STRENGTHENING NIGERIA’S WEAK INSTITUTIONS THROUGH THE INSTRUMENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION

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Abstract
An examination of the Nigerian nation reveals that our institutions over the years have become weak and ineffective, this is due to a myriad of problems confronting our polity which have caused them to fall short of constitutional requirements. This paper reiterates the importance and relevance of strong institutions as a catalyst for sustainable growth and development. Thus, this paper explores how Civic Education (which focuses on the demand for good governance and responsible citizenry) can be used to achieve strong and efficient institutions for the country. In doing this, it chronicles the basic fundamentals of Civic Education and how it can be enlisted to strengthen Nigeria’s institutions and structures. The paper concludes by recommending the need for strong, effective, functional and virile institutions which is crucial for nationhood and how it can be achieved via the instrument of Civic Education.

Keywords: Institutions, Civic Education, Good Governance, Responsible Citizenry.

Introduction
The general demand for good government the world over has become very topical, as such, every stakeholder is interested in ensuring the quality governance is delivered to all. An examination of events in other climes reveals realistic efforts on the part of the leadership to affect the lives of the citizenry positively. Quite unfortunately, the Nigerian state rather than follow suit have become renowned for high level of corruption, fragile democracy, the culture of impunity as well as weak and vulnerable institutions. Over the years, the Nigerian system had revolved around individuals in positions of authority at the detriment of institutions, consequently the structures of the countries institutions had been hindered or weakened due to change of functionaries. Consequently, the Nigerian institutions have become structurally deficient, ineffective and failed to perform constitutional roles.

It is worthy of mention that no nation achieves its full potentials with weak institutions. Paying leap service to institutional strength is quite detrimental to our developmental efforts and is capable of retrogressing developmental efforts so far put in place. As such, the over reliance on individuals at the expense of institutions forms the crux of this paper. The paper is quick to stress the over bearing influence some individuals have over institutions, which is capable of undermining the ability of such institutions to perform their roles. If Nigeria’s goal of becoming one of twenty (20) most developed countries is to be realized by the year 2020, efforts must be redoubled to strengthen all our institutions in order to outlast any individual(s) or persons. All
over the world, no individual or person(s) is bigger or stronger than any system institutions, rather individuals should be made or groomed to work for institutions, as only this would guarantee a secured future for all. This paper suggests that one method to start this process is through the inculcation of civic education for all. CIVIC Education on the other hand seeks to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes. Civic education if employed is capable of committing Nigerians to institutionalizing strong, formidable institutions as a gateway to growth, development and overall transformation. This far reaching impact of civic education on strengthening Nigeria’s weak institutions forms part of the many areas this paper hopes to look into.

Objectives of the Study/Paper

The objectives of this study:
1. To examine why Nigeria’s institutions have remained weak despite the country’s potentials.
2. To examine the effects of Nigeria’s weak and ineffective institutions for despite practice of democratic rule.
3. To reiterate the need and importance of strong institutions as an ingredient for growth and overall development.
4. To examine how Nigeria’s institutions can be strengthened through the instrument of civic education.
5. To ensure Nigeria through strong institutions reclaims its pride of place amongst emerging world powers which will make Nigeria rank among the twenty (20) most developed nations of the world by the year 2020.

Conceptual Clarifications

Structure of Nigeria’s Institutions

Institutions are seen as key actors in guiding the political process and are shaped by historical struggles, rules and procedures, rather than being merely the aggregation of individual motives, institutions shape political processes and are themselves the product of political processes (Sambo, 2013). This therefore entails provision of structures that would outlast any individual or group. The idea behind institutions is to promote the demand for good and responsible leadership. Sambo (2013) describe institutions as frameworks that would guarantee a nation transformation. Corroborating the earlier position is Idumange (2011) posited that institutions are necessary to ensure good governance in any society. He listed a few of the necessities as an independent judiciary, a free press, freedom of information, open budget processes, virile civic society organizations and an effective watch dog amongst others.

Institutional theorists stress the need to distinguish between institutions and organizations. Organizations are purposive entities and are tangible things which have remits, offices and staff. Institutions on the other hand provide the rules, norms and settings within which organizations emerge.

Weak Institutions

Weak institutions otherwise referred to as Institutions weakness can be described as the absence of those attributes or qualities that define institutional strength of a structure or body (Sambo, 2013). Usoro (2013), lent credence to this position when he asserted that where there are no strong institutions, independent of political manipulations and governmental controls, decisions are taken on the whims and caprices of individuals. In the same vein, weak institutions can negatively affect the quality of governance as well as the national integrity of the entire
nation. Needless to state that Nigeria’s weak institutions has continually undermined the country’s image and dwarfing her growth. The situation presently is that our institutions are weak even look up to the leaders for direction. Obi (2013) concluded that Nigeria’s institutions have become weak and inefficient, the result being the country’s image bashing. Onah (2012) corroborating this position asserted that our institutions have assumed the characters of our leaders. He further reiterated that until our institutions assume a life of their own and stand up to their constitutional responsibilities, the country will not be able to have strong institutions necessary for sustainable growth and transformation.

**Civic Education**

Civic Education is a body of knowledge which provides information and learning experience to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic procedures and processes (Ezeaku, 2013). Civic Education otherwise known as democracy education apart from helping citizens prepare for public participation which includes identifying problems, gathering information, examining alternatives, proposing public policy, developing action plan which are needed for national development, also helps to situate citizen’s interest to the realities of power and provide them cognitive services enabling them to judge the performance of their leaders. The basic of value criteria of good governance bring civic education to the fore. The idea behind civic education is to promote the demand for good governance and responsible citizenship. In the same vein, Omiyefa (2012) describe civic education as knowledge, skills and values given to a child or group of learners with a view to making them functional and responsible individuals capable of contributing to the socio-economic, political and religious developments of the state.

Apparently, civic education is that form of education which arouses the interests of the people specifically designed in content and function to produce good, useful, responsible and informed active citizens for our great and dynamic nation.

**Factors Responsible for Weak Institutions in Nigeria**

Over the years, Nigeria has been plagued by what can be referred to as general governance failure. According to Idumange (2011), though most analysts point at vices affecting Nigeria’s development such as corruption, inequality, kleptomania, unemployment etc. While it is germane to acknowledge that these factors are dwarfing our growth, they are only symptoms of general governance deficit, which is a product of weak and vulnerable institutions.

The underlying factors responsible for institutional weakness in Nigeria include;

1. The lack of genuine commitment on the part of the leaders towards democratic ideas and principles has further weakened our institutions. The display of despotic tendencies and utter disdain for democratic principles and processes has greatly affected the quality of governance in the country and largely responsible for our woes a people. The height of disregard for democratic principles in no small measure has been responsible for institutions weakness in Nigeria for instance, the Nigerian politician rather than follow laid down procedures would choose to circumvent procedures or rubbish the laid down rules. Such practices are inimical to having and sustaining institutions.

2. The docile nature of our institutions also calls for concern. To a large extent, some of our institutions have become ineffective and incapacitated as a result of lack of support from the government or lack of institutional frameworks for self sustenance. Some of these institutions are time bound and loose steam after a while. For instance, the pet projects introduced by former first ladies of the country often lose relevance when the tenure of their spouses lapse. For country that is striving towards growth and development, such practices should be discouraged. The likes of Women Trafficking and Child Labour
Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) and Child Care Trust by Mrs. Titi Abubukar and Late Mrs. Stella Obansanjo respectively comes to mind.

3. The duplication of government agencies or organs is also a factor responsible for Nigeria’s weak institutions. Over the years, Nigerians have witnessed the overduplication of government agencies thus leading to the weakness of or either of them. The establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (ICPC) by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 is a case in point. The EFCC and ICPC were established as agencies to fight all forms of corruption in the country. Meanwhile, the police has a department or unit known as Special Fraud Unit (SFU) which hitherto had the same mandate as the EFCC and ICPC. Following the duplication of roles for these agencies of government, these institutions have become weak, even though they claim to be autonomous. Today, some of these organs of government have become inefficient, ineffective and unworkable.

4. The undue rush for independence by our nationalists can also be linked to institutional weakness in Nigeria. At independence, the rush for independence led to hurried decision making. Without identifying the peculiarity of the Nigeria nation, the parliamentary system of government was adopted. In the same vein, the political leaders rather than take the gradualist approach which would have allowed independence to fulfill its mandate did otherwise. The process were haphazardly done and in the end all these was done was not done well, and the much expected development could not be attained. This paper concludes that this initial error have in one way or the other been responsible for our many problems including our weak institutions (Onah, 2012).

5. The over-lapping function of our institutions is also responsible for its weakness. It is common in Nigeria to find institutions or organs having similar roles and duties. The over-lapping roles of these organs is capable of weakening their structures. For instance, the similar roles performed by the Police and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) with regards to law enforcement and crime prevention if not examined is capable of snowballing into a crisis that might lead to crisis of confidence between the two law enforcement agencies. The similar mandate given to the EFCC and ICPC is also a case in point.

The Need for Civic Education

Civic Education whenever and however undertaken, prepares citizens of a country, especially the youths to carry out their roles as responsible citizens. Civic Education is that education needed for imparting knowledge and skills that is needed for effective participation in the community, government and politics. Butts (1989) as quoted by Adetunji (2010) also gave credence to the need for civic education when she described it as the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for political participation. In a few instances, political participation and civic education can be limited or negligible. But in order to monitor and ensure good governance at all levels of government, there is the need for more political participation in order to influence decision making which is what Civic Education entail. Banks (2005) argues that the ideas and values which are rooted in civic education emerged as a panacea for solving problems confronting human kind.

In is reflection on the functionality of civic education as an instructional design, Okam and Lawal (2011) as quoted by Omiyefa (2012) concluded that our world has become a mad place. He lamented that many displaced social values which have been allowed to operate vulgarly in many societal frameworks are all tending society towards a situation of disorder.
Corroborating this position, Suswam (2008) listed Nigeria as an example of a polity where these crisis situations have assumed immense significance, particularly with regards to her efforts at grappling and attempting to solve problems which bear on Nigeria’s socio-political development. It is regrettable to note however that in the present circumstance of Nigeria, probably one of the most serious problems confronting her include insecurity, wide level corruption, high crime rate, the culture of impunity amongst others all pointing to how weak, ineffective and inefficient our institutions have become.

The Centre for Civic Education adds impetus to the need for Civic Education as its goal is to promote civic engagement and support democratic and participatory governance. The idea behind civic education is to promote the demand for good governance (i.e. having an informed and engaged public) as a necessary tool to complement the efforts to improve the practice of good governance. Notably, the entrenchment of civic education is only possible in a civil society, as it is synonymous with democratic governance. On the other hand, civil society which is an important aspect of democratization is a vital link between citizens and the state capable of entrenching the right values as well as strengthening our democratic institutions and image. Access to information which is a trait of democratic rule is vital to civic participation and also encourages its development. A more informed people are more likely to participate in policy discussions and communication their ideas and concerns freely, hence, the need for civic education. The development of an informed citizenry is one of the basic functions of civic education as it is an avenue for citizens to be part of decision making as well as demand for better governance from political office holders.

Conclusively, civic education is the heart of governance as only as informed and enlightened people can help a nation grow. In the same vein, Nigeria’s weak institutional framework can be strengthened when we ensure public discipline and commitment towards Nigeria which invariably is what civic education entails.

**Strengthening Nigeria’s Institutions through Civic Education**

The task of strengthening our institutions by making them strong and potent is a task for all and sundry. Thus, efforts must be intensified to ensure our weak institutions are enhanced and strengthened as this is crucial for growth, the ongoing transformation agenda of the government and overall development of the country. Nigeria’s weak institutions have often been explored by persons in position of authority as they often look for loopholes to circumvent laid down procedures. Usoro (2013) concluded that where strong institutions exist, occupants of public offices have no option than to observe the institutions were the presence of clear and unambiguous ideology which all members could identify with. But in the absence of a potent structure, Nigeria’s development and growth would be greatly hindered.

This paper is of the view that the instrument of civic education which entails the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation as well as solving problems confronting mankind if adequately deployed is capable of strengthening our institutional framework such that our institutions can perform optimally. Nigeria’s weak institutional framework can be strengthened when we ensure public discipline and commitment towards Nigeria. The time has come when every Nigerian is involved in the Nigerian project, the project to help Nigeria rise above her challenges and rank among major world powers. Our institutions must be made to work. Making them work would further strengthen them. Having strong institutions are the only guarantee than national transformation and growth would be permanent. The task of making our institutions work is a task for all Nigerians. The Love for
one’s country which civic education revolves around can be deployed to ensuring our institutions become strong, virile, active and functional which would ultimately facilitate development.

In the same vein, the country must be ready to conform to global best practices. It is not possible to have strong institutions when the average Nigerian seems not be interested in the Nigerian project. It is time we put our hands on deck to ensure overall growth and development. Not until such tenets as democracy, good governance, human rights, rule of law, patriotism, fairness, prudent spending, concisions and conscientious leadership amongst others are obtained in real terms in this country, the goal of having strong and virile institutions and overall transformation may continue to elude us. As such, the Nigerian people must rise up through the instrument or tool of civic education to achieve strong institutions for the country. As such, we can only remain patriotic by deciding as a people to ensure our institutions our rejuvenated to ensure optimal performance as only this will guarantee a secured future for all.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that our country’s growth has been stampeded; hence, there is the need for national rebirth and rejuvenation of our institutions and structure as a country. One important social function of Civic Education has been the preparation of citizens for leadership positions. Indeed, its relevance at strengthening and re-energizing our institutions cannot be over-emphasized. The major approach of Civic Education is to equip the citizenry with necessary, appropriate and relevant values, attitudes and behaviour (Omiyefa, 2012). This moral inclinations of civic education which serve as a tool for national consciousness, and good governance is directly related to our quest for strong and virile institutions. Thus, the inculcation of civic education is a catalyst for strong institutions in Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion, recommendations are hereby made for strong institutions in Nigeria.

- There should be concerted efforts to ensure our institutions assume a life of their owe and stand up to their constitutional responsibilities, only this would guarantee sustainable growth and development.
- Efforts must be intensified to ensure public accountability in particular democratic accountability and other forms of accountability in the area of public sector performance, service delivery and due process in public procurement.
- The government should avoid the duplication of roles of government agencies and departments, duplication of roles often lead to weakness. The roles of agencies of government should be clearly spelt out in order to avoid any ambiguity or overlap.
- The government at the centre should exhibit commitment to democratic ideas and principles and above all be part of the rebuilding process of the Nigerian state. A dedicated and honest leadership with a purpose-driven followership are capable of helping Nigeria rise above her current challenges and ultimately catapult it to growth and development.
- This paper recommends that agencies with duplicated mandates be scrapped or better still be merged to ensure optimal effeminacy. In the same vein, institutions of government with weak structures or ambiguous mandates be scrapped.
References


