

From Principles to Praxis and VEC Theoretical Frame Work

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ABSTRACT

The core contribution of the Visit Every Community programme in Enugu State confirms the tenets of the philosophy of development that “popular participation is therefore in essence the empowerment of the people to effectively innovate themselves in creating structures and in designing policies and aid programmes that serve the interest of all. I have every joy, therefore, in recommending this book and encouraging all to have access to its rich wisdom thoughts that are philosophically grounded, politically correct, and economically viable, filled with paradigms for development in an African setting. It is indeed my privilege to write this foreword and to hope that students of philosophy, political science and the management and social sciences can see in this book, a reference material and resource book that serves the dual purposes of development, philosophical theory and applied practice

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It is important at this stage to move from the theoretical elaboration of principles of good governance to an examination of real life or existential situations where the applications of these principles had so far produced results that have been widely acknowledged as superlative, extraordinary, amazing, beautiful and sustainable [1]. Visit-Every-Community (VEC) project, which is the subject of this philosophical inquiry is a product of good governance principles - a very rounded, comprehensively articulated, non discriminatory, unbiased, compact, integrative, inclusive and sustainable development blueprint of the Governor of Enugu State, His Excellency, Sullivan Iheanacho Chime, which he clearly and unequivocally stated in his 4-Point Agenda [2]. In

- Sustain efforts to create an effective service-driven, accountable and transparent public service that will really be a provider of service to members of the public.
- Sustain on-going governance reform efforts working with our development partners, especially the DFID and the World Bank.
- Sustain support to the Public

defining his vision for Enugu State at page 1 of the blueprint, the Governor said: I see an Enugu State where Government is open, accountable and responsive to the genuine yearnings of the people and takes action to improve the lives of the people ... I see an Enugu State where healthcare, quality education, potable water, electricity, transportation, communication will become available to all our people no matter where they are in the State ... a State where security of life and property will be a reality. Perhaps aware that his vision could turn to a mirage, after all Karl Marx had earlier observed that “philosophers have interpreted the world, the problem is to change it”, the Governor pointedly included the principles of good governance as a key thrust of his 4 Point Agenda [3].

The objectives include:

- Bureau to spearhead improvement of public service institutions and service delivery.
- Encourage Service and Accountability.

The public service must provide services to the people of the State, and every public servant, including political office holders, must be accountable to the people for the services for which he has been employed to render. The other components of the 4-Point Agenda

with their key thrusts are:

1. *Physical Infrastructure*
 - *Roads*
 - *Housing (mass middle/low cost housing).*
2. *Economic Expansion and Employment*
 - *Industrial Development*
 - *Agricultural Development*
 - *Tourism.*
3. *Rural Development*
 - *Rural Access*
 - *CDCC*
 - *Rural Industry.*
4. *Service Delivery and Good Governance*
 - *Basic social services (Health, Education, law and order/security)*
 - *Public Service Empowerment*
 - *Pension, Housing, Transport*
 - *Citizens inclusion and participation (women groups, youths, traditional rulers and elderly statesmen).*

It is not within the purview of this work to discuss extensively the 4-Point Agenda, neither is it concerned to enumerate the numerous monumental achievements that have resulted from the Agenda. Agenda as a verb is about issues to be discussed or things to be done and it is enough to use the lawyer's parlance- RES IPSA LOQUITUR, that is, the fact speaks for itself, in describing what the Governor has laid on ground. The inculcation and enthronement of good governance principles as was done in Enugu, under the leadership of Governor Sullivan Chime, in the conduct of public affairs remains the desideratum for rapid, revolutionary, viable, concrete and authentic transformation of any State or nation [4]. The realization of these existential and irrefutable facts makes relevant the well considered observation and prayers of Bell, who prayed that "one wants men in office, who govern well and that the quality of life in any society is determined, in considerable measure, by the quality of leadership." He emphasized his opinion by unequivocally warning that "... a society that does not have its best men at the head of its leading institutions is a sociological and moral absurdity" [5]. The most accepted concept today about the State is that it is a legal creation of individual will. In other words, human beings originally created the State by means of contract in which individuals

for their mutual benefits came together and consented to transfer their individual power to a political body or State to govern them. The protagonists of this social contract theory included Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Thomas Hobbes (1588)-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 - 88) [5]. These social contractualists "unanimously opposed the deduction of political authority from above". However, the theory of social contract has been used at different times and for different political purposes. It has been used either to justify despotism or to extol and propagate democracy [6]. Hobbes, for instance, in his great work, Leviathan propounded a theory of State of nature which was a State of insecurity, a very uncivil and lawless State, where the condition of man's life was "nasty, brutish and short". With the aid of reason, Hobbes said, man discovered that for his self preservation, there is a need to surrender all his rights to a Leviathan - embodied in the State in "an unconditional pactum subjection is" by which the whole of his natural rights was transferred to the ruler who, thus, acquires absolute power over his subjects. Hobbes' type of absolutism has been practically demonstrated by many leaders in many countries of Africa and elsewhere. Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, for example, employed such a system of personal rule, called 'Nasserism.' According to Meredith,

the organization of the State (Egypt) and its policy was determined by well alone. All power was concentrated in his hands; every aspect of Government came under his remit... "managed to abolish the difference between State and Government, between those two and himself

Kamuzu Banda of Malawi was unequivocal in asserting his

absolute authority. He told his people bluntly that

as long as I am here, and you say I must be your president, you have to do what I want, what I like, and not what you like and you want. Kamuzu is in charge.

That is my way

Absolutism, we all know, was the hallmark of military administration in Nigeria. Decree No 4 of 1985 promulgated under General Muhammed Buhari paradoxically climaxed in having two Journalists, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor, of The Guardian Newspapers jailed for publishing the truth. John Locke's version of the theory of social contract would rather be more helpful for a deeper understanding of this work [6]. This is because Visit-Every-Community (VEC) as a philosophy of action and as a programme for socio-economic and political development in its conception, definition and action exhudes Lockean orientation. Locke is opposed to the absolutism of Hobbes and to all forms of absolutism. Man's birth to him is co-eval with certain natural, inalienable rights to life, liberty and estate. The function of social contract, therefore, is to preserve and protect those natural rights. In other words, natural rights are not mere grants from the State. The power of Government is, therefore, limited and may not extend beyond what is required for the maintenance and protection of the common good. For him, individuals in a State have conditional obligation and therefore, the people have the right to

oppose or even rebel against any Government that cannot guarantee their peace, safety and public good. They have the supreme power to change, remove or alter such governments. Locke's theory had great influence on the American, French and Nigerian constitutional developments. The principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, separation of powers, fundamental human rights, the individuality of the citizen, capitalism and the separation of State and government and the State and society are all reflections of his political theory. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) is currently the embodiment of the social contract of Nigerians with their Governments. The social contract theory is a forerunner of democratic theory, which has displaced the theory of Hobbes' absolutism or the theory of the divine right of Kings, which held that the King or the ruler is God or had drawn his power from God and therefore, has no reciprocal relationship with the people. This view of power was represented in the statement of King James speaking to Parliament in 1609: Where he said that "Kings are justly called Gods".

... for they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth. For if you consider the attributes of God you shall see how they agree in the person of a King; God hath the power to create or destroy, make or unmake at his pleasure, to give life or send death, to judge all and to be judged or accountable to none ... and the like power have kings; they

make or unmake their subject;
they have power of raising up or
casting down, of life and of death...
accountable to but God only.

Today, the King is under God, sovereignty of the people and the law. Every society has transited or is transiting into democracy, whose ultimate goal is to minimize arbitrariness and tyranny and to promote or maximize a pattern of human civility and conscience that is

...The most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs. She is everybody's mistress and yet somehow retains her magic even when her lover sees that his favours are being, in his light, illicitly shared by many others. Indeed, even amid our pain, at being denied her exclusive fidelity, we are proud of her adaptability to all sorts of circumstances, to all sorts of Company.

It is, therefore, easier to describe democracy than to define it. It is only important to note that it is the opposite of autocracy. The simplest definition of it came from Abraham Lincoln who says, "It is the government of the people, by the people and for the people". In the classical Greek

The growth in the size of the population of cities and States, the distances they cover, and the vast, complex and continuous stream of issues requiring Government conservations, decision and action, plus the inability of a population to devote much time to political participation set limits to the extension of direct democracy.

Consequently, large and complex societies gave rise to representative democracy in which people periodically elect their governors or leaders from among themselves to exercise power and make decisions on their behalf and in which the elected is expected to represent the interest of his people. Obasi identified criteria that are associated with such representative democratic government and they are that:

rooted in human dignity, respect and justice. Unfortunately however, the concept, democracy, is still having definitional problems. It has for this reason been labeled a coat of many colours which induced a scholar to describe it as perhaps:

conception of democracy, the people, take part directly in making decisions that affect them. Modern States with their large, complex urban and industrial characteristics are anathematic of such direct democracy. As Roberts observed:

- most adults can participate in the electoral process. (The principle of universal participation).
- citizens' votes are secret and are not covered. (The principle of political equity).
- leaders are chosen in free elections contested by, at least, two viable political parties. (The principle of majority rule).
- the Government bases its legitimacy on representing the desires of its citizens (The principle of responsiveness).
- citizens, leaders and party

officials enjoy basic freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion

and organization.

In this work, however, we want to see democracy as a means as well as an end. Democracy cannot be only about the abstract principles of rights and liberties, periodic elections, multipartyism, rule of law, etc. It is also about the substantial, concrete and existential condition of the citizens of the State with

reference to its measurable impact on the welfare and quality of life of the people. This raises automatically the questions about food, water, shelter and job opportunities, among others. In other words, there must be a causal relationship between democratic practice and human welfare. In the words of Emiri:

...for democracy to have real meaning it should not only make the people as the foundation of governance, it must also enhance their material well-being. To illustrate: What is the usefulness of political rights to a man in search of food, who daily lives below the poverty line? To such ones, egalitarianism at the polling station is mere cold comfort to people forced to go to bed hungry, when others are awash with opulence. This is why it has been said that democracy merely affords the masses once in every four or five years the opportunity of choosing their executors

The import of Enugu assertion is that the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, health care, education, etc, makes the enjoyment of civic, social, cultural and political rights meaningful and sensible. A

democracy of both means and ends inextricably leads to sustainable democratic development, a sustainable development that "empowers the people rather than marginalizing them

... gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decisions that affect them.

Democracy, therefore, is also about participation in the social, economic and political processes. It is human to take part in matters that concern us, which infact match the Aristotelian axiom that "man is a social and political animal." Participation in the process

of governance is what authoritarianism denies man. When people are given room for participation in the governance process they are also empowered. We subscribe to Anifowose's view that:

...at the centre of democratic idea is the notion of participation which

describes the extent to which individual members of society share, take part, or get involved in the life of that society. Thus democracy cannot be concerned in theory or created in practice without the creation, recognition, encouragement and expansion of the opportunities for participation.

Opportunities for participation and empowerment of people are not only a recognition of their intellectual capacities and human dignity but also a recognition of their abilities and capabilities in making meaningful contributions towards their own development. Experientially, it is now a truism that any form of developmental

programme in which people themselves are allowed to articulate their needs, prioritize them and take part in proffering solutions and at the same time conferring ownership on the people is sustainable. VEC as a programme of social, economic and political development would be viewed from this prism.

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