

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Democratic dividends in Nigeria as perceived by persons with special needs: A case study of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo**

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Accepted 12 March, 2009

**There is a general misconception in the society that people with special needs are not concerned about the nation's democracy. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the perception of people with special needs about democratic dividends in the country. To achieve this, 14 participants each were randomly selected from among persons with physical impairment (PH), hearing impairment (HI) and visual impairment (VI). 42 people with special needs from the federal college of education (special), Oyo were the subjects of the study. This institution has the highest concentration of literate people with special needs in Nigeria. The age range of the participants was between 20 and 45 with a mean age of 27.8 years and standard deviation of 3.42 years. The instrument employed was a self-generated and validated democratic dividends as perceived by people with special needs. The result showed that people with special needs are keenly aware and concerned about the nation's democratic dividends. The results were discussed about how people with special needs could benefit more and be integrated meaningfully into the polity.**

**Key words:** Democracy, persons with special needs, democratic dividends.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background to the study**

The importance of government in any society is to enhance human condition through people's involvement in the determination of various decisions that affect their lives. All over the world, this viewpoint accounts for the reason why democracy is regarded as the best form of government that allows man to fully actualize his potentials and opportunities. Thus, democracy is both an expression and expansion of man's freedom and is akin to man's progress and societal sustainability. Ighodalo (2006) stated that a democratic government releases the total energy of all citizens for development rather than the restraint, curtailment, suppression and oppression associated with an authoritarian regime.

Oyugi (1988) defined democracy as the open polity that is accessible to the general citizenry. Likewise Ajibewa

(2006) described it as the ability of the electorate to choose freely on a regular basis between competing groups of potential leaders who want to conduct the affairs of the state. Huntington (1991) described it as the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's vote. Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992) defined democracy as ideology and politics. As an ideology, democracy is the philosophy of governance, which puts a high premium on the basic freedom, or fundamental human rights of citizens, the rule of law, the right to property, the free flow of information and the right to choose between alternative political options. However, as politics, democracy is concerned with institutions and procedure of governance which foster consensus while simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for the ideology of democracy.

Dahl (1971) discussed certain elements that sustain a democracy. These include effective participation, equality

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in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, control of agenda and inclusion of adults. Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992) highlighted other 10 elements such as: right of choice. Freedom from ignorance and want. Empowerment and capability, respect for the rule of law and equality before the law; promotion and defense of human rights, creation of appropriate political machinery, sustained political communication to create trust among populace, accountability of leadership to followership, decentralization of political power and orderly succession through secret ballot. Council of Foreign Relations (2006) added that a democracy might not worth its salt without a firm and fearless judiciary, efficient and impartial electoral system, a visionary and effective executive, a committed and responsible legislative, a forthright and courageous press and an active and tolerant multi-party system.

However, Gbadebo (2001) berated all previous elections into different elective offices in the country since the time of independence in 1960 describing it as a grave manipulation against the will of the electorate. He revealed that the 1964 and 1965 regional elections in country were marred by mistrust and chaos. The 1979 elections were also characterized by large-scale malpractices. The 1983 elections were also alleged to have been falsified beyond measure, which led to a military take-over. However, the 1993 elections were considered free and fair, it was nevertheless annulled by the military under general Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB). The 1999 and 2003 elections were also greeted with criticisms of massive rigging. Then came the latest April 2007 elections that remained the most condemnable by local and international observers in our national history. The question is: Did all these democratic fouls have impact on our fellowmen with disabilities?

Adelabu (2004) stated that 10% of the population of any country consists of people with disabilities. On that premise, it is assumed that going by the 2006 Nigeria population census figure of 141 million, as many as 14.1 million are people with special needs in the country. Ironically, these are people that are marginalized, abandoned, frustrated and disenfranchised. Ismaila and Ajobiewe (2001) stressed that persons with special needs are sidelined in socio-political affairs due to inadequate and ineffective legislation. On that note, people with special needs require the same civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights as any other able-bodied people.

### Statement of the problem

The absurdities characterizing the previous political experiments in the country have made the populace disillusioned about her process of democracy. Since people with special needs co-exist with others in the country, it is likely that the existing socio-political climate could have some impact on them. Thus, the perceptions of persons with special needs would confirm or disprove the general idea about democratic dividends in Nigeria.

### Purpose of the study

This study is mainly to investigate the perceptions of people with special needs about democratic dividends existing in the country. Specifically, the study sets out to quantify the perceptions of people with special needs about such issues as rule of law, electoral process, human rights, governance and people's co-existence.

### Research question

The democratic dividends accrued to the citizenry depict the success or failure, acceptability or rejection of such a democracy by the citizenry, both able-bodied and disabled. Therefore this study seeks to empirically quantify the perceptions of people with physical impairment (PH), hearing impairment (HI) and visual impairment (VI) about democratic dividends in the country.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design

This is a descriptive survey that systematically collects, analyzes and describes data about a given population. In this kind of study, there is no statement of hypothesis, experimentation or establishment of cause and effect relationship.

#### Population

This study employed a randomly selected sample of 42 persons with special needs in the federal college of education (special), Oyo. 14 participants each were randomly selected from among staff and students with physical impairment (PH), hearing impairment (HI) and visual impairment (VI). The age range of the participants was between 20 and 45 years with a mean age of 27.8 years. This institution was considered appropriate because it is the only college of special education in sub-Saharan Africa with a large concentration of special needs persons.

#### Instruments

The authors developed 25 items on democratic dividends in Nigerian democracy. The instrument contains 5 sections, namely: rule of law, electoral process, human rights, governance and people's co-existence. The instrument contains section A (demo-graphic information) and section B (the test items). Upon trial testing, the instrument was considered appropriate for the study.

#### Procedure

40 items were developed initially and given to two experts in political science and special education for face validity and reliability. The suggestions and criticisms of these experts pruned the items to 30 items. At the end of trial testing, 5 of the items could not survive, leaving 25 items on the instruments. The authors personally did the administration and retrieval of the instrument. People with physical impairment (PH) and hearing impairment (HI) were able to read and respond to the instrument on their own, while the investigators assisted those with visual impairment in the reading and response to the instrument.

**Table 1.** Dividends of democracy as perceived by persons with special needs.

<b>A</b>	<b>Rule of law</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1.	The rule of law is very effective in the country	21(50%)	21(50%)
2.	In Nigeria, there is equality before the law	10(23.80%)	32(76.20%)
3.	Judicial decisions are devoid of political interference	18(42.84%)	24(57.16%)
4.	Nigerians are proud of the country's legal process	35(83.34%)	7(16.66%)
<b>B Electoral process</b>			
5.	The best candidates win elections in the country	13(30.94%)	29(69.06%)
6.	Nigeria elections are usually free and fair	12(28.56%)	30(71.44%)
7.	Election results usually reflect the desire of the masses	12(28.56%)	30(71.44%)
8.	The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is unbiased in its decision making	20(47.60%)	22(52.40%)
9.	The electoral process has ruled out the possibility of the military to come back to power again	8(19.04%)	34(80.96%)
<b>C Human rights</b>			
10.	People with special needs enjoy the same rights and opportunities as any other people.	10(23.80%)	32(76.20%)
11.	People with special needs are encouraged to occupy elective offices in society.	11(26.18%)	31(73.82%)
12.	The government respects the rights of minority groups.	13(30.94%)	29(69.06%)
13.	Nigerian democracy respects human rights	13(59.54%)	29(40.46%)
14.	The Nigerian police protect the people with integrity	10 (23.80%)	32(76.20%)
<b>D. Governance</b>			
15.	People in government always act in the best interest of the masses.	10 (23.80%)	32 (76.46%)
16.	Government takes major decisions based on popular consultations.	20(47.40%)	22(52.40%)
17.	Civilian government benefits the masses more than military regimes.	35(83.34%)	7(16.66%)
18.	The legislators are mostly concerned with the development of their constituencies.	34 (80.96%)	8(19.04%)
19.	Corruption has reduced significantly under the civilian government.	29(69.06%)	13 (30.94%)
20.	The political leaders are very sincere to the populace.	10 (23.80%)	32 (76.20%)
<b>E. People's co-existence</b>			
21.	Ethnic militias came into existence because of political injustice.	20 (47.60%)	22 (52.40%)
22.	All inter-tribal conflicts in the country have political undertone.	12 (28.56%)	30 (71.44%)
23.	The level of religious tolerance /harmony is very acceptable.	28 (66.68%)	14 (33.32%)
24.	The problem about co-existence in Nigeria is the fear of ethnic domination.	28 (66.68%)	14 (33.32%)
25.	The Nigerian people have a common view about how the country should be governed.	15 (35.70%)	27 (64.30%)

**Data analysis**

Simple percentage was used to analyze the data collected from the participants on each item.

**RESULTS**

The results of the data collected are shown in Table 1.

**DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The results of the study clearly show that people with special needs are quite aware of democratic events in the country. For instance, in section A dealing with Rule of Law, it was found that opinions were sharply divided

about the effectiveness of the rule of law as shown in item 1. The case was contrary in item 2 when 76.20% held the view that there is no equality before the law whereas 23.80% was of the affirmative. Considering all these, there seems to be a consensus of opinion that people with special needs are proud of the country's legal process as reflected in item 4.

Besides, the results on the country's electoral process confirmed the assertion of Gbadebo (2001) that the populace is tired about election results in the country. The result itemized from item 5 through 9 showed that the respondents abhorred the processes and outcomes of elections in the country. Item 8 indicates that 52.40% opined that the Independent National Electoral Commission is unfair about election results on many cases. This is evident in some already declared Year 2007 election

results which were overturned by law courts. Above all, 80.96% of the respondents foresaw the possibility of a military take-over if the electoral system continues being abused. Perhaps, all these made a basis for existence of bad human rights records in the country as shown in items 10 through 14. Specifically, the respondents decried human rights abuse, disrespect for people with special needs and lack of integrity and patriotism among the Nigerian police.

However, there was a positive perception about a comparative advantage of civilian administration over the military regimes as shown in item 17. Many of the respondents had the opinion that consultation provides the basis for the civilian government's major decisions as revealed by item 16. Nevertheless, majority of the respondents disagreed that people in government are sincere or act in the best interest of the populace. This may be the reason why many of the respondents said that Nigerians lack a common view of how the country should be governed as shown in item 25. This political injustice accounts for many inter-tribal conflicts occurring in the country as shown by item 22. Mostly, democratic dividends are approaching in piece-meal, but the fruits have not blossom for enjoyment of the citizenry in the country.

## Conclusion

The importance of democratic government lies in the benefits that the citizenry stand to enjoy in a representative democracy. Therefore, for a democracy to be worthy, there are certain elements and structures to hold to and to hold by. These elements include: rule of law, electoral process, human rights, governance and co-existence. The moment these things are abused or out of place, then democracy is non-existent, or in proper language, a mockery of itself.

Since people with special needs have inalienable rights as other people, their views and opinions about democratic dividends in Nigeria are crucial in national development. It is only then our society can boast of participatory and meaningful democracy. Going by the results of this study, it is clear that people with special needs are keenly aware of absurdities in the present Nigeria's political and democratic arena.

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