

INCLUSION OF THE SPECIAL NEEDS POPULACE: A PANACEA FOR GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

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Introduction

Since the dawn of humanity individuals are known to be unique by nature in their own ways. Hardly are two individuals identical in terms of their makeup e.g., behavioral thread for these positions hence their uniqueness. As the uniqueness varies, within the individual (intra/inter) the varied needs however range from physical/health, education, socio emotional. The uniqueness of humans however becomes more evidence if it is glaring beyond the needs of the conventional norms of any given society which further called for special attention. Indeed going by the narratives the paper will deliberate on the individual his/her uniqueness viz-a-vi their inclusion or participation in daily life activities (participation in politics) going by the diversity and uniqueness of individual with special needs inclusion is founder mental in other to carry them alone the terrain of development of any given democratic dispensation the paper further deliberated on democratic governance and its futures as the relate to development in the African Continent. Effective implementation of inclusive education result to full participation of special needs persons in a democratic governance.

Democracy is the most successful political idea in the world. Democracy allows ordinary people a decisive say in who governs a country and how they govern it. It is based on a system of government by all the citizens of a country, typically exercised through elected representatives. The concept of democracy is broad and diverse. Every country has a unique democratic system, and

countries will therefore be 'differently democratic'. Democracy has many features: What then are the key features of democracy? Although there are other aspects to democracy, we look at six key features. When these six main features are present it indicates a strong democracy.

They are:

- Respect for basic human rights,
- A multi-party-political system paired with political tolerance,
- A democratic voting system,
- Respect for the rule of law,
- Democratic governance, and
- Citizen participation

Characteristics of Good Democratic Government

Existence of the Constitution: In every democratic nation, there is usually the existence of a constitution which is either written or unwritten. A constitution can simply be defined as the fundamental laws or rules which guide a state or society. It establishes the institutions of the government such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary and defines their powers. The constitution also contains the rights and duties of the citizens and the government. It is imperative to note that there are two types of institutions namely: Formal and informal institution. Formal institutions are those which discharge formal functions such as the three arms of the government. On the other hand, informal institutions are those which discharge informal responsibilities such as the political parties and the press. In a democratic society, the constitution usually states how these institutions function.

Popular Participation in Politics: One of the most important features of democracy is popular participation in politics. From the definition of democracy explained above, it is clear that any system which does not encourage people to participate in the political decision making of the government is not democratic. Consequently, popular participation is not just a feature of democracy; it is an essential part of the system. People have to participate in politics either directly or through a representative which is legitimately recognized by them. Take for instance, in Nigeria (a federal system), people at the local level, who cannot actively participate in politics at the central level, are allowed to elect senators who represent their opinions at the central level. No doubt, popular participation in politics is one of the features of democracy that cannot be jettisoned.

Legitimacy/Democracy: Legitimacy is the recognition of the people of a state, the right of their leaders to govern. Oxford dictionary defines democracy as when there is conformity to the law or to rules. It is also the right and acceptance of an authority, usually a governing law or a regime. Democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. This postulates that in a democratic state the people are very key and all are expected to be principal actors in all life endeavors to assure no one is left out or excluded. Hence this is known to foster inclusion in all that promote development.

Periodic Election: Since the people are the supreme in a democratic state, there is usually a fixed tenure for conducting elections. This is to make sure that the political power of the state is not concentrated in a single hand. Democracy postulates that the people are Supreme and as such, they have the power to decide who will administer their political affairs. Conversely, a state where there is no political party or just one political party or where the people are not allowed to select anybody they want as leader, is not a democratic state.

Equality before the Law: In a true democratic state, there is equity before the law. This form of government does not encourage the idea that some class of citizens should or should not be punished for their actions. Even the legitimate leaders in a democratic state are forced to face the law during or after their service of the nation. Equality is a key feature of democracy because it postulates that citizens have the same rights to vote and to be voted for. This means that all votes casted in a democratic state during election is valid, notwithstanding wealth or position of the person who casted the vote. This is exactly what is called equality.

Fundamental Human Rights: Fundamental human rights are also very important features of a democratic state. They are those inalienable and immutable rights that are given to a member of a state as soon as he/she is born. These rights help to protect the citizens of that state from molestations by dictators. This is why it is important that the Fundamental human rights of people in a democratic state be entrenched in the constitution of every state. In the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria for instance, the Right to human dignity is protected under section 4 of the constitution. This right protects the citizens of Nigeria from any act by another person that degrades their dignity. There are other fundamental human rights that also help to

ensure effective practice of democracy. The freedom of the press is one of them. Evidently, press freedom is one of the essential pillars of a democratic state. It is also one of the main features of democracy.

Press Freedom: Freedom of the press or press freedom is also a key feature of every democratic nation because the press plays important roles in a democracy. First of all, this principle means that the people are allowed to freely create print and online media houses with the aim of disclosing and analyzing government activities. It brings about accountability in governance and that is one of the tenets of democracy. Where there is no press freedom then there is no democracy because the government will hardly be accountable to the people, knowing fully well that their actions are not being watched and disclosed. This is the case in some of the most corrupt African and European countries in the world today. It should, however, be noted that there is usually a limit to this freedom too. In most countries, where the press tries to blaspheme the government or incite the people to attack the government, it will be deemed to be an act of treason and the punishment can be deadly.

Rule by the Majority: Democracy is a concept of governance where every decision is made in favour of the majority interest. The will of the majority always prevails. Elections are won a by majority votes, opinion polls are given weight by majority views, referendum is conducted by majority votes, bills in the legislative houses are decided based only specified majority votes, courts and tribunals adopt the majority decision as their final decision, and so on.

Absence of Dictatorship and Oppression: Democracy is characterized by the absence of dictatorship and oppression of the masses. Dictatorship is a type of government where an individual or group of persons possesses absolute sovereignty over the running of the government. Dictatorship is synonymous to autocracy. Dictatorship has no place in a democratic government; rather, democracy encourages an all-inclusive government for the benefit of the masses. There is nothing like absolute power since the people in authority are subjected to checks and balances. Thus, there are limits to the exercise of power in a democratic setting. Also, there are no rooms for abuse of power and oppression of the masses in an ideal democracy.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion seems to be new in developing countries. It is a practice of educating both the so called normal and those with special learning needs in the same school and class together. This practice aimed at promoting the principle of normalization where all person regardless of their ability live and share same environment with provision relevant resources. The National Centre on Educational Restructuring and inclusion (1995) defines inclusive education as a set of principles and practice which provides all learners, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services in age-appropriate class rooms, in order to prepare the students for productive lives and full members of society.

Inclusion, is an attempt to teach people with disabilities together with other children in regular setting with provision of support services. Therefore, inclusion is all encompassing, bringing important changes be re-structuring the well commitment of education such as curriculum resources, facilities, methodologies and assessment method. Inclusive education according to UNESCO (2005), is a "Process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners, through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education" hence differences and diversities are recognized and plans to address their challenges are made adequate and appropriate by. In fact, inclusion, is not just a more integrating learners with or without disabilities in the same neighborhood schools but it is more concerned with diversity and individual differences that could be addressed by providing equal opportunities for everyone to participate effectively in inclusive learning environment.

Nevertheless, it is important to list out some of the importance or key principles that guide the philosophy of inclusion.

They are:

1. Providing all learners with challenging and flexible general education curriculum.
2. Embracing and responding to diversity and different abilities and strengths.
3. Using reflective practices and differentiated instruction.
4. Establishing collaboration among major stake holders such as teachers, parents, students and communities' organization (Salend, 2011).

Inclusion is significant to persons with special needs because it promotes the fundamental human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (United Nations, 1989). Thus, the children irrespective of their abilities or disabilities have equal access to quality education. Inclusion also promotes social justice that denies discrimination and ensures equality. Everybody is given the right to participate and contribute to society. Therefore, special need pupils/students benefit with inclusion for promotes their social and academic interaction with non-special needs, help them access the general education curriculum, gives opportunities to them to attend neighborhood schools, ease transit from school to community, increases their self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-concept, reduce segregation against special needs population and improves their academic achievement. In fact, not only the special need populations benefit from inclusion but also their teachers, parent and society in general.

Conclusion

Going by the narratives on the concept of uniqueness, democratic governance and inclusion in the African context, inclusion is a pillar upon which a fully implemented participation of individuals with special needs will in no small major foster development in all ramifications of human endeavor. Since democracy is embrace and regarded as the most liberal form of governance, the African Continent has to embrace and implement it. In other to ensure the zero reject and no one is left out in the execution of governance special condition not withstanding

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