



Democracy, Leadership and Development Examined in Light of Nigerian Democracy

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Abstract

The persistent crisis of governance and leadership in Nigeria has limited the capacity of democratic institutions to generate sustainable and human-centered development. This paper examines the interrelationship among democracy, leadership, and development and argues that democratic governance becomes meaningful only when it advances the common good, public accountability, and people's material well-being. Situated within Southern sociology and Global South scholarship, the paper rejects the tendency to evaluate Nigeria merely as an incomplete version of Euro-American democracy. Instead, it interprets Nigeria as a historically constituted postcolonial formation shaped by colonial state-making, unequal incorporation into global capitalism, local political struggles, and indigenous aspirations for self-reliance. The study adopts qualitative analysis, hermeneutical interpretation, and thematic engagement with secondary literature. It finds that weak political will, corruption, elite capture, fragile institutions, and limited citizen participation obstruct the relationship between democratic leadership and development. At the same time, African intellectual traditions emphasize that development should be understood not simply as economic growth or institutional imitation, but as social transformation grounded in dignity, collective welfare, freedom, and the capacity of people to shape their own futures. The Nigerian case therefore contributes to Southern theory by showing that democracy should be evaluated through historically grounded and substantively social indicators, including access to healthcare, education, water, energy, employment, security, fair taxation, and the rule of law. The paper concludes that responsible leadership and sustainable development require democratic accountability, popular participation, epistemic inclusion, and recognition of locally grounded knowledge. It recommends people-centered governance, stronger institutions, equitable resource distribution, effective leadership training, and the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms.

Keywords: democracy; development; Global South; leadership; responsible governance

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of democracy seems to be the string that connects the concept of leadership to development. Effective leadership brings about sustainable development. Responsible governance hinges on good leadership. Unfortunately, responsible governance or good leadership is lacking in the Nigerian democratic agenda due to corrupt practices and a lack of political will. Unfortunately, a lack of political will has been one of the problems in Nigeria, and this has led to the reason why Nigeria has not been able to meet the dreams and aspirations of the people. The interrelatedness between leadership and development, and how the concept of democracy represents the bedrock for responsible leadership, is vital. However, responsible leadership paves the way for sustainable development. This paper argues that the concepts of democracy, leadership, and development are concepts that hinge on human-centeredness. The concept of democracy, leadership, and development represents the need for human betterment, and these concepts provide the supporting structures of society.

Moreover, without good democratic principles and values, responsible leadership and sustainable development, human betterment seems not to be plausible. Good human condition in terms of meeting their dreams and aspirations hinges on good democratic principles and good leadership. Democracy hinges on the promotion of freedom, rights, and privileges. Effective leadership and sustainable development revolve around the attainment of the basic indices of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include a reduction in infant mortality rate, good healthcare, regular power supply, affordable water supply, cleaner energy, a good tax system, and the rule of law. Responsible governance and effective leadership should aim at the promotion of the common good of the people. Development means the social transformation of society. Development is the transformation of society socially, politically, technologically, scientifically, economically, educationally, and psychologically. Development centers on human betterment. Nonetheless, this paper is divided into six sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two focuses on the conceptual clarification of democracy. Section three discusses the conceptual clarification of leadership. Section four is anchored on the conceptual clarification of development. Section five hinges on the nexus of democracy, leadership, and development: implications for the Nigerian experience. Section six harps on the conclusion and recommendations.

Most conventional discussions of democracy and development use concepts produced from Euro-American historical experiences as universal standards and then portray African

states mainly through the language of absence, failure, or incomplete modernization. Southern sociology challenges this hierarchy of knowledge by treating societies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other postcolonial locations as sites of theory production rather than merely sources of data (Alatas 2006; Connell 2007). From this standpoint, Nigeria is not simply a case in which Western democratic institutions have failed. It is a historically specific society formed through colonial state construction, unequal incorporation into global capitalism, and postcolonial struggles over citizenship, resources, and political authority. A Global South perspective therefore requires an analysis of democracy, leadership, and development that begins from Nigeria’s own historical experiences, intellectual traditions, and popular aspirations.

This orientation also reframes development. Rather than equating development with economic liberalization, institutional imitation, or economic growth alone, it understands development as human-centered social transformation, material security, public accountability, and collective capacity for self-determination. This position is consistent with Rodney’s relational account of underdevelopment, Efemini’s emphasis on self-reliance, and de Sousa Santos’s argument that social justice also requires recognition of marginalized forms of knowledge (Rodney 1972; Efemini 2010; Santos 2014). Accordingly, this paper asks not only whether Nigerian democracy conforms to externally derived institutional models, but also whether it enables ordinary people to shape public decisions, secure the necessities of life, and define development according to locally grounded priorities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine democracy, leadership, and development within the context of Nigeria’s democratic experience. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitated an in-depth exploration of governance structures, leadership practices, and their influence on national development through the analysis of existing literature and documented evidence rather than quantitative data. This approach provided a broad understanding of the political, institutional, economic, and social factors shaping democratic governance and development in Nigeria. The study relied entirely on secondary sources of data obtained from credible and authoritative publications. These sources provided valuable information on democratic institutions, electoral processes,

leadership performance, accountability, governance practices, and development outcomes in Nigeria.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This involved carefully reviewing and organizing the information into major themes reflecting democratic governance, leadership effectiveness, political participation, institutional accountability, the rule of law, transparency, good governance, democratic consolidation, and socio-economic development. The analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns, key issues, and emerging trends in the literature, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of how democracy and leadership have influenced Nigeria's development trajectory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Clarification of Democracy

The concept of democracy has been given different meanings. For Iain Mackenzie, it is only relatively recently that democracy has become a form of government deemed by many to be beyond question: until the twentieth century, democracy was often viewed with suspicion. It was thought to be a base or corrupt form of government that did not adequately take into account the (to some) obvious fact that the masses were incapable of governing themselves (Mackenzie 2009:102). The concept of democracy guarantees the public good and the social coordination of the political state. However, democracy means different things to different people. For John Hoffman and Paul Graham, the concept of democracy will be piously invoked in support of an argument. So, in asking what democracy is, we also have to address the question of why it has become almost obligatory for politicians to claim adherence to the concept. Democracy represents a kind of society in which people govern themselves (Hoffman and Graham 2009:101). However, every society needs some form of government in which the people take part in the decision-making process.

In addition, democracy is a political ideology that hinges on the public good of the people. For Hoffman and Graham, democracy has been more and more widely acclaimed from all sections of the political spectrum, so that it has become increasingly confusing as a concept. Democracy involves both direct participation and representation, and representation needs to be based on a sense that the representative can empathize with the problems of their constituents (Hoffman and Graham 2009; Ejiroghene and Chuks 2026). Accordingly, Leon

Baradat argues that democracy must work within a governmental system. Democracy has many critics at every point on the political spectrum. Some critics have argued that democracy is a hopelessly visionary idea based on a number of impossible principles that can never really work because they are too idealistic. Democracy is based on the belief that the majority of the people have only average intelligence and creativity. Democracy is also attacked as being slow and inefficient in society (Baradat 2008:101–102). Accordingly, John Burr and Milton Goldinger, democracy is the form of government in which the people participate in the important decisions that affect their lives (Burr and Goldinger 2008:519). For Joan Ferrante, democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the citizen body and in which members of that citizen body participate directly or indirectly in the decision-making process (Ferrante 2003:538). Nevertheless, democracy hinges on the decision-making process of a people that represent political participation. Democracy through political participation gives people a sense of belonging.

Nonetheless, democratic commitment demands the need for social coordination. On the other hand, democracy represents the normative outcomes of socio-political order. Accordingly, Ekiyor Henry argues that democracy is cherished and claimed by many all over the world. Even die-hard dictators verbally associate themselves with democracy to bring some form of recognition and legitimacy to their regimes. Democracy is fragile, and it can easily be aborted, distorted, hijacked by dictators, and destroyed. In view of this, it must be handled with care. Democracy takes many years to be nursed and nurtured into a sustainable democracy (Ekiyor 2004:26–27).

Conceptual Clarification of Leadership

Leadership crises are among some of the fundamental challenges facing Africa as a continent. For Aghamelu Helen, understanding the leadership of a society may be tantamount to the comprehension of the society’s social system (Aghamelu 2009:140). Leadership demands herculean responsible governance. Accordingly, Godwin Okaneme argues that political leadership at any level is not a tea party. Leadership is a very serious business and therefore requires some unique positive dispositions for one to succeed while in office (Okaneme 2018:7–8). Nigeria is bedeviled by poor leadership. According to Christopher Ukhun, poor leadership has stymied the nation’s enormous economic and political potential. As a result of leadership failure in Nigeria, the country’s quest for sustainable development has been stunted (Ukhun 2004:88–89). Ukhun argues that there is a dearth of the necessities of life.

Everyone, including international observers, is in the know that the lives of Nigerians are on the brink of annihilation, even when we profess to be in a democratic dispensation (Ukhun 2004:92). For Wangari Maathai, good leadership could curtail corruption, one of the most corrosive aspects of poor leadership that has been rife in post-independence Africa. Good leadership would provide the milieu in which citizens can be creative, productive, and build wealth and opportunity (Maathai 2009:113). According to Okaneme, leadership is a critical component in contemporary Nigerian society.

Furthermore, leadership drives all human activities, social, economic, political, and religious. It is the ability of an individual or organization to lead or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations (Okaneme 2018:1). Accordingly, Okaneme argues that: political leadership, on the other hand, is a concept which is central to understanding political processes and outcomes. It is political leadership that ultimately gives states their political leaders at various levels of governance. Political leadership is a major component of the state. Without its effectiveness and efficiency, any nation's development is impaired (Okaneme 2018:2). For Okaneme, political leadership is like a light in the midst of darkness. It shows the way that any nation should go in its march towards development. Political leadership has had a chequered history in Nigeria since its independence in 1960 till the present moment. It largely accounts for the low level of development in the country despite the nation's abundant human and material resources (Okaneme 2018:2–3). For Wangari Maathai, the realization of good leadership could start with an African president or prime minister stepping forward and declaring that we have a problem in our country and as a people. We are cheating and undermining ourselves, and we need to change (Maathai 2009:113).

According to Maathai, whether it is a policeman bribing a bus driver, or a government minister receiving a kickback to license a business, or someone stealing someone else's crops to make a quick penny, we are failing ourselves, our country, those who came before us, and, indeed, future generations (Maathai 2009:113–114). Maathai argues that when a critical mass of people is aware of the situation and willing to speak out, protest, monitor government actions, and risk harassment, arrest, or even death. Maathai stresses that courage is, however, required for a leader to acknowledge the freedom, rights, and privileges of the people to self-determination and prosperity, and as a result demonstrate leadership that avoids bloodshed or further violence (Maathai 2009:114). For Paulinus Ejeh, leadership is simply the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal (Ejeh 2021:183–186).

In addition, leadership as an act of achieving a common objective or goal demonstrates the need for radical openness, lustfulness, empathy, emotional intelligence, listening skills, and enthusiasm.

Conceptual Clarification of Development

Development revolves around human betterment. For Paulinus Ejeh, development is essential and highly necessary for economic growth and the sustenance of any country. Development can only be existentially meaningful if it is sustained or sustainable. And sustainable development is only possible if initiated, directed, and managed by good leadership (Ejeh 2021:193–194). On the other hand, Izu Onyeocha argues that:

“Development can mean at least three things; 1) a process by which an inner principle that is at first hidden comes to light, e.g, the development of an idea by a speaker or a writer; 2) it may be a slow step by step transformation (which is not necessarily directed to one definite goal, e.g, many historical developments, 3) it may be a transformation that is guided in a definite direction, 4), it can be a transformation that leads from the unformed and less determined to the formed and fully determined, e.g., the development of the foetus. Finally, it can be a transformation from one form or species to another, and this can occur either slowly or by leaps. These abstract meanings of the word ‘development’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Several of them can be realized together in the concrete processes that we call ‘development’” (Onyeocha 2020:2).

Furthermore, one of the major hindrances to sustainable development in Nigeria is the challenge of political corruption. Accordingly, Okaneme argues that political corruption leads ultimately to the underdevelopment of Nigeria. Political corruption could lead to slow economic growth in a country like Nigeria. Unfortunately, political corruption has slowed down Nigeria’s quest for development (Okaneme 2018:11). For Eghweree Charles and Aiguosatile Otoghile, corruption amplifies decay, or that is capable of polluting a society and denying it the desired good that can either be the development of social cohesion or achieving mutually beneficial goals. Consequently, funds lost to political corruption appear to make achieving development difficult in Nigeria (Eghweree and Otoghile 2018:106–107).

Moreover, political corruption in Nigeria has crippled Nigeria’s quest for development. Nigeria’s quest for development has been distorted due to the prevalence of national insecurity.

However, insecurity remains a bane to Nigeria's quest for economic development. For Alloy Ihuah, one of the formidable challenges that has confronted the Nigerian nation in recent times has been the preponderance of insecurity (Ihuah 2021:274). Accordingly, Aghamelu Fidelis argues that human insecurity suffers because the conditions, which ensure living in peace without fear or threat of being deprived of life and its necessities, are lacking in Nigeria (Chuka 2006:103). For Gbari Sylvester and Anselm Udo, insecurity in Nigeria has been fueled by ethno-religious crises. The spate of insecurity in our country, from Boko Haram, kidnapping, religious crises, human trafficking, militancy, assassinations, robberies, bombings, Fulani herdsmen, and other insecurity problems, calls for dialogue in Nigeria (Udo 2021:208). In addition to the foregoing, the insecurity situation in Nigeria requires political will in order to gain the people's confidence in terms of the protection of lives and property.

Nevertheless, the quest for sustainable development in Nigeria has been bedeviled by poor democratic governance. Unfortunately, poor democratic governance has led to the problem of brain drain in Nigeria. For Maduabuchi Dukor, the phenomenon of brain drain has eaten away the manpower and intellectual resources that would have been the bedrock and galvanizing motif for African development, citizenship, and freedom from the international capitalist system controlled from Europe (Dukor 2010:116–117). The concepts of development and democracy revealed that both concepts are interconnected or interwoven. Democracy goes with development, and consequently, democracy and development resonate within the ambit of the socio-political, technological, scientific, educational, economic, and cultural development of a nation. Consequently, the concept of development implies public responsibility and social transformation. The philosophy of development is value-driven. Development is human-centered, and it demands that countries of the world should be self-reliant. Accordingly, Andrew Efemini argues that:

Development requires public responsibility and technological self-reliance, and these should serve as the springboard for human capacity building. For development to be sustainable, it must be linked to the attainment of human betterment. Development is interrelated with politics, leadership, and culture. Nigeria's development crises are complex because of their political and historical roots, and the history of the Nigerian economy does not help matters. The Nigerian economy in the modern form is a colonial one (Efemini 2010:173).

In light of the above, development is an abstract concept that must be translated into a concrete reality. Development requires the need for human improvement. Accordingly, Efemini argues that development is visible and useful, and it includes an aspect of quality of life and the creation of better conditions for the Nigerian people (Efemini 2010:173–174). However, development has a multidimensional approach because it means different things to different people. However, development hinges on the collective experience of a people in a society. Development has different connotations, such as economic development, human development, social development, cultural development, political development, and environmental development. Development simply hinges on visionary leadership and democratic commitment. Development revolves around the people’s sense of value, self-reliance, scientific and technological progression and assimilation, arts, sports, health, education, and the religious consciousness of a people. Moreover, development is defined by the economic prosperity of human beings. Development is defined by man’s quest for happiness and his quest for rapid economic growth. Development resonates with the need for leadership responsibility. For instance, Nigeria’s quest for economic growth has been a wild goose chase due to leadership failure. Nigeria, as a developing nation, is gradually becoming a failed nation-state due to chronic leadership crises and politico-economic corruption. Worthy of note is that human beings should take the responsibility of sustainable development very seriously. Development is tied to life itself. According to Andrew Efemini, development is so fundamental to human beings because it is tied to the protection of human lives and property.

Nonetheless, development, whether of an individual, community, nation, or state, or in terms of economy, politics, or culture, is so tied to life that it must constantly be examined (Efemini 2019:126–127). Andrew Efemini further heightened his theoretical position by arguing that development is understood as the quantitative and qualitative improvement in the material, emotional, and spiritual conditions of human existence. The improvement that is referred to must be sustainable and realizable in ways that are consistent with the protection of human dignity (Efemini 2010:1). For Andrew Efemini, understanding the meaning and nature of development has remained an ongoing concern for man. In addition, development is the process of social transformation in which the people themselves are in charge of the process. To achieve industrialization and economic growth, there is a need for modern man to emerge and dominate the social, economic, and political life of Africa. It is the responsibility of the Nigerian state to fashion out an appropriate self-reliant and sustainable development project (Efemini 2010:1–2). The national development of any country demands the need for self-

reliance and the radical harnessing of its human and natural resources through visionary leadership, democratic accountability, and sustainability.

The Nexus of Democracy, Leadership and Development: Implications for Nigeria

The nexus of democracy, leadership and development represents a holistic principle or coordinated approach of human existence. Sustainable development requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. The sustainable development of any country hinges on responsible leadership and good governance. Sustainable development in Nigeria has become a wild goose chase due to endemic corruption, monetized politics, an elite regime, godfatherism, political irresponsibility of Nigerian politicians. Sustainable development hinges on the need for responsible leadership. Sustainable development includes all aspects of the life of the individual and the nation-state. Nigeria's quest for sustainable development should resonate within a planned national economy. Development revolves around the dynamic process of social transformation. Sustainable development should revolve around full economic growth and the expansion of industries, arts, science, technology, agriculture, education, social, religious, and cultural institutions.

Nevertheless, responsible leadership serves as the catalyst for rapid social transformation, as this is lacking in the Nigerian body polity. As rightly observed by Andrew Efemini, leadership is inseparably linked to the conception of sustainable development. Leadership determines what the social structures of society would look like; it determines the goals and directs the social activities and functions of societies. Leadership, consequently, grows out of the desire for social transformation (Efemini 2010:2). Development is stimulated by the need to meet the material needs of the people in Nigerian society. Accordingly, Walter Rodney argues that development is defined as the ability of society to tap its natural resources to harness and cater for the material and social needs of the general population (Rodney 1972:10–11). For Alison Watson, development entails the structural dynamics of core-peripheral economic relations of various strata of societies (Watson 2004:13–14). In addition to the foregoing, development in Nigeria is bedeviled by social crises and structural strain. For Joan Ferrante, structural strain means any situation in which the valued goals have unclear limits; people are unsure whether the legitimate means that society provides will allow them to achieve the valued goals; and legitimate opportunities for meeting the goals remain closed to a significant portion of the population (Ferrante 2003:546). However, development is made possible when structural strains or social distortions are mitigated from society. Unfortunately,

all forms of social distortions characterized the Nigerian society and include the evils of corruption, godfatherism, elite regime, monetized politics, weak government institutions, poor educational system, unemployment, ethno-religious crises,

Moreover, development is feasible in society by virtue of championing political and economic liberalization and democratization of Nigerian society. Sustainable development is only possible through democratic governance, accountability, and transparency. For Denis Venter, good governance and transparency are essential to sustainable development (Venter 2004:248). Accordingly, Denis Venter stresses that the development of any nation-state revolves around a call for liberalization and democratization; development will take place only if political leaders abandon their authoritarian practices (Venter 2004:234). For Denis Venter, some of the authoritarian practices in African countries include corrupt practices, elite regimes, and monetized politics. Chuka Euka, in agreement with Denis Venter, believes that development is evident from its push of free market economics, liberal education, good governance, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, among other holistic values for the people of the member state. Very critical to our understanding of development is the dire need to use it as a synonym for economic liberalization and greater openness and happiness of the people in society (Euka 2006:79). In addition, the foregoing, the democratization and the economic liberalization of society revolve around democratic accountability.

Nevertheless, development in Nigeria could only thrive if the Nigerian government abides by democratic principles, sustainability, accountability, transparency, and equity, which need to be made real and tangible. Development in Nigeria has been bedeviled by political and economic corruption and brain drain syndrome. However, corruption has always been a societal problem and a global phenomenon. One of the drawbacks to Nigeria’s quest for sustainable development is endemic corruption. For Victor Jeko and Odigie Joseph, corruption is like a cancer, and it has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society (Jeko and Odigie 2022:119). However, economic growth and sustainable development do not fall from the sky. It requires pragmatic effort by all Nigerian citizens. The quest for economic growth and economic development requires concerted human action. Development in present-day Nigeria is bedeviled by poor governance. Accordingly, Jeko and Odigie stressed that the present-day Nigeria is known for a lot of atrocities, such as ethno-religious crises, poor democratic governance style, and poor leadership structure, and these can serve as stumbling blocks for Nigeria’s quest for sustainable development (Jeko and Odigie 2022:119–120).

According to Jeko and Odigie, poor development planning has resulted in the alarming rate of unemployment and brain drain in present-day Nigeria. Unfortunately, millions of Nigerians have left the shores of this country, resulting in the mass exodus of Nigerian youths to greener pastures. For Jeko and Odigie, the alarming rate of unemployment in Nigeria cannot be swept under the carpet.

In addition, unemployment occurs when fully fledged adults who are willing, capable, and ready to work with their rational and intellectual capacities, and they cannot find a suitable job to do in Nigeria (Jeko and Odigie 2022:122). Development remains a catalyst for the enjoyment of human life. Sustainable development is the key to human social transformation. Development, in all its ramifications, could lead to human flourishing. Sustainable development hinges on good policy implementation. Buttressing their theoretical position further, Jeko and Odigie argued that what drives development in society is good policy direction and strategic national planning. Development should be integral in outlook. A well-developed nation is a well-organized state with a strong and stable government (Jeko and Odigie 2022:122–123). Stable government brings about a robust civil society. However, the quest for national development in Nigeria has been bedeviled by the prevalence of corrupt practices, ethno-religious crises, and elite regimes and monetized politics. For Jeko and Odigie, development is also ideologically and culturally driven by the people. Development in Nigeria is in a sorry state because Nigerian politicians are paying lip service to the quest for sustainable development due to political irresponsibility, lack of political will or democratic commitment, accountability, transparency, poor value system, and the prevalence of political and economic corruption (Jeko and Odigie 2022:118–119). However, corruption has virtually destroyed the social structures of Nigeria (Adagbabiri and Okolie 2015:158–161). Law and religion, that suppose to be the supporting structures of society, have been distorted by a poor legal framework in Nigeria (Adagbabiri and Okolie 2017:1–16).

Contribution to Southern Sociology and Global South Scholarship

Viewed through Southern sociology, the Nigerian experience exposes the limits of approaches that treat Euro-American political trajectories as the normal path and postcolonial democracies as delayed or incomplete versions of that path. Connell (2007) argues that mainstream social theory often organizes knowledge through a metropole-periphery relation in which concepts are produced in Northern institutions while Southern societies supply cases and data. This paper reverses that relation by using Nigeria's democratic contradictions to

theorize how colonial legacies, resource dependence, elite capture, weak public institutions, and popular demands for material security shape the meaning of democracy and leadership. Nigeria is therefore not only an object to which general theories are applied; it is a location from which the relationship between democracy, leadership, and development can be rethought.

Second, the analysis contributes to alternative discourses in social science by centering African thinkers and locally grounded concepts of human betterment, self-reliance, community, dignity, and public responsibility (Alatas 2006; Lowery 2020). The manuscript’s engagement with Rodney, Maathai, Efemini, Dukor, Okaneme, Ejeh, and other African scholars demonstrates that theorizing democracy and development does not have to begin with imported modernization models. These intellectual traditions interpret development as a moral, social, and political transformation tied to the protection of life, collective welfare, human dignity, and control over resources. Such an approach broadens democracy beyond elections and formal institutions to include the substantive capacity of people to influence decisions and live with security, equality, and dignity.

Third, a Global South perspective draws attention to epistemic justice. De Sousa Santos (2014) argues that global social justice is impossible without global cognitive justice because colonial power also marginalizes the knowledge through which communities understand and organize their lives. Applied to Nigeria, democratic renewal requires not only institutional reform but also recognition of local knowledge, community practices, African political thought, and citizen experience in defining public priorities. This does not require romanticizing tradition. Rather, it calls for critical dialogue among constitutional democracy, African intellectual traditions, local institutions, and the lived knowledge of groups often excluded from state-centered development planning.

Fourth, the Nigerian case suggests a Southern conception of democratic development based on four interrelated principles: historical accountability, material redistribution, epistemic inclusion, and popular participation. Historical accountability requires acknowledging the colonial and postcolonial structures that have shaped state institutions and inequalities. Material redistribution links democracy to access to healthcare, education, water, energy, employment, and security. Epistemic inclusion recognizes Nigeria’s intellectual and community resources as sources of policy knowledge. Popular participation moves beyond periodic voting toward continuous citizen influence over public institutions. Together, these

principles show that democratic legitimacy in the Global South depends not only on procedural conformity but also on the ability of governance to repair historical inequalities and produce socially meaningful improvements in everyday life.

The broader theoretical contribution is that Southern sociology should not be reduced to adding African examples to theories constructed elsewhere. Its task is to reconstruct the terms of theory itself. In this paper, democracy, leadership, and development are analytically connected through the question of whether political institutions enhance collective capacity and human flourishing. This Nigeria-centered formulation can inform comparative research across postcolonial societies facing similar tensions among electoral democracy, externally oriented development agendas, elite rule, and popular demands for social transformation.

CONCLUSION

Having critically examined the concepts of democracy, leadership, development and their implication for Nigeria, this paper, however, concludes that the quest for national development of any country demands the need for self-reliance and the radical harnessing of its human and natural resources through visionary leadership, democratic accountability, and sustainability. Effective leadership brings about sustainable development. Responsible governance hinges on good leadership. Unfortunately, responsible governance is lacking in Nigeria due to corrupt practices and a lack of political will to meet the dreams and aspirations of Nigerians. The concept of democracy represents the bedrock for responsible leadership, and responsible leadership paves the way for sustainable development. The nexus of democracy, leadership, and development represents a holistic principle or coordinated approach of human existence. Sustainable development requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. Sustainable development in Nigeria has become a wild goose chase due to endemic corruption, monetized politics, an elite regime, godfatherism, political irresponsibility of Nigerian politicians. However, without good democratic principles, values, and responsible leadership, sustainable development is not feasible. Good human condition in terms of meeting their dreams and aspirations hinges on good democratic principles and good leadership. Leadership as an act of achieving a common objective or goal of a people demonstrates the need for radical openness, lustfulness, empathy, emotional intelligence, listening skills, and enthusiasm.

Moreover, democracy hinges on the promotion of the common good and human rights and privileges. Democracy hinges on the decision-making process of a people who represent

political participation. Democracy through political participation gives people a sense of belonging. Effective leadership and sustainable development revolve around the attainment of the basic indices of good governance, which include a reduction in infant mortality rate, a good healthcare system, regular power supply, affordable water supply, cleaner energy, a good tax system, and the rule of law. This paper, however, recommends that:

1. The Nigerian democratic agenda and commitment should aim at ensuring people-oriented programmes.
2. Nigerian politicians should be equipped with leadership and managerial competence to avoid embarrassment to the international community.
3. Nigerian democratic commitment should ensure strong government institutions.
4. The Nigerian democratic agenda should curb all forms of corrupt practices such as embezzlement of public funds, electoral fraud, election rigging, elite politics, and monetized politics.
5. The Nigerian government should ensure a strong legal framework for the rule of law to thrive in Nigeria.
6. There should be an equitable distribution of resources among the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.
7. There should be the promotion of the freedom, rights, and privileges of the Nigerian people.
8. There should be effective leadership training for Nigerian politicians whenever they intend to aspire for any political office.
9. Leadership should be taken very seriously by the Nigerian politicians, and it should not be an avenue to loot public funds at the detriment of the Nigerian populace.
10. There should be an attitudinal change between leadership and followership because the problem of Nigeria goes beyond leadership. We also have a followership problem.
11. There should be gender equality, and Nigerian women should have the right to vote, education, and employment.
12. There should be provision of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria, such as functional education, an effective communication network, a good road network, and healthcare facilities.

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