

# Social Institutions and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Weak institutional structures, corruption, lack of capacity building and other militating factors hindering institutional growth and democratic gains, forms the basis for this study. It examined social institutions and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. Specifically, it studied: the relationship between individuals' attitude and institutional growth in Nigeria and, to identify factors militating against institutional growth and sustainable democracy. A survey research design was adopted using the questionnaire as a major instrument for data collection. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 200 respondents from heads of departments and boards of public and private institutions in Cross River state. Microsoft excel and PAWS statistics were used to analyse the data. The findings shows that the attitude of individuals has no significant effect on poor institutional growth rather, other indicators such as corruption, lack of capacity building, poor accounting system ethnic sentiments, poor remuneration and interferences from politicians are responsible for weak institutions in Nigeria. We therefore recommend that the government should ensure zero tolerance to corruption in all sectors of the economy. It has been concluded that Social institutions are the pivots where the development of the country revolves and when these institutions are strengthened, it will as well deepen democracy and Galvanize equitable distribution of resources.

## Keywords

Sustainable Democracy, Social Institutions, Attitudinal Change and Institutional Growth

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## 1. Introduction

Social institutions are part of social structure saddled with the responsibilities of providing vital social services such as education, health, promoting family values, economy, politics and promotion of moral values in the society. Social institutions are platforms where social interactions take place through the various activities of people. These institutions include family, education, health, economy, politics and religion. The outcome of these social interactions determines the state of human society. These social institutions are interdependent; change in one

institution inevitably causes adjustments in other areas. For example, changes in education by way of producing low quality graduate can affect the quality of service in the labour market.

The attributes of social systems as outlined by [1] are commitment, agreement, cohesion, solidarity, consensus, reciprocity, cooperation, integration, stability and persistence. He further assumes that the structures (parts) of a system are inter-dependent, and that they work in harmony for the maintenance of the system. Every social system has a

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social arrangement and behavioural pattern with recognized intended (manifest) and unintended (latent) functions. The optimum performance of these social institutions is dependent on the role power plays in creating and maintaining these social arrangements. In the case of Nigeria, democracy has been in practice for over sixteen years. It is a system of government that allows people's voice to determine who govern the affairs of the state as well as ensuring that the essential services are provided for the people. That is why the concept has been defined as the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

In Nigeria, since over 16 years after the military rule and the installation of democracy, the needed services that can strengthen and empower social institutions to stimulate social development are lacking. Social problems such as unemployment, insecurity, poverty and corruption are becoming more amplified than the dividends of democracy. Sustainable democracy is an aspect of democracy whose focus is to address issues of disparity, inequalities, discrimination, and oppression, marginalization of minority groups, insecurity, unemployment and poverty. With this study, the missing link between social institutions and democracy can be traced and addressed.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

There are weak institutional structures, pervasive poverty, unemployment, insecurity and corruption in Nigeria. These problems are quite worrisome as they affect people at all levels of social arrangements. Studies have identified poor learning environment and shortage of facilities as factors crippling the activities of the educational institutions [2]. These problems are blamed on the negligence of the government and bad leadership in charge of sharing and controlling economic opportunities and provision of needs that services these organized social groups. Government of any society should be seen as agent vested with power and authority to see to the welfare of the citizens.

#### *Objectives of the Study*

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between Social institutions and democracy in Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. determine the effects of individuals' attitude on institutional growth in Nigeria
2. identify problems associated with social institutions and sustainable democracy in Nigeria
3. suggest the ways of strengthening social institutions and sustainable democracy in Nigeria

#### *Literature Review*

##### *Social Institutions*

Social institutions are the principal "instrument" whereby the essential tasks of social life are organized and executed [1]. When the structures that are put in place in the society are able to perform optimally, life and social progress will be enhanced. Since these structures are designed to provide social services for the well-being of man, the interplay between social institutions and democracy is pertinent. The roles of social institutions vary according to their types, which includes education, family, economy, religion and politics. Educational institution constitutes schools (formal or informal) and other educational regulatory bodies such as ministry of education and management boards established by law to provide essential services of developing individuals and equipping them with skills and knowledge. Through education, the child is thoroughly socialized [3], and it involves the preservation, dissemination and innovation through which new comers are trained and inducted into the society [1]. Other functions of the educational institution are the improvement of the living standards of the people, development of individual personality, development of vocational skills, respect for one another and the law of the society and direct influence on other social institutions such as family and church. The knowledge a child acquires from home is further sharpened in schools.

Educational institution helps to inculcate norms, values, statuses and roles into people for their well-being [4]. Norms as an aspect of culture is inculcated into the individuals in the society through education (schooling) to be able to differentiate what is right and wrong or know their rights and obligations. Values here connote behavioural patterns which are considered desirable and thought worthy of being pursued. Through education individuals are trained and ranked; this helps them to occupy certain positions in the society. This aspect of function determines an individual's role and status in the social strata.

The economic institution is responsible for the provision of production and distribution of goods and services for the satisfaction of people's needs. How these goods and services are been exchanged and distributed determines the shape of the economy structure of the society. Both the large scales forces of the economy institutions such as the financial institutions and the activities of the people in such institutions have vital roles to play in the reduction of pervasive poverty in the society. This is achieved through formulation of financial policies that could boost socio economic conditions of people.

Health institution is another vital social institution in the society that is saddled with the responsibilities of providing individuals with, social, emotional and physical needs. Health care system could be defined as the organization of

people, institutions, and resources to deliver health care services to meet the health needs of target populations [5]. There is a wide variety of health care systems around the world, with as many histories and organizational structures as there are nations. In some countries, health care system planning is distributed among health agencies. The activities of health institution are regulated by some health agencies and government regulatory bodies such as Federal Ministry of Health, Donor partners, states and Local Government Areas.

Health reforms help in strengthening the role of health institutions in Nigeria. Health reforms commonly include changes in health financing and changes in health system organization and management. Regulation of quality of drugs that are produced, with other health practices is one of the functions of health sector in Nigeria. One of the health regulatory agencies; National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and control (NAFDAC) was created in 1993 by Federal Government of Nigeria to regulate and control the manufacturing, importation, exportation, distribution and advertisement of drugs, cosmetics, chemicals, medical devices and package water.

Political institution is one of the sub-systems of social structure in the society, whose responsibility is to provide good governance through the allocation and sharing of scarce resources, taking of good decisions based on the demand and the support from the environment. The political system operation is based on basic input, output mechanism which relates to the interactions between the environment and the results from the system. Almond and Powell in [6] categorized the seven functions of political institutions under input and output mechanism. Input: political socialization and recruitment, interest aggregation and interest articulation while the output functions include: Pattern maintenance and adaptation, rule making, rule application and rule adjudication. For the above functions to be implemented, the arms of government such as the Legislative, Executive and the Judiciary have to handle the responsibilities assigned to them in line with the wills of the state.

#### *Problems Associated with Social Institutions and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*

Educational sector in Nigeria is another area that has suffered a lot of setbacks in the past administration. Some of these setbacks cut across delay in payment of salaries of teachers, acute shortage of staff, lack of infrastructural facilities, and incessant strike action by the teachers due to insensitivity of government to their plight and others. Considering the importance of this sector, one should think that there is need for sound policies to be formulated in a way that the system will be revamped.

In health many procedures, tests, and therapies are used too often while others are not used often enough. In addition, few, if any, institutions or offices are free from medical errors, which can often have serious consequences on patients and even practitioners [7]. Implementation of reforms also has effects on the healthcare service consumers. According to [8] the scope of the health reforms implemented in developing countries varies substantially. It is useful, albeit rough and imprecise, to distinguish the reforms into those affecting the supply side and those affecting the demand side of the health sector, that is, those involving the financing, management, and provision of services on the one hand and, those involving the demand for and consumption of services on the other hand. The vast majority of reforms have focused on the supply side. Accessibility and affordability of health care services would include evaluation of the adequacy of the numbers of healthcare facilities and the proper distribution of these facilities to allow easy and immediate access to a medical facility for every patient who needs one at affordable cost.

Democracy vis-à-vis good governance refers to a system that involves every stakeholder, particularly in the control of economic and political power in a way that inspires one's faith and commitment in corporate reality of the nation [9]. It has been further maintained that for Nigeria to get her democracy right and ensure the dividends of democracy reaches the majority of her citizenry, she needs to ensure and emphasize good governance in the polity. Institutional structure is put in place in order to create a sustainable society. In affirmation, [10] observed that the laws of nature must be respected by society and the laws of society must be respected by the economy. Nature's laws can be violated by society and society's laws can be violated by the economy, but not without suffering the eventual consequences. A sustainable economy must function for the overall good of society and society for the good of nature. [11] aptly noted that a careful assessment of our attitudes towards the country, sober reflection about our actions towards the nation will certainly make it obvious that we think more about selves. Most times, we hide under the ethnic toga to carry out activities that will mainly benefit us as individuals, rather than the generality of Nigerians.

Democracy is expected to be a government of majority rule or a representative system of government where the opinions and the needs of the various groups within a sovereign nation are taken into consideration. Leaders and development agents have professional and ethical responsibility to observe, assess, interact and intervene with groups and their environment in a way that is based on theories and methods shown to be credible and in alignment with societal values [12]. Democracy is expected to promote

greater social interactions among citizens who participate in vibrant interaction across transnational civil society and within emerging global public sphere [13]. When the expected roles of democracy are met, it will be viewed as the platform for cooperative, practical and transformative activity as an attempt to determine the nature of real democracy in a pluralistic society like Nigeria.

Democracy also has the central role of guaranteeing the freedom and justice of its citizens. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure the rule of law is obeyed; dispensation of justice is devoid of delay or denial and security of lives and property. With these, the fundamental human right of the individuals will not be violated (freedom of speech, movement and worship). Inokoba and Paki in [14] put it that “people inhabiting a territory cannot by themselves constitute a state. Until and unless the people are politically organized, there can be no state”. It is this organization of the society that allows for effective functioning of government, the existence of institutions, the creation and observance of laws and much more. Without such organization, the state exists as a chaotic entity and consequently becomes extinct or fails completely.

#### *Theoretical Underpinning*

Structural Functionalism is one of the most popular Sociological theories that have stood the test of time in the analysis of social phenomenon [15]. Concept of function applied to human societies is based on an analogy between social lives and organic life [16]. He sees the functions of social institution as a correspondence between it and the needs of the social organism. It is a descriptive model of how human social organization works. Talcott Parson [17] produced a general theoretical system for the analysis of the society that came to be called structural functionalism. This is a theory that looks at the society as a living organism. This theory is also known as the equilibrium model or the consensus theory of society. It looks at society in terms of social system made up of various social institutions or subsystems that are interdependent. The major proponents of the theory include: Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), Auguste Comte (1798-1859), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Emile Durkheim 1858-1917).

The functionalist explanation of health institution in Nigeria will mainly be based on the following pattern variables of Talcott Parsons (1964). He was of the view that every group or society tends to fulfil four functional imperatives which include adaptation, goal attainment, pattern maintenance and integration.

**Adaptation of social institution:** Every social system need to exercise some degree of control over its environment. The social institutions are structured to continually provide basic

needs or services for people. These needs could be in the form of provision of quality teachers, better remuneration, educational facilities in case of educational institution. For health institution: drugs or improvement of health related material resources. Some of these services Include overall co-ordination, determination of policy (national norms and standards), Supporting national drug and food monitoring programmes, International liaison and cooperation and to promote the health of all the people by informing and educating consumers, industry and law enforcers. Within the purview of political institutions lies good governance through provision of basic amenities, sound policies and programmes for social development, protection of lives and property.

**Goal attainment:** Every social system set up goals and a way of realizing them. Educational institution in Nigeria is regulated by ministry of education. They function as state and federal ministries of education. Other educational boards operate under them. The ministry is responsible for the provision of policy direction as well as supervisory roles across different levels of education in Nigeria. Health institution is not an exception. Here, ministry of health is responsible for setting up goals and allocation of resources in attaining them. The plan to eliminate polio transmission in Nigeria was part of the fulfilment of the goals of health institutions in Nigeria. In the same vein, there is National health insurance scheme to create opportunity for Nigerians to access health delivery services. Religious leaders' fights inter religious conflicts by promoting religious tolerance, community development services through alms giving or relief materials to the needy. Through this institution, people's negative attitudes can be changed; peace and social order can be maintained

**Pattern maintenance:** This variable helps in maintaining the motivation of individuals to perform their roles according to social expectations. Latency or pattern maintenance according to [15] does not end in being able to perform the roles expected of people occupying certain statuses in the system. These roles could be performed just to satisfy the expected demands but with no moral basis to respect the right of others in the system, who also have roles to perform. Latency ensures that actors in all social system display appropriate morals and motives, and be able to control attitude that would lead to conflict or break down in the system.

**Integration:** Citizens of Nigeria who are confronted with poor socio-economic conditions due to communal crisis, militancy attack, terrorism, disaster, and outbreak of diseases can receive humanitarian services from the government and other development partners. Other ways government can integrate the less privilege is through developing skill

acquisition programmes that will be beneficial to the affected individuals. When this is done, it will help them to realize their potentials.

## 2. Method

The study was carried out in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Calabar is the capital of Cross River State and has an estimated population of 1.2 million residents (National population census, 2006). Calabar is divided into two Local Government Areas: Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government areas. Calabar Municipality covers an area of 222.00km<sup>2</sup> while Calabar South Local Government area covers an area of 111.00km<sup>2</sup> (surveyor's general map of Cross River State). The study focused on social institutions and sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

It adopted a survey research design using the questionnaire as a major instrument for data collection. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 200 respondents from heads of departments, boards and high ranking personnel of public and private institutions in Cross River state. 50 respondents were selected from Cross River State Ministry of Education, 50 from University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, 50 respondents from Calabar Municipality and Calabar South local government councils. 50 respondents were also drawn from the private and religious institutions. First Bank Calabar and Ecobank Calabar are the private institution from which are samples were drawn from, while Promised Covenant Chapel Calabar, Holy Catholic Church, Calabar are the religious institution. The data gathered were analyzed with PASW statistics software and tested with product moment correlation at 0.05 significant level. Social institutions are defined in terms of people's actions in public offices. Actions here are measured based on the code of conduct or negative attitude that undermine the public interest such an office was created to serve.

## 3. Results

### *Hypothesis One*

The hypothesis here is meant to gauge the respondent's attitude towards institutional growth.

Ho: There is a significant relationship between negative attitudes by persons in public offices and institutional growth

H1: There is no significant relationship between negative attitudes by persons in public offices and institutional growth

**Table 1.** Respondent's attitude towards institutional growth in Nigeria.

Items	YES	%	NO	%	TOTAL %
I work to achieve personal goal rather than institutional goal	70	36	125	64	100
I work because I need to solve my problems	45	23	150	77	100
I need appreciation whenever I render service to people	30	15	165	95	100
Government under fund institutions so we must find a way to survive	163	84	32	16	100

Source: field work 2017

**Table 2.** Test of hypothesis one using Pearson product moment coefficient.

X	Y	X <sup>2</sup>	Y <sup>2</sup>	XY
70	36	4900	1296	2520
45	23	2025	529	1035
30	15	900	225	450
163	84	26569	7056	13692
125	64	15625	4096	8000
150	77	22500	5929	11550
165	95	27225	9025	15675
32	16	1024	256	512

N= 195

Correlation coefficient = 0.99

Decision: Since the correlation coefficient which is 0.99 is greater than the table value of 0.288, at 0.05 significant level, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis (H1) which states that there is no negative attitude by persons in public offices towards institutional growth.

### *Hypothesis Two*

H0: There are no factors militating against social institutions and sustainable democracy in Nigeria

H1: There are factors militating against social institutions and sustainable democracy in Nigeria

**Table 3.** Factors militating against social institutions in Nigeria (Mean response).

Factors	Mean	Ranking
Corruption	2.773	1
Lack of capacity Building	2.657	2
Ethnic sentiments	2.657	2
Poor remuneration	2.556	3
Poor accounting system	2.463	4
Interferences from politicians	2.332	5

Source: Field work 2017

## 4. Discussions

The findings from hypothesis one shows that there is no significant relationship between negative attitudes by persons in public offices and institutional growth. This is an indication that the issue of sustainable democracy is a matter of collective participation of all social actors across all the social institution

in Nigeria. Strengthening of institutions in Nigeria will also attract funding from bilateral and multilateral donors for development programme. This is because western aid providers and governments in many countries have placed the promotion of good governance on their policy agenda. Earlier studies [18] affirm that institutions are the rules of the game in a society, with politics and leadership providing the daily social services, control economic system and national security [19].

Findings on the factors militating against the growth of social institutions in Nigeria indicate that corruption ranked first, with the mean response of 2.773, followed by lack of capacity building with the mean response of 2.657, ethnic sentiments with the mean response of 2.657, poor remuneration with the mean response of 2.556, poor accounting system with the mean response of 2.463 and interferences from politicians with a mean response of 2.332. The educational institution is an essential institution that causes individuals to develop new skills for the improvement of their lives and the society in general. The training of teachers and provision of educational facilities is sacrosanct for sustainable democracy. Also, access to health care services is crucial for societal growth. Good health policies that regulate the operations of clinics and hospitals as well as training of healthcare staff are necessary requirements for a growing society. Transparent accounting system will also bring about probity and accountability in the system.

## 5. Conclusion

The issue that concerns sustainable democracy Vis-a-vis good governance should not be treated with naivety but should be treated with some level of seriousness. Social institutions are the pivots where the development of the country revolves and when these institutions are strengthened, it will deepen democracy and Galvanize equitable distribution of resources. These can only be achieved if government and other agencies can develop the skills of the people across the sensitive sectors through capacity building and policy frame work that will bring the desired change in the system. Hence, this study accentuates the formulation of policies that promote public interest rather than personal interest, national re-orientation and capacity building. It is therefore recommended that the government should ensure that there is anti-corruption crusade committee in educational, health and other sectors. This will help to reduce corrupt practices.

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