and as many viewpoints in a given society (UNESCAP). Clientelism renders this feature of good governance impotent due to the fact that informal patronage involves the promise of rewards which could also be in the form of esteemed position for loyalty. By the time prebend offices are created and clients who had worked for the boss occupy various positions. The desire to achieve a consensus becomes a wild goose chase as various actors represent the boss' interest. Any attempt to bite the finger that fed you in that context may amount to loss of position. Therefore, consensus is reached on the basis of the desire of the boss instead of national interest.

Against this backdrop, Wenibowei (2011:113) argues that elections in Nigeria are therefore mere formality for the confirmation of a candidate already selected by flexing a more financial muscle in election campaigns. Thus, the Nigerian electorates are deprived of consent to elect their preferred leaders as a result of the activities of clients working vehemently on behalf of their patrons whose interest they represent. The consequence of this, according to Falade (2014), is the emergence in the political scene of mediocre and stooges (who cannot take decisions independently without recourse to the patrons) as leaders and managers of state resources. This perhaps explains the erratic economic growth rate the country has been experienced in the last decade or so.

Thirdly good governance ensures accountability. Accountability means that government officials are responsible to the masses or the people that brought them into power. It means that whatever action that takes place in the daily operation of government ought to put the peoples' interest at the core. This parameter of good governance has been crippled by patron-client network in Nigeria. During election periods, politicians render a lot of good services to the people including influencing their choice through financial inducement. Having attained power, the talk of accountability becomes irrelevant because it is assumed that the masses have been rewarded for their service. The politicians assume that with the exchanges that took place, it was basically their money that brought them into power and therefore owe no one any responsibility. The masses in turn are left redundant with the idea that they have had their

share of the bargain therefore any outcome of their action is basically their own creation until power is about to change hand.

Good governance also possesses the attribute of transparency. By transparency, it means that decision taken and their consequent enforcement are done in line with an established rules and regulations of the land. According to the UNESCAP report on governance, transparency also means that information is freely available and accessible to those who are directly affected by it. This attribute is basically significant in that it tend to carry the people along. However in Nigeria this feature of good governance is totally a wish that never come to pass as a result of unwholesome effect of patron-client relationship. Leaders who assume power position through this means usually become very corrupt that every access to the information that will reveal their nefarious and inhuman behaviours concealed to the public. Decision taken usually neglect the will of the people and the leadership actions do not go in line with the established rule.

Responsiveness is another major attribute of good governance which requires that institutions and processes should serve all stake holders within a reasonable timeframe. For any constituted authority or government to be responsive, it means that such government is sensitive to the demand of the people and react promptly to any threat to the existence of it citizens. In Nigeria, government is not responsive to the wish and aspirations of people. Elected leaders barely yield to the demands of those who elected them because they seem to have bought their way into the incumbent position they occupy. Their major concern in this aspect is how to achieve their personal interest whereas the interest of the people have been mortgaged and bought over as a result of the money they had received. Sometimes even the agents or clients that worked for them are neglected while some are lucky to be beneficiaries of promised reward through employment and other means.

In Nigerian for example, the government is less concerned with the rate of insecurity and other social vices plaguing the state. The lack of concern to the plight of citizens is evidenced in the ongoing \$2.1b arms deal scandals. A situation in which funds that was meant to combat insecurity was used for election purposes. In all states of the federation, roads are in a deplorable state which further sums up the spate of accidents that leave hospitals full of victims. Road projects as well as other infrastructural projects are left undone by successive administrations in Nigeria. Occasionally, the news of citizens appealing to states and federal

government to intervene in their predicaments is meant with deaf ears. All these are as a result of government irresponsiveness in Nigeria political system that was created from clientelism. In all, patron-client relationship negatively affect good governance's attribute of responsiveness.

Another key feature of good governance is that it ensures efficiency and effectiveness. Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of the society. For institutions to produce such result there need to be an organized and efficient human set-up to handle them. In relation to this, patron-client network brings about the emergence of mediocre who either lack the leadership capacity to govern or become insensitive to the needs of the society having paid the cost of attaining power. According to Otohile, Igbafe and Agbontaen (2014:186) "Good governance is not about geographical distribution for equity but about qualified and dedicated people to hold public offices. The best person should be picked instead of adopting quota system. It is not only discriminatory; merit is also compromised in the process". This statement is a replica of the Nigerian terrain.

Since 1999 democratic arrival in Nigeria, successive political leaders at the federal, state and local government levels have emerged through vote-buying mechanisms and other informal means. Upon the attainment of power, their major objective is to recoup the amount that utilized or expended during the election period while the demands of the people can come later for those with little element of conscience. Roads are left unconstructed; electricity is usually epileptic with dilapidated health care provision and every other thing that gives the citizens good life. Thus, patron-client activities reduce leaders' ability and capacity to produce effective and efficient governance in Nigeria.

Thus, the clientele's nature of the Nigeria political system weakens bureaucratic institutions thereby rendering them inefficient and ineffective while also hindering good governance and prevents development from taking place. This is because powers have been personalized. It is difficult to draw a distinction between an office holder (person) and the position he/she occupies. As Okafor et al (2012) observed, in a neopatrimonial state like Nigeria, decisions are taken not on the basis of institutionalized rules but in favour of personal relationships and to personal advantage.

Equity and Inclusiveness: equity and inclusiveness constitute cogent elements of good governance as given by UNESCAP. A society's well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in the management of its affairs and do not feel excluded from the main stream its decision making process. Patron-client network creates a whooping gap between the rich and the poor by constantly reducing the latter to the lower class. Such gap automatically alienates the lower class from any process of decision making and as such the talk of equity and inclusiveness becomes a forgotten issue as far as the Nigerian political system is concerned. After elections are conducted in Nigeria, the bosses, now leaders, scarcely come to their various constituencies to harness citizens' demands not to talk of meeting them accordingly. No wonder Ikelegbe(2013) noted that the Nigerian state is suspended. It does not practice grass root participation thereby creating a large gap between the rulers and the ruled. Corroborating this view, a respondent in a study that was carried out by Otoghile, Igbafe and Agbontaen on the quest for good governance in Nigeria, noted that

“We do not have good leaders in the country that is why people do not feel impact of governance. They only care about themselves and never for their people. They hardly keep to their election promises. All they do is steal money for their personal aggrandizement”

Another interviewee responded in the same manner when he argued that:

“Nigerian leaders are very selfish and not interested in the welfare of the Nigerian people, and they are highly corrupt. Nigerians have not truly enjoyed the dividends of democratic governance in the country; rather what they get is impoverishment. This is because when funds meant for a particular purpose say provision of health care facilities, are diverted to other purpose or better yet, embezzled, that is impoverishment” (Otoghile, Igbafe and Agbontaen, 2014:185).

The rulers formulate policies to suit their obnoxious interests whereas the poor masses are left to swim in the ocean of doom with the fittest surviving. The resultant effect of this is a rapid increase in crime rate and violence. Those agents that have been empowered during the election with different means either use the weapons or money as the case may be that were given to them for different purposes by the time failed promises become the order of the day.

Lastly, good governance ensures the free operation of the rule of law. In a nutshell, rule of law inherently means the supremacy of the law over the ruler and the ruled. According to the UNESCAP report on good governance, rule of law requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights and impartial enforcement of the laid down rules and regulations centered on independent judiciary. The extant level of clientelism in Nigeria has rendered the operation of the rule of law a wild goose chase. Patrons often time buy their way to attain political power thereby making them unaccountable to the people who had purportedly voted them in. The end product of this is a scenario in which the elites continue to shield themselves from the ambit of the law in the name of impunity whereas the masses become the direct recipient of the wrath of the law. Impartiality in the application of the rule of law is the order of the day in a weakened judicial system. Like the popular parlance goes, “the rich are often rewarded for acts of stealing and corruption whereas the poor prosecuted for stealing biro”. This is the case of the Nigerian system. The agents who were negatively empowered with ammunitions by the patrons become social deviants in the society thus becoming the targets of government policies. The level of damages the activities of patron-client relations has done to governance in Nigeria cannot be over stated.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Patron-client network resulting from vote buying and other informal exchanges in the Nigerian political system has rendered the concept of good governance meaningless. The structure it has created on ground has configured the mindset of the ordinary citizen to accept the extant trend. In this regard, the masses view the idea of vote buying and other informal networks as the only medium to get their own share of the so called national cake without really having the orientation that when things turn sour, they are usually at the receiving end. According to an aged woman who participated in the collection of rice that were doled out by an aspiring politician in Edo state Nigeria when she was asked why she decided to come out for this exercise despite her age, she noted clearly that this is the only opportunity to eat from the aspirant. Else, when he assumes office, their plights become irrelevant. She even started by asking “are you not a Nigerian?” In essence, the ideal has been replaced with the reality and the reality is a major clog in the wheel of good governance.

It is a truism that that there is no problem without a solution. The menace of patron-client network and its consequent implication for good governance can be reduced to the lowest ebb if not totally eradicated in Nigeria. However, the sole method to achieve this long term goal is for all parties involved (both the candidate for election and the voters) to be properly educated and be aware of the law dealing with vote buying and informal exchanges in Nigeria. Among other electoral law provisions in Nigeria, section 131(1) of the 2006 Electoral Act and section 124 of the 2010 Electoral Act (As amended) state that any person who does any of the following:

a. Directly or indirectly by himself or by any other person on his behalf, gives, lends or agrees to give or lend or offers promises during an election;

b. Promises to procure or endeavor to procure any money or valuable consideration to or for any voter, or for any person on behalf of any voter or to any person, in order to induce any voter to vote, to refrain from voting, or corruptly does any such act as aforesaid on account of such voter having voted or refrained from voting any election;

c. Directly or indirectly, by himself or by any other person on his behalf, corruptly make any gift, loan, offer, promise, procurement or agreement as to or for any person, in order to induce such person to procure or to endeavor to procure the return of any person as a member of a legislative house or to an elective office or the vote of any voter at any election;

d. Upon or in consequence of any loan, gift, offer, promise, procurement or agreement as, corruptly procures or engages or promises or endeavor to procure, the return of any person as a member of a legislative house or to an elective office or the vote of any voter at any election;

e. Advances or pays or cause to be paid any money to or for the use of any other person, with the intent that such money or any part thereof shall be expended in bribery at any election, or who knowingly pays or causes to be paid, any money to any person in discharge or repayment of any money wholly or in part expended in bribery at any election; or

f. After any election directly or indirectly, by himself or by any other on his or her behalf receives any money or valuable consideration on account of having voted or refrained from voting or having induced any other person to vote or refrain from voting or having induced any candidate to refrain from canvassing for votes for himself/herself and any such elections commits an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of #500,000 (five hundred thousand naira) or twelve months imprisonment or both.

Section 131(2) of the same 2006 Act and section 124 (2) of the 2010 Act (as amended) also stated that a voter commits an offence of bribery where before or during an election directly or indirectly himself or by any other person on his behalf, receives, agrees or contracts for any money, gift, loan, or valuable consideration, office, place or employment, for himself or for any other person, for voting or agreeing to vote or for refraining or agreeing to refrain from voting at any such election. Complete awareness of this law will go a long way in curbing the activities of patron-client network in Nigeria.

Secondly, these laws should be written and spelt out in a manner that the common reader will easily understand. From the sections stated above, it is obvious that a succinct judicial interpretation is required to enable the reader fathom the real intent of the content. Therefore, law needs to be written in a simple language for proper understanding.

Thirdly, virile institutional framework is required to achieve an effective and efficient functioning implementation of the rules. Law enforcement agencies should be made virile to ensure that there is strict adherence to the rules and also ensure that offenders are treated accordingly without fear or favour. The bedrock of an effective political system is the capacity and ability of the institutions. Without strong and independent institutions to ensure maintenance of law, the laws that are made will only exist on papers as it is today in Nigeria.

Also, electoral bodies and other relevant agencies need to be properly empowered and given absolute autonomy to deal with cases of malpractices ranging from vote buying and other informal exchanges resulting from patron-client activities.

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