

Development Planning and Good Governance Delivery In Benue State: *A Review of “Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue”*

Nyianshima Geoffrey Orvihi, Ph.D.

Prof. Eugene T Aliegba

Dr. Canice Esidene Erunke

Department of Political Science,

Nasarawa State University, Keffi

geonyianshima@gmail.com

08032903294

Abstract

The high expectations and aspirations for good governance in Benue state following the return to democratic rule in 1999 have been largely unfulfilled. While there are many dimensions to the failure of democratic governance in Benue State and Nigeria at large, this paper focuses on the aspect of development planning with emphasis on the Ortom's development blueprint, “Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue” with the aim of highlighting its challenges and implications for good governance delivery in the state. The paper explains that the achievements of “Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue” were far below the satisfaction of majority of the Benue people. The failure of the plan to impact positively on good governance delivery was largely as a result of its problematic nature – from the process of initiation, design to implementation. Among other specific factors, were the problems of lack of visionary and committed leadership as well as the absence of sustainable institutional framework to drive implementation. With the aid of elite theory, the paper argues that the failure of political leadership, particularly during the Samuel Ortoms's Administration, to deliver the goals of dividends of democracy as enshrined in “Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue” document can be attributed to the poor attitudes of political elite and the faulty process of leadership recruitment, among many other factors. Meanwhile, the paper recommends for new political orientation, change of attitude as well as visionary and committed leadership.

Key Words: Development Planning, Governance

Introduction

The main purpose of government is to ensure security and achieve sustainable improvement in the quality of lives of the generality of the people. It is for this reason that governments all over the world usually design frameworks for socio-economic development of the society. Regrettably, the process of development planning and good governance delivery in emerging democracies, especially in the Third World Countries (TWCs) including Nigeria, has been very unimpressive largely on accounts of poor leadership. Nigeria ranked third - worst nation, 102 out of 104 countries, in Global Governance Index (Ibeh, cited in *the Guardian*, April 28, 2021). From the available reports, Nigeria is not found on the global and regional maps of the countries with best democracies and good governance. Even within the Nigeria, there are disparities among states in terms of good governance and socio - economic development.

In Nigeria, democracy has been restored for about two decades ago, with so much hopes and expectations from the people considering that the country has abundant human and natural

resources. It is assumed that with democracy, people would be free to choose their leaders and representatives and hold them accountable for the overall objective of fast tracking development and improving the general living conditions of the masses. However, the present state of democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria gives cause for concern, as it tends towards the direction of disempowerment (Shafiu, et al., 2023). With emphasis on Buhari's Administration, Hoffmann and Wallace (2022, p.1) maintain that:

Nigeria's democracy has been fragile and fluctuating since independence as government continues to crackdown on free press, basic rights are continually challenged in a failing justice environment (#EndSars protests 2020), steady decrease in voter turnout as voters have become disillusioned by the recycling of political candidates, the lack of internal democracy in political parties, and the failure of government to deliver real progress.

Democracy, as it is practiced in Nigeria over the years, has not yet delivered considerable uplift in living standards for most Nigerians. The democratically - elected governments in Nigeria have continued to preside over weak democratic institutions as well as poor socio-economic fundamentals, endemic corruption, high rate of poverty and unemployment, huge infrastructure deficit as well as poor human development index (HDI) which has shown a 22% increase in 19 years, but remains low at 0.548, categorizing the country as having low human development (UNDP, 2024). Benue state, which is the focus of this study, stands very low in comparison with some of its counterparts in Nigeria in terms of standard of living, employment opportunities and infrastructure delivery. Report of socio-economic databook which analyses relative performance of the sub-national level of government in Nigeria ranked Lagos State, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Oyo State as the best performing states in economic performance (Bello, cited in *Leadership*, September 30, 2023)

The importance of development planning for good governance delivery cannot be over-emphasized. Development planning is necessary because since development is neither accidental nor does it take place naturally and quickly of its own accord, it is expedient to plan it deliberately (Asabe - Shahu of the Yar'Adua Foundation, 2020). Development planning, according to the National Development Plan (2021 - 2025), helps to guide the implementation of programmes and policies that promote rapid multi - sectoral growth and development of the nation's economy (*Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Development*, 2021). As argued by Moti (2019), while development planning is purely a guide and amenable to review or re-direction as dictated by the operating environment, its absence or inconsistency can, however, spell doom for the sustainable development of a country.

Regrettably, the political leadership in Nigeria and, Benue state in particular, seems to place premium on the struggle and competition for the control of state resources at the detriment of credible and sustainable development plans. A study by Asabe - Shahu of the Yar'Adua Foundation (2020) reveals that there have been development planning initiatives and programmes in Nigeria, yet such efforts do not seem to produce concrete developmental results from all indicators. In Benue state, successive administrations have seemed to engage in an elusive search for the best strategy that can deliver governance to majority of the citizenry as there is hardly any one that cannot be identified with any development document that gives one an impression of government commitment to development. What is worrisome is the poor development indices of Benue state which tends to raise concerns about the impact of development planning on governance delivery in the state. Arguably, development planning in Benue state has been constrained by lack of commitment by the political leadership to development and good governance delivery.

Conceptual Clarification

One basic requirement for discussing anything is to understand, first and foremost, what is being talked about. Thus, in order to properly interrogate the subject matter of development planning and good governance delivery, it is pertinent to clarify the key concepts in line with the works of other scholars.

- (i) **Development Planning:** Although, the concept of development planning is used very often, it is always difficult to give a clear cut definition of the term, especially that it is

used interchangeably with other concepts, such as agenda setting, vision plan and development blueprint. By development planning, Asabe - Shahu of the Yar'Adua Foundation (2020, p.2) defines it as: a long-term programme designed to effect some permanent structural changes in the economy is connected with the involvement of government in the economy whereby it sets out objectives about the way it wants the economy to develop in the future and then intervenes to try to achieve those objectives. Based on the above perspectives, development planning in the context of this paper concerns with deliberate control and direction of the economy by a central authority for the purpose of achieving definite targets and objectives within a specified period of time. It simply connotes a proposed actions or course of proposed actions directed at achieving the goals of development.

- (ii) **Governance:** The concept of governance, according to the World Bank Report (2000) means exercise of political power in the management of a nation's affairs. Deriving from this conceptualization, governance can be said to be the way power is exercised in the management of the country's economic and social resources for the development of society. It is the ability of the government to efficiently and effectively promote the economic well-being of its people. Thus, governance encompasses state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes, implementation capacity as well as relationship between governing apparatus and the governed - that is the people in terms of their standard of living (George - Genyi, 2013). Governance typically emphasizes leadership which suggests the way political leaders manning the apparatus of the state, use or misuse power, to promote social and economic development or to engage in those agendas that largely undermine the realization of the good things of life for the people.

Good governance is in tandem with democratic governance which is largely characterized by high valued principles, such as the rule of law, accountability, popular participation, transparency as well as human and civil rights. These governance values have the capacity to facilitate the development process of a country. Governance provides the ground norms for a society to operate; and on whose basis, one may determine whether the society is experiencing good governance or bad governance.

Theoretical Analysis

Owing to the multi-dimensional in nature of the subject matter of development planning and good governance delivery, it has attracted diverse theoretical and analytical perspectives which cannot be exhausted in this paper. However, it is expedient to select a suitable theory to explain the failure or success of development planning and governance delivery in Benue state and Nigeria. For this purpose, the paper adopts Elite Theory as a theoretical framework. Elite theory was formulated at the end of the 19th Century, and in the first decades of the 20th Century by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels (*International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2008). Although, the Elite Theory has its origin from the field of sociology, it has become a popular scientist tool of explaining politics and development through the works of Harold Lasswell.

Historically, elite theory was conceived as a reaction to the ideological streams of socialism and democracy which claim the involvement of the masses in governance and decision making process. Instead, proponents of elite theory, such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848 - 1923), Gaetano Mosca (1854 - 1941), Roberto Michel (1876 - 1936) and Ortega Y. Gasset (1883-1955) focus on the inevitability of a group of few people (elite) in all societies. This group of scholars argues that, in every society, there is a small clique of people that are engage in policy formulation and implementation. Elite theory assumes that every society consists of two broad categories: the selected few who are able and, therefore, have the right to supreme leadership; and the vast masses of people who are destined to be ruled (Varma, 1999).

This theoretical assumption suggests an inescapable division between the masses and dominant minorities known variously as the elite, ruling class, political class, oligarchies and

aristocracies. Most relevant in the context of this paper is the popular view of elite theorists that political leadership otherwise known as political elite plays a dominant role in decision making and for the development of any society. It implies that political elite have exceptional influence over the fate of the society because of their superiority and dominance over decision making. Thus, the main duty of political elite as conceived by the public is to construct and reconstruct society by mobilizing the available human and material resources in order to achieve the goals of development.

Therefore, the suitability of elite theory in this paper is based on the reality that there is hardly any society which attained reasonable levels of development without the significant role of leadership. As argued by Jibo's (2014), in every society, it is the elite who are the vanguard of development. It suggests that the nature and character of political leadership determines, to a large extent, the failure or success of development in any society. This analogy explains how the political elite in Benue state and Nigeria has failed in its responsibility to put in place necessary measures that can bring about development in the state. However, it must be noted that the problem of economic backwardness in Benue state is not as a result of the existence of political elite. This is because political elite have been able to achieve remarkable development strides in some states in Nigeria as can be seen in Lagos, Rivers, Borno and so on.

In Benue state, the failure of political elite, especially the Samuel Ortom's Administration to achieve the goals of development as contained in "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" document can be attributed to the poor attitudes of political elite and the faulty process of leadership recruitment, among many other factors. For instance, the process in which Samuel Ortom emerged as the flag bearer of All Progressive Congress (APC) during the 2015 General Elections was not only questionable, but also has serious implications on his achievements in office after 8 years. His level of desperation to obtain nomination ticket from APC a week after his failure to PDP clearly demonstrated his motive was not to serve, but to acquire governorship seat as a platform to amass wealth primitively. This argument can be supported by his numerous personal projects all over the state after 8 years with little or nothing for the state.

Despite the usefulness of the elite theory in understanding the failure of development planning to impact positively on economic development in Benue state with a focus on Ortom's Administration, the theory can be criticized for its narrow approach that neglects the scope of influence wielded by non-members of the elite class in the society. In Benue State and Nigeria in general, civil society organizations and other interest groups also influence policies and programmes in the country. That notwithstanding, elite theory remains useful in the study of democratic practice in Benue State under the leadership of Suwasan and Ortom (2007 - 2023). This theory is considered suitable for this paper because the development process of any society is largely influenced by the attitudes and conduct of political leaders who are saddled with the responsibility of decision making.

A Critical Review of "Our Collective Vision for a Greater Benue"

The development history of societies across the globe has shown that socio-economic development of any society is not an accidental process, but rather a product of human thoughts, visions and actions. It emphasises the imperative of development planning which is largely based on the need to identify and mobilize both human and material resources that are needed for the transformation of society. Basically, development planning ensures the process of development to be headed in the desired direction that can bring about improvement in the living standards of the generality of the people. Thus, an assessment of Ortom's development blueprint, "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" is based on the extent to which it has been able to deliver good governance by utilising the abundant development potentials of the state to achieve socio-economic development and better the material conditions of the majority of the people.

"Our Collective Vision for a Greater Benue" is a development blueprint of Samuel Ortom who was elected into office as the Governor of Benue State in 2015 under the platform of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and later decamped to the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

The plan's overarching thrust, according to the document, is to prime Benue people for a collaborative rescue of the state from its current sluggish socio-economic development by rebuilding and transforming the old Benue into a Model New State. Its Vision Statement is to inspire people "to build a Model New State, anchored on the fear of God that was economically and socially viable for the common good of all". The main building block for driving its Mission Statement is based on encouraging people to "collectively mold a thriving state by providing critical infrastructure, promoting agro- allied industrialization, priming public-private-partnership, empowering the people, creating jobs and wealth, changing the way of conducting government business, fostering good governance and establishing an investment hub in a peaceful and democratic context". The core ethical values and principles underpinning Our Collective Vision are:

- (i) Benue people's participation in the Government of the State is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended;
- (ii) Constitutionally, sovereignty belongs to the people from whom the Government of Benue State derives all its powers and authority (the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended). Thus, differing interests are mediated to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the State;
- (iii) All Benue people are born free and equal in dignity and rights and have equal opportunities to improve their well-being;
- (iv) All Benue people are equal before the law and are entitled to full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal without any form of arbitrary deprivation; and governing with the fear of God.
- (v) Benue people and their leaders have a broad vision on good governance and sustainable development along with a sense of what is needed for such development. The institutions and processes work towards meeting the needs and aspirations of Benue people;
- (vi) The operations of the State Government are guided by the principle of value-for-money in obtaining the maximum benefit for Benue people without waste of resources.
- (vii) Leadership effectiveness should manifest through the attributes of pro-activeness, beginning with the end in mind, putting first things first, thinking win-win, seeking to understand then to be understood, synergizing and continuously sharpening the saw through physical, emotional, ethical, social, mental and spiritual development; and,
- (viii) Decision-makers in government, the private sector, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are accountable to the people; this is built on the free flow of information where Government institutions, processes, and information are easily accessible.

Therefore, Our Collective Vision for A Greater focuses on achieving a dual set of complementary and overarching objectives: (i) rescue and reverse the old Benue State from its sluggish socio-economic development; and (ii) build a Model New Benue State, anchored on the fear of God with a view to making the state economically and socially viable for the common good of our present and future generations. The specific objectives are directed at integrating and balancing the social, economic, institutional, environmental, integrated government, and ethical objectives. According to the Our Collective Vision document, the development plan is propelled by the relief from the scourge of crippling poverty to a dignified and prosperous living standard; recovery from a dwindling to a vibrant economy for the common good of all; and reforming the public service with a view to institutionalizing a people-trusted government. The core targets, strategic priority programmes and activities of the plan include, good governance and revenue security; agriculture-driven industrialization; science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) - based education and health services; investments in critical infrastructure; and gender, women, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

According to the Plan document, N200 Billion was the projected cost of the five strategic programmes over four years. The funding structure for implementing the programmes includes, annual budgetary appropriations, bonds and debentures, financial and technical support from

development partners, and public-private-partnership schemes. The plan provides for implementation strategy comprising institutional framework, shared responsibilities and accountabilities, effective coordination, rapid capacity-building and robust ICT, effective change management, development of implementation action plans, promotion of broad based multi-stakeholder participation, effective monitoring and evaluation (M & E), risks and mitigation, and sustainability and legacy.

As laudable as the contents of the blueprint may appear to be, the socio-economic reality of Benue State has shown that development planning through the instrumentality of "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" of Ortom's administrations, from all indications, does not seem to produce concrete developmental results and deliver dividends of good governance. Like most development plans in Benue state and Nigeria, "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" suffers from the problem of lack of credibility and sustainability from the level of initiation, design and implementation. Obviously, Benue state is battling with both problem of inappropriate plan framework and poor implementation of the available plans as the state is still very far from where it ought to be. It is difficult to talk of credible and sustainable development plans in the state, not because there is anything inherently problematic about the concept, but because it is not in the least clear that the political leaders have visions that are identifiable and supported with sincere leadership and appropriate institutional framework.

The development blueprints of Ortom's administration, "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue", like many other plans or agenda settings, especially since 1999, shows that public policy formulation and implementation continues to be the exclusive reserve of a few as majority of the people have not been opportune to make input into government decisions even when it borders on their welfare. The plan is noted to be imperfect and devoid of ideological character without the necessary elements that could make it predictable, relevant, credible and indeed, sustainable. Relatedly, the Ortom's development plan lacks certain key ingredients, such as visionary leadership, proper communication, marketability, accountability, and predictability. Therefore, the plan fails to incorporate an integrated approach for implementation such as legislation.

As a critical variable, the legislative framework in the context of assessing the development blueprints, according to Agbinda (2011), basically focuses on the availability of regulatory instruments for implementing and achieving the stated goals. Institutional building with legislative backing is considered to be critical for any state or nation desirous of relevance both at national, regional or international levels. The institutional imperative argument is supported by Acemoglu and Robinson (2013), who attribute the differences among countries in terms of poverty, political and economic power to the level of institutional growth, viability and sustainability. Regrettably, instead of strong institutional building, "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" is rather premised on faith in God.

Critical to development planning is the role of political leadership. The importance of visionary leadership for the success of development planning is anchored on the fact that leadership provides direction for the initiation, formulation and implementation of development agenda. Also, the success or failure of development plans can be attributed to the quality and nature of political leadership. However, development plans in Benue state with emphasis on Ortom's blueprint have not been backed up with visionary and committed political leadership. The political leadership has not demonstrated enough commitment to put Benue state on the path of good governance. The Ortom development blueprint is only designed to create an impression of government intention without any serious commitment nor sincerity of purpose to implement it. This explains why it has become mere academic document or research material without any practical efforts to implement it.

Further, the Ortom's development blueprint suffers from the problem of lack of continuity that usually effects policy sustainability. As argued by Kayode and Akume (2012), every regime that comes to power officially abandoned on-going policies and programmes without recourse to their prospects and cost implications. The development strides of Aper Aku, Fr. Adasu and other laudable development plans have suffered this set-back in Benue state. A practical example

is the Tomato Juice Company in Wannue initiated by George Akume's at the twilight of administration which has been abandoned by his successors. Despite that some projects have suffered policy reversals and false starts, annual budgets however carry these projects without fully executing them.

More importantly, endemic corruption constitutes one of the major setbacks of Ortom's development blueprint. Generally, corruption continues to blossom in Nigeria and the problem has been compounded and reinforced by lack of political will and commitment by the political leadership. The development blueprint Ortom suffers from abuse of public power for private gain. The government of Ortom places itself in a position that gives him undue advantage. This can be seen, for instance, in the large number of government vehicles recovered by the Assets Recovery Committee set up by the present administration of Fr. Hyacinth Alia. It clearly shows elements of mismanagement of public funds during the administration of Ortom.

In sum, "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" does not seem to deliver satisfactory results in terms of socioeconomic development and democratic dividends for majority of the citizenry. The plan lacks basic requirements to guide the operation, implementation and benefits that are associated with. Simply put, the plan does not clearly set out priorities and specify actions needed to attain the goals of socio-economic development in the state. Above, it lacks political will as well as the necessary ingredient of visionary leadership and right institutions that can fast track good governance delivery in Benue State.

Conclusion

Development planning is, no doubt, a veritable platform for delivering the dividends of good governance. While there are plethora of perspectives to explain the phenomenon of democratic governance in Benue state, the issue of development planning is also pertinent considering that it helps in initiating processes to ensure that policies and strategies put in place to achieve the goals of development. However, the achievements of "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" are far below the satisfaction of majority of the Benue people. Thus, the failure of the Samuel Ortom's Administration to deliver the goals of dividends of democracy as enshrined in "Our Collective Vision for A Greater Benue" document can be attributed to the poor attitudes of political leadership and lack of visionary and committed leadership as well as the absence of sustainable institutional framework to drive implementation.

Based on the above submission, this paper argues that development planning in Benue state and Nigeria should not be seen as a political pre-occupation, but a covenant between government and the people. There is need for the review of existing development plans both at the national and state levels in order to come up with credible and sustainable programmes that can deliver good governance to the people. The implementation of any development plans largely depends on the political will of the policy makers. This entails shunning corruption while ensuring utmost utilization of the resources on projects and programmes that will have long term positive impacts on the lives of people.

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