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# ORGANIZED LABOUR, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Aniefiok S. Ukommi<sup>1</sup>, Ubong Nnana Umanah<sup>2</sup> and Michael-Olomu Onyintonye<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of Uyo, Uyo

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology  
Obong University, Obong Ntak  
Etim Ekpo L.G.A  
Akwa Ibom State

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology  
Federal University Otuoke  
Bayelsa State

## ABSTRACT

This paper assessed the changing roles of the organized labour from that of a union regarded as confrontational, antagonistic and opposition to workers' bad conditions of service to a movement that has come to champion the course of democracy and sustain good governance to a rather seeming "subversive" organization in the last few years in Nigeria. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria is believed to have skewed not only political activities in favour of politicians but also assigned a narrow function to organized labour in a liberal democracy that strongly emphasizes popular participation and negotiation of interest and interactivity. The paper avers that labour before now through the instrumentality of strikes and mass appeal, brought some influences to bear on government's anti-people, pro-rich policies and practices that were considered obnoxious. Today's slow reactionary measure towards workers' welfare as touching on National Minimum wage and its indifference towards the harsh economic situation in Nigeria has raised concerns by stakeholders as well as scholars on the new role of labour. The paper used a total of three hundred (350) respondents through Random Sampling selection method and the data were analysed using Person's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient ( $r$ ) statistical tool. The study revealed that there is a strong correlation between organized labour's role and good governance and national development in Nigeria. The paper concluded that labour should be seen as a more viable partner in the struggle to better the lots of the citizens in terms of welfare which form part of its responsibility and the ultimate goal of government as the presently changing role of labour from that of championing the course of democracy and sustenance of good governance to a seemingly subversive organization is unacceptable.

**Key words:** Labour, good governance and development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of establishing trade unions according to Sydney and Beatrice Webb (1911) as cited in Nwagbara (2004) is that workers initially join unions to pursue immediate economic goals, but eventually pursue political economic and social reforms such as nationalization of industries and the protection of infant industries.

One major interest in labour is the effectiveness of these organizations to remain financially stable and its ability to work within established political, economic and social systems despite the supportive or disruptive features of the social environment to contribute to national development. Despite the efforts on contributing to nation development, the political class has continued to accuse the organized labour of interfering in the political and economic processes as it were. Organized labour had always lend its voice to issues of national interest, the debate for and against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans of 1986 proposed by the Military Administrative of General Ibrahim Babangida and Labour's Stance against the acceptance of the loan; the Lacuna caused as a result of the absence of the late Nigerian President, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua for about six months of from late October 2009 to March 2010 and the National Strike on Fuel Subsidy removal in 2012 by labour against the government of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan are a few instances of labour's efforts and contributions to good governance and national development.

All over the world, organized labour has become important agent of socio-economic transformation and class struggle always representing the interest working class against capitalist exploitation (Okechukwu, 2016). In contemporary times however especially in the developing countries, labour unionism has become an indispensable tool in ensuring and guaranteeing industrial harmony between the employer and employee. In Nigeria, labour unions fought against colonial rule and exploitation of the Nigerian state during the colonial period.

In fact, labour movements the world over, through their activities and constant defence of workers and members of the society, have forced sit-tight, dictatorial and fascist regimes to accede to the demands of labour. This paves way for the gradual increase in earnings, improvement in the employment conditions of workers, change in draconian government

policies, election of popular politicians and installation of popular mandates and the adjustment of harsh economic policies, like the 1980's SAP in Nigeria, thus making such policies more humane and supportive of the lives and economic interests of the generality of the citizens (Okechukwu, 2016). And according to Iyayi (2008) labour unions in Nigeria have gone beyond their traditional role of championing the cause of workers by wielding much political and social influence and acting as a vigilant watch dog for the people. This development can only be sustained with labour active involvement in politics because it is at the political realm that decisions affecting the economic wellbeing of labour membership are taken and again, there are very strong linkages between democracy, good governance, national development and labour's economic wellbeing as Wogu (2012) puts it "the dividing line between economics and governance is very blurred".

From the foregoing role of labour in the past that made it a vigilant watch dog for the people one can pause for a moment to ask some pertinent questions such as: Is labour still performing the role of the past in practical terms? If yes, to what extent is labour's involvement in the social, economic and political matters in Nigeria? If no, what could be responsible for the changing role of labour in the recent past? This paper seeks to examine the various ways organized labour has contributed to good governance and national development in the past and present.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

In order to establish a firm grasp of the subject matter of the discourse, it is important to attempt to define each of the operational works. This is more necessary to establish the linkages between organized labour, good governance and development.

### **2.1 Labour**

The term has not one universally accepted definition. In other words, it has no settled meaning as its meaning is elastic and inexhaustible. For some people labour means "a source of wealth". According to Obasi (1997) a trade or labour union is a group of workers whose major aim is to seek for improvement in the material conditions of its members. But, in the opinion of Toyo as cited in Eze and Chinwuba (2015) trade unions or labour unions are organizations of an under-privileged class for class struggle in a society characterized by privileged ... The trade unions are

organizations of the underdogs in modern production and service activities. These under gods are called employees, wage workers or salaried workers (Toyo, 2008).

Labour therefore is an umbrella organization of all workers whose only source of subsistence is the sale of their labour power. Audi (2009) seems to agree no less with this position when he argued that trade unionism all over the world emerged for improving the economic, living and working condition of workers. This paper views labour as organization of workers in either public or private sector of the economy who sell their labour and resources to seek permanent solutions to menacing socio-economic and political problems in Nigeria. Labour in this discourse refers to the Nigeria labour congress (NLC).

## **2.2 Good Governance**

Governance is also subjected to varied definitions like many other concepts. Dozie as cited in Chinwuba and Eze, 2015 observed that governance is "the totality of processes entitled in the exercise and management of the collective will of a people by a people under a defined authority or constitution. Alaba Ogunsawo as cited in Chinwuba and Eze (2015) also asserted that good governance is responsible and responsive government with the welfare of the people being the main purpose of the state and those who govern on its behalf. Good governance, therefore, has to do with those activities of the public office holders such as policy making and implementation which ensure transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and efficient service delivery to enhance the quality of life of the governed. Simply put, good governance is not the process but the result of governance.

## **2.3 Development**

According to Rodney (2005), development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. Some of these are moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending on the age in which one lives, one's class origin, and one's personal code of what is right or what is wrong but what is undisputed is that the achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society. At the level of social groups therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships.

Much of human society has been a fight for survival against natural hazards and against real and imagined human enemies. Development also means growth integrated with economic, scientific, political and home based technological expansion (Oghuvbu, 2007). Kindleberger and Herrick (1977) therefore defined economic development to include improvements in material welfare, especially for persons with the lowest incomes, the eradication of mass poverty, illiteracy, diseases and early death.

The relationship between Labour, good governance and development shows that while labour's role as a group is to checkmate the activities of the public office holders against irresponsible and irresponsive act of governance to ensuring good welfare for its members, labour also guard against exploitation of its members against their increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, material wellbeing and growth with integrated economic, scientific, political and home based technological expansion. This role of labour should be commended in the light of the excessiveness of those in leadership positions over time in the context of Nigeria.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Underpinnings**

This paper adopted the elite theory which tries to explain the role of elites in democracy and governance. The political elites have tended to take advantage of the access to power to embark on unbridled amassment of wealth at the expense of the working poor whose only property is the labour that they offer. As they continue to control the structure of the state the worker's interests have become synonymous with theirs. It has been opined that "the fact that Nigeria is oscillating between democratic stagnancy and governance backwardness is a reflexive of elites' pursuit of personal aggrandizement and promotion of egocentrism rather than altruistic policies that are nationalistic and people centric in nature (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012). This development as it were alienated the working poor and therefore encouraged the workers to coalesce and synergize with the civil society groups to checkmate the powers of the elites in a democracy that advocates participation, accountability, transparency and fair play. The role of labour in this context is to strengthen and deepen good governance as a means to ensuring development in Nigeria.

#### **2.5 Evaluation of Labour's Contributions in National Development (Past and Present)**

An evaluation of the role of organized labour in National development can be viewed from four cardinal perspectives, this includes factors such as Economy, Political, Social and Education.

## **Economy**

From the economic perspective, one can say that organized labour has contributed immensely. A part from the periodic agitation for salary/wage increases for workers of this nation in the form of minimum wage, it has helped to collectivize, project, and protect the views, yearnings, interests and aspirations of workers in a bid to improve their terms and conditions of employment within the industrial relations system. Labour took its resolute stand against securing the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan and austerity programmes which was proposed by the Military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. Labour ensured that its stand was clearly communicated to the administration, stating that such loans will be squandered, as previous funds have been mismanaged. The position of labour was that the masses will suffer most from the austerity measures aimed at improving the economy. Though, the Federal government eventually implemented the structural Adjustment programmes, the effects were so overwhelming, resulting in nationwide spread riots in 1989. Still on economic fronts, comes the issue of increase in the prices of petroleum products. And from 27<sup>th</sup> May 1978 to 2002 the federal government increased prices of petroleum products eighteen times and organized labour protested nine times and promoted civil protest nationwide three times (Okaka, 2010). The general strike called by labour in June 2007 to protest the sales of the government owned petroleum Refineries in Port Harcourt and Kaduna and the increase rates of value added Tax (VAT) and Income Tax from five percent each to ten percent are also clear examples of labour's contributions to the nation's economy. The strike by labour forced the government to rescind on its earlier decision to increase the rates of tax and values added tax (VAT). In 2012, labour called on a national strike on the petroleum subsidy removal and the strike was suspended on January 18, 2012 to press on the government not to remove petroleum subsidy and that strike was also successful as government reversed its decision on fuel subsidy removal. But today, especially in the last five years, labour seemed to keep mum against government irresponsible and insensitive activities that have led to high economic inflationary indices like fuel price from ₦87 per a litre to ₦145 per a litre, high cost of living including high cost of transportation and foreign exchange rate thereby changing its role from that of the championing the course of democracy and good governance sustainability to rather a subversive organization. Though this study is not intended to indict the present leadership of labour under Ayuba Bubba but looking at the role of labour under Adams Oshiomole and Comrade Omar Abdulwaheed and their

achievements, it just appeared that the new role of labour today may not be unconnected with leadership and the elitist desire to muscle up the working poor.

### **Politics**

In the area of politics, organized labour has contributed its own quota by constantly getting involved in issues that concern Nigerians generally. Aladada (2004) observed that labour has contributed enormously to democracy, citing the efforts of labour toward defending democracy after the presidential elections that were declared and finally held in June 1993, but annulled by the military president, General Ibrahim Babangida even when the initial results of the election indicated that the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate and publisher Chief Moshood Abiola (late) had won the election by a large majority. Labour after waiting patiently and the government also seemed not to be willing to release the entire election results, declared a general strike in 1994 to protest these developments and protect democracy, first by the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG) and followed by Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN). The situation led to fuel scarcity, wide spread, crises, and the entire country was almost grounded, with the masses calling for the release of the results and subsequent installation of Chief Moshood Abiola as the duly elected president of Nigeria. But Babangida however, claimed he still support a transition to democracy and on August 26, 1993, he transferred power to an interim national government under Chief Ernest Shonekan.

During the 2003 general elections, the organized labour had its own election monitors to ensure freeness and fairness of elections, labour encouraged Nigerians to accept the 2003 general election results. During the public hearing for constitutional amendment held nationwide from February to April, 2010, organized labour actively took part and held its own position. Another case worthy of consideration is the role played by the organized labour because of the lacunae in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which makes no provision should in case the president leaves office due to ill health without handing to his vice, as a result of the absence of the late president of Nigeria, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua for about six months from late October 2009 to March 2010 and the then vice president was not able to act in the capacity of the president. Labour added its voice to that of millions of Nigerians who insisted that power be handed to Goodluck Jonathan. Recently, the country has witnessed religious motivated killings



like the herdsmen and farmers clashes which have remained unabated and labour seemed to keep its face the other way for reasons unknown to the masses.

### **Social**

On social issues, organized labour has not relented as they have always taken the driver's seat through its voice on issues affecting the masses. This can be discerned from the active role of the organized labour over the sales of the government owned petroleum refineries. Even though labour viewed this issue to be a social or moral matter, it still confronted the government. Government believed it was in the interest of the nation the decisions were taken and that the sales will improve the economy. Labour's position was based on the social effects of the sales which include the loss of jobs and the multiplying effects on the citizens of this country.

Another role of labour worthy of note was the list of motions submitted by the Nigeria labour congress in 2007 to its delegates conference to be ratified as demands from the federal government. The list included among others a motion No.4 which is a request for the provision of portable drinking water for all Nigerians. That demand although social in nature was being made by the organized labour and today, we are yet to see such pragmatic role played by the organized labour.

### **Education**

In the area of education, labour has contributed in no small measure by organizing training seminars, and workshop to help develop its members, apart from higher institutions of learning that may have trained its members. This position is taken due to available statistics. Between 1999 to 2004 the Nigeria labour congress (NLC) organized about one hundred and thirty-four seminars, workshop and training programmes. Apart from educating its members, the NLC had submitted motion 12 to the federal government requesting for the reforming of the education sector and motion 14 requesting the government to increase its funding to the educational sector of the country. These contributions made by labour in Nigeria did not come without a prize.

Many labour leaders have suffered imprisonment and at many times death to continue the struggle. Take the case of Nduka Eze, who was a clerk with United Africa company (UAC) who

became extremely popular in 1947 because of his constant challenge of the colonial authorities, he eventually lost his job in 1951. Another case worthy of consideration is the pains and agony suffered by labour during and after the 1994 general strike called by labour to protest the amendment of the June 12, 1993, presidential elections in Nigeria by the then military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida. As we speak today, we do not know the number of motions sent to the 8th senate by the current labour leadership.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study used random probability sampling technique to select three hundred persons. The sampling technique determines the chances or likelihood of drawing each member of the selected public and private establishments in the research sample. Two federal ministries, one located in Uyo and the other in Calabar and one private organization, situated in Calabar one state ministry in Uyo and one in Calabar was selected. The research used structured questionnaires since it will streamline the response of the sample population of three hundred persons. The survey data were used to generate the responses of those interviewed.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1: Responses on the strength of correlation between labour's role and good governance and national development in Nigeria**

CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS	YES (X)	NO (Y)	TOTAL
Federal Ministry of Education, Uyo	60	30	90
Federal Ministry of Agricultural Calabar	30	20	50
State Ministry of Health, Uyo	50	30	80
State Ministry of Health Calabar	20	10	30
De Choice mall Calabar	30	20	50
Total	190	110	300

Source: Field work, 2019

Table 1 shows the responses rate from each of the federal and state ministries selected for the study including one private establishment in the researcher.

**Table 2: Showing the calculation of the strength of correlation between labour's role and good governance and national development in Nigeria**

X	X <sup>2</sup>	Y	Y <sup>2</sup>	XY
60	3600	30	900	1800
30	900	20	400	600
50	2500	30	900	1500
20	400	10	100	200
30	900	20	400	600
Total 190	8300	110	2700	4700

Source: Field work, 2019

The calculated test of significance of (Y) = 5.28

Degree of freedom (d/f) = 3

Table value under 3 d/f at 0.05 = 2.35

#### 4.1 Decision

The calculated test of significance of (Y) value is 5.28 and the table value is 2.35. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) which says that there is no correlation between the role of labour and good governance and national development in Nigeria is therefore rejected. The alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted which says that there is a strong correlation between labours role and good governance and national development in Nigeria.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The finding of the study revealed that there is a strong correlation between labour role and good governance and National development in Nigeria. This implies that when labour is not vibrant and viable in its role there is a tendency for bad governance and underdevelopment in the country as we are beginning to see some bad economic policies which have brought about hardship and poor living standard of the people. The result affirms existing literature that labour should be a viable partner in the effort to deepen democracy and good governance rather than a

subversive organization (Chinwuba and Eze, 2015). The study found out that labour in the past were vibrant and viable and were able to record successes in terms of influencing government to reverse some of its anti-people policies and programmes right from colonial times.

## 5 CONCLUSION

From the forgoing, it can be seen that in the absence of vibrancy and virile opposition parties in the Nigerian political space, labour should assume an increasingly important role in Nigeria's democracy. This study posits that labour should be seen as a more viable partner in the struggle to better the lots of the citizen in terms of welfare which forms part of its responsibility and the ultimate goal of government. Labour overtime, through strikes, non-formal participation, has made democratic dictatorship increasingly difficult and advocated transparency, accountability, good governance and national development the platform upon which democracy stand. In the last five years, it appeared that organized labour seemingly has changed its role from that of championing the course of democracy and good governance to a rather subversive organization with the level of in activity and passiveness.

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