# Good governance in rural areas: challenges for social security

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of good governance in the development of rural areas and in arresting social insecurity. It assesses the general characteristic of good governance in the world especially as it relates to rural areas of Nigeria. It examines the causes of social insecurity and advocates that the various actors at the rural areas must contribute to good governance if social security must be achieved. It opines that in a situation of crisis, hunger and want, social security challenges exist. Insecurity of life, war, famine can lead to displacement and the extinction of a civilization. The paper concludes by examining how social security can be achieved and the link between social security and the continuity of culture.

## Introduction

This paper is therefore set to underscore the importance of government and good governance. An examination of some basic concepts such as good governance, rural areas and social security shall be made. The paper examines the inevitability of good governance in rural areas and establishes a positive link between good governance and social security. Finally it assesses the role of social security in the continuity of culture.

## Conceptual Clarification

Philosophers have the penchant for defining crucial terms/concepts, because of the Aristotle's now-famous dictum: "initio deisputandi est definitio no minis" (for discussion to be intelligible, it must begin with definition of terms). It is against this background that it becomes necessary to examine briefly some of the basic concepts we shall come across in this paper.

## Government/Good Governance

Government is the legitimate executive authority by which a state bears the final responsibility over a nation. Governance therefore refer to the nature of dispensing this responsibility. It has to do with the appropriation of power and authority, coupled with their inherent aspect of arbitrariness. When this arbitrariness of power and authority is rationally appropriated in the direction which guarantee and ensures the common good of the entire society (nation) then we talk of good governance. Otherwise it is not. According to Kampe (2003).
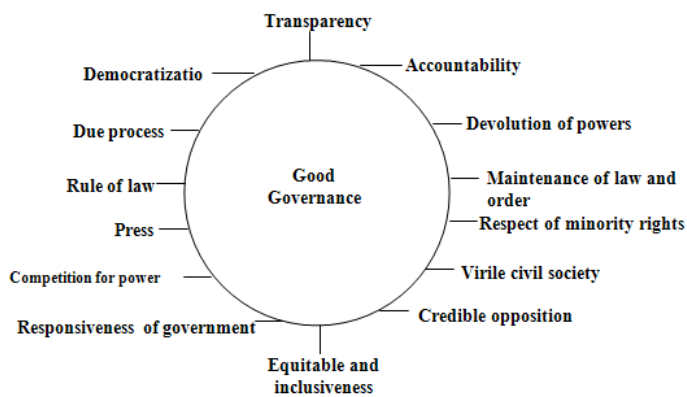
*"Governance has to do with the manner in which responsibility is discharged. Such a responsibility may be acquired through election, appointment or delegation in the public domain or in the areas of commerce-corporate governance. Therefore, good governance is taken here to mean a condition whereby such responsibility is discharged in an effective, transparent and accountable manner while bad governance is associated with maladministration in the discharge of responsibility, good governance entails the existence of efficient and accountable institutions – political, judicial, administrative economic, corporate – and entrenched rules that promote development, protect human rights, and respect the rule of law, and ensure that the people are free to participate in, and be heard on, decisions that affect their lives".*

Good governance encompasses the consolidation of legitimate authority and state power in an effort to bring all structures under the instrumentation that enables peace, security and stability – thus leading to socio-political and economic prosperity.

The term "Good Governance" are increasingly used in development literature. The concept of governance is not new. It is as old as civilization. Governance means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented. Otherwise governance focuses on the actors involved in decision making and implementation of decisions made and the structures put in place to implement such decisions. Government is the act of governance, or act of ruling. It is the idea of state put in the hands of men who are fallible, definite and concrete. Government are human being holding positions systematically related to one another. Government are agents of state. They are rulers, leaders, officials, employees who hold positions of power, honour, privilege, trust in accordance with the constitution for which they are given remuneration in the form of salary, prestige, title and honour.

Good governance among the governing elite in Africa is a concept filled with double – barrel interpretation because of their reluctance to be held accountable. Yet it is at the heart of conflict prevention mechanism. Good governance is a pro-active measure known to defuse conflicts.

Indeed it is defined as the running of the affairs of government positively and progressively, in a manner beneficial to all and aimed at delivering public goods in the greatest interest of the generality of the people. This concept is characterized by a number of indices, these are maintenance of law and order, accountability, democratization, transparency, due process, rule of law, responsiveness of government, separation and devolution of powers, a free press and a free and virile civil society, a credible opposition, competition for power, respect for minority rights, equitable and inclusiveness (Best, 2006). It is also responsive to the present and future needs of the society. Fig. 1 show some characteristics of good governance, and are briefly discussed here

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**Fig. 1: Characteristics of good governance**

**Participation:** Participation of both sexes is crucial to good governance. Participation could be direct or indirectly, through representation. It is important to note that representative democracy does not necessarily take into account the needs of the most vulnerable in decision making. Participation means the citizens needs to be informed and organized. This is where the freedom of association and organized civil society play key roles.

**Accountability:** This is a key requirement of good governance. Not just for government institutions but also for civil societies and private sectors. They must be accountable to their stakeholders and to the public. There are those who will be affected by its decisions and actions. Accountability must be accompanied by transparency and rule of law.

**Rule of Law:** This refers to the legal framework that are enforced impartially. It requires the protection of human rights and the rights of the minorities. For this to be effective, the judiciary must be independent and the police force must be impartial and incorruptible.

**Responsiveness:** Good governance presupposed that institutions and processes serve all stakeholders and respond as soon as the need arises to nip in the bud any ugly situation that may arise. It entails government acting expeditiously in time of crisis or emergency.

**Equity and Inclusiveness:** This requires that all groups in society be given opportunity to improve and maintain their well-being. It means giving an open door to all and treating all equally. All should opportunity to enjoy the benefits derivable from government.

**Transparency:** This means decision taking and enforcement are done in a way that abides by rules and regulations. It allows for information flow. Moreover information must be freely available to those who will be affected by it, in an easily understandable form.

**Effectiveness and Efficiency:** This emphasize the need for institutions and establishments to produce results that meet the needs of present society with the resources available. The concept covers the sustainable use of resources and the protection of the environment.

**Democratization:** It allows for individuals and every group in society to be given the opportunity to vie for positions without hindrance. It is the opportunity to fairly compete, without intimidation or discrimination.

**Free Press:** A press that is not gagged. A press responsible in reportage and investigative journalism is emphasized here. A press that practices development journalism without sacrificing ethnical standards.

**Virile Civil Society:** This refers to the civil society that is conscious and alive to its responsibilities. Civil societies keep government on its toes and bring to the front burner, issues that
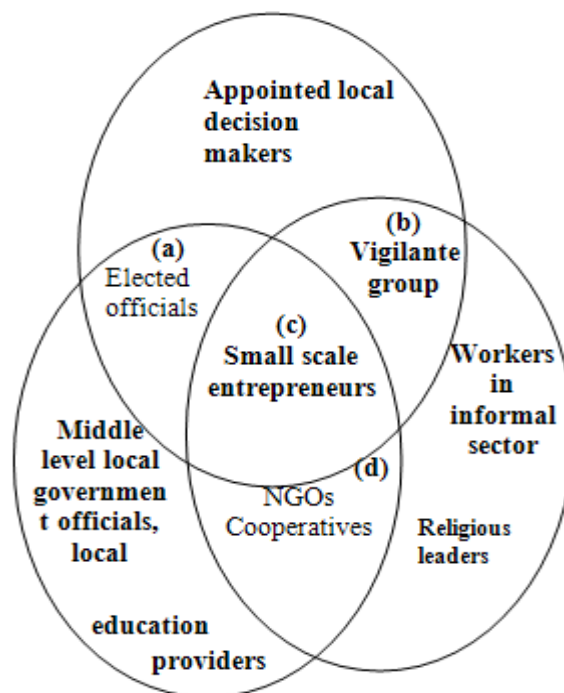
individual journalist could not easily handle for fear of victimization.

Respect for Minority Rights: The rights of the minority should be protected since they may not have the number necessary to push through their desires democratically. Good governance ensures that the majority does not stifle them.

Devolution and Separation of Powers: Good governance enforces the separation of powers within the institutions while ensuring the performance of each, without conflict. There maybe overlaps but they are such that the overlaps do not seriously hinder progress or jeopardize the existence of the structures and institutions.

Credible Opposition: Good governance provides avenue for the opposition to effectively participate in the affairs of state. In most cases the opposition make constructive criticisms that fosters progress in the polity.

Actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government. In this case our focus is the rural areas. How do we define rural area or rather what is a rural area?
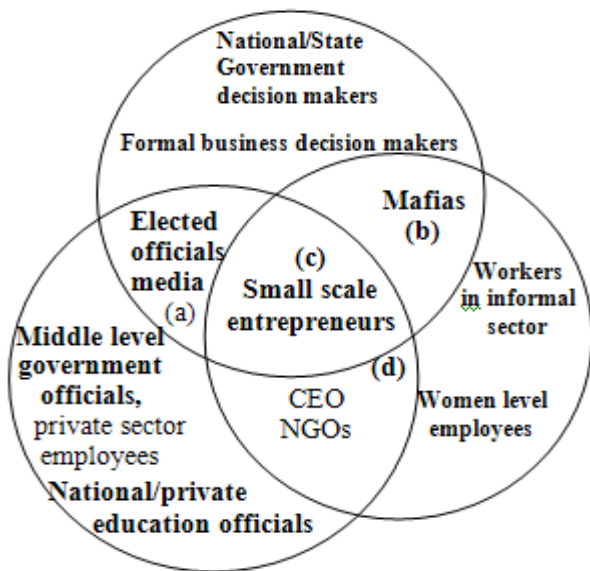


**Figure 2: Rural Decision Makers**

**Rural Areas**

Rural area means remote area excluded from urban with poor habitation and the most marginalized in the scheme of national development. It is important to emphasize that rural areas are remarkably different from the local government, although must rural areas come directly under the purview of local government areas. Consequently, the local government is the government closer to the people at the rural areas in order to provide government services. Indeed rural development is aimed at bringing some development to the rural areas. Rural development are a set of policies and projects designed and co-ordinated to raise and sustain the standard of living of the rural population as a whole. It implies modernization which would bring increase in productive power and changes in human attitudes, and ability to influence the arrangement of that environment. It seeks to establish an economic base for the society which would generate progressively higher levels of output and promote the emergence of a knowledge and attitudinal base which makes possible an automatic and continuing expansion of man's capacity to deal rationally with

the environment. It remarkably bring people and their traditional institution in the development process.

In rural areas the actors include influential community leaders powerful families, association of peasant farmers and fisher folks, co-operative NGO, religious leaders, financial institution and party leaders. Fig. 2: Provide the actors involved in rural governance.

However, in the urban areas the situation is much more complex. In the urban centres, the actors include media, lobbyist, international donors, multinational corporations organized crime syndicates "the mafia" who may influence decision making. Fig. 3: Provides actors involved in governance in urban setting.



**Figure 3: Urban Actors**

In most rural areas, local powerful families make or influence decision making. Such formal decision-making is often the result of corrupt practices or lead to corrupt practices as they interfere with the activities of the local authorities for their selfish interests. Poor governance is increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evils within a society. The Niger Delta crisis that held the Nigerian nation supine from 1999 – 2007 and even the Boko Haram insurgency are all hinged on poor governance.

**Social Security**

Social security refers to the availability of security and access to it especially those that concerns social existence. A community is considered socially secure when the people do not live in fear or want socially. In the Niger Delta, half of the people are chronically socially insecure, due to extreme poverty and socio-economic displacement, climate change and cultural threat. The threat to culture is very high, for example, the Niger Delta is a melting pot of many civilizations and cultures, some of which have survived to the present, either in folklores, oral traditions, oral literature and religious artistic expression, or in archaeological contexts. In many ways, the relics of these rich historical and cultural heritage are not appreciated, and so nothing is done to protect them. If the social security that makes possible the existence of these people in their natural environment and the continued thrive of their socio-economic system, is threatened, then their cultural properties would gradually be extinct.

Put differently, social security means sustained livelihood. They are activities intended to help economically disadvantaged members of society meet their daily subsistence needs in a manner that is dignified, locally, appropriate and environmentally sustainable.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain social security in a world beset by a confluence of challenges. In Nigeria, 70% of the populace live in rural areas without good roads and social services, and sound technological development to sustain their culture and tradition.

The common definition of social security therefore is when all the people at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and socio-cultural ingredience to meet their existence and the continuation of their culture group.

The Inevitable Link between Good Governance, Rural Areas and Social Security Although it might sound trivial or even irrelevant to bring up such basic matters as the links and or relationship between good governance, rural areas and social security, yet, it (the link) is the very fabric of any society. Infact, without it the social world as we know it will cease to exist. The earliest graphic illustration is that between the mouth, teeth and tongue. In a way, good governance, rural areas and social security have the same kind of relationship. One cannot exist without the other. The function of one complements the other.

Social security is that capacity to ensure that people have access to a secure means of living, food, income and asserts. It is a socially sustainable means of overcoming shocks and stresses that arise as a result of unexpected incidents in societal and individual lifespan. When society is secure it provides the catalyst for the continued existence of future generations. It eliminates the fear of extinction or loss of identity, even the fear of social and political domination. In reality with continued existence of a people one can be sure of the survival of language, acquired, shared and transmitted traits.

Government on the other hand is that instrument or institution that ensures a crisis free and ordered society. All civilizations have been generated and perpetuated by the use of some form of hierarchical structure, that ensures that human behaviour conform to a standard that does not threaten the corporate existence of the whole.

It is therefore penitent to observe that government is that medium/instrument through which the social security – political, economic social can be enthroned and transmitted from generation to generation not only in the rural areas but society as a whole..

**What Happens when People do not have Social Security**

For people who do not experience good governance, economic and social security, short life expectancy are real risks. It is obvious that people who suffer from socio-economic security will be less able to pass their culture on, than those in other areas with an improved situation. They are likely to be physically and intellectually poor due to poor economic conditions resulting from food insecurity. They are also likely to die younger due to pre-carious existence resulting from failure of government to provide enabling socio-economic environment and security of life and property. Lack of good governance and lack of social security adversely affect society in three ways.

a) The individuals are likely to have a short life span because they are structurally defective during early development on account of poor nutrition intake and poor food security.

b) The regeneration of the society becomes difficult as culture, and traditions are not continuously transferred to younger generations. Systematic demise of individuals who would have passed on the culture and tradition, leads to cultural extinction.

c) Good governance as a value become virtually unknown in a society like this where social security is in want.

**Why is there Social Insecurity**

Rural areas are largely populated by the rural poor, who are much more poorer than the urban poor. In the rural areas poverty walks on four legs. The people lack access to sufficient resources to produce or buy quality food. Poor farmers and fishermen have very small resources to buy effective equipment or use labour saving techniques. Often they cannot produce enough food for themselves let alone excess from which to generate income. This affect their health as they lack sufficient calories and nutrients necessary to undertake the work needed to produce food. Without good health the body is also unable to make use of available food.

a) Drought, flood disasters and pest can easily wipe out or cause a displacement of a large population of society resulting in social insecurity.

b) Conflicts threaten social security as people flee to safety or become involved in the fighting. The chaos that ensure become a barrier to socio-economic security of a cultural group. Moreover, contamination resulting from explosive debris, make existence in their previous location difficult.

**Good Governance and Social Security**

Social security is the security of life property, and the provision of enabling environment for society to replicate itself. It is the most promising instrument for not only reducing poverty but securing local livelihood. One of the critical conditions required for the social security of society is to ensure that good governance structures and related policies are in place at all levels.

Achieving social security in its totality continues to be a challenge not only for developing nations like Nigeria, but also for developed nations like the United States, Europe and Asia. The difference however, is in the magnitude of problems in terms of its severity and proportion of the population involved. In developed nations, the problem of providing security is targeted by various interventions, including espionage, in the form of proactive check mate of other foreign threats. Secret development of various biological, chemical and technological research. These efforts have significantly reduced social security in these nations. Similar approaches are employed by developing nations but with little success.

Social security is affected by a complexity of factors. These include: Unstable social and political environment that preclude sustainable economic growth, civil strife and war, poor human resource base, natural resources constraints, inadequate education, natural disasters such as flood and locust infestation and the absence of good governance. All these contribute to insufficient social security or insufficient access to security by households and individuals.

Wrong macro-economic policies and unstable political situations account for governance problems. Wrong policy biases, poor investments, lack of capacity building processes, weak governance in agriculture resulting in social in security. The root cause of social insecurity is the inability of people to gain access to socio-economic well-being due to poverty and insecurity of life.

In Nigeria, there is high incidence of insecurity if adequate measures are not taken. A number of factors have contributed to this tendency including civil strife, poor governance, draught and agriculture dependency on the climate and environment.

**Challenges**

The major challenge to social security in the rural areas is its lack of social amenities and technologically underdeveloped economic sector. There is an overall decline in economic production and investments which has a corresponding implication on food and the livelihood of the rural population. The reduction in sustainable means leads to restiveness and migration into the urban centres.

The rapid population growth in rural areas, limited education and poverty make life in the rural areas very short. The rate of insecurity is high as the institution for law enforcement are very distant from the people. More importantly, poor policies in the rural areas greatly affect social security. The problem arises when the focus of policies, structures and institutions are put above that of the people themselves. Especially when they are not inclusive in their, design they tend to handicap majority of the citizenry. One such way is the uneven development within the country where certain regions are preferentially developed at the expense of others for political reasons. This threw up a number of challenges that affect social security. Some of which are:

1) Poverty
2) Participation in government
3) Inadequate distribution of wealth
4) Poor planning by government
5) Capacity building challenges

**How can Social Security be Achieved**

The solution lie in increasing all aspect of social life ensuring its availability, accessibility and adequacy for all. Because social insecurity is directly correlated with poverty. If poverty must be alleviated, then wealth must be created for the target population. Stakeholders must ensure that all is done with honest intentions for the benefit of all. To achieve social security in rural Nigeria, the following is hereby proposed:

a) Social amenities must be provided at the rural areas to stem the rural urban drift. The rural areas must be made the food basket of the nation as various local governments apply technology to boost productivity essential for food security.

b) Conflict prevention and resolution mechanism and democracy and governance based on principles of accountability and transparency in public institutions and the rule of law are basic to reducing hunger among the less privileged in the society.

c) Security, property rights and access to law enforcements when such property or life is under threat is a cardinal function of government. Institutions for the enforcement and protection of law and order must be subjected to the democratic principles.

d) A long term policy must be put in place by local government to ensure local economy grows based on comparative advantage. The people in the rural areas must be encouraged to boost the economy, that way the citizens, will live, work and pass on their culture and tradition without threat of any kind.

e) None of the actors at the rural areas should be marginalized or excluded from participating fully in matters that concern their existence. It is usually discrimination and exclusion that gives rise to strife that disrupt the stability and social security of a community.

**Role of Social Security in the Continuity of Culture**

To address this sub-section, a cursory attempt will be made at understanding the implication of a secure society and proceed to its effect on continuity of a civilization. There is no doubt that the social resource that can rescue man from his developmental challenges is land and its resources. A secure and sustained existence can be seen as the bottom line. In the Niger Delta for instance, social cohesion, evidence in healthy, positive relationship among the peoples that co-exist in the Niger Delta help to re-enforce development.

Niger Delta is a multi-ethnic and multi-culture area. The incessant strife among these people reveals the threat to social security and therefore to sustainable livelihood. These clashes

threaten the stability and the social fabric of the populace and therefore affects domestic setting, and could provide avenue for rape, arson, battery and famine.

The transfer of knowledge in a situation of conflict, mistrust and fear become a major challenge. When this happens, depletion of local knowledge become the norm. One cannot quantify the problematic created by rapid urbanization and industrialization on the local science and technology and regeneration of local resources. It is therefore not surprising that with these problems it becomes difficult to transfer indigenous culture and knowledge. In the area of health, economic know how, etc, many long to return to the ability to use herbal means to create a health balance. This return is almost impossible as most of our local intellectual property is lost or untransferred because the society was disrupted and those to transfer or pass on the knowledge are no more.

When a peoples life or community is threatened, the political and economic spheres of life face similar challenges, many rural areas in the Niger Delta hardly participate in decision making. This is a setback on women and children as policies friendly towards them may not be promulgated. Members of the community need to be consulted or brought along in the area of governance. Policy formulated and implemented should be such that would affect all segments in society. This is where good governance come in.

## Conclusion

The secret of the success of some emerging world powers like United States, United Kingdom lie in the continuous enthronement of good governance. The people have become cohesive in thought and have continued to transfer their knowledge because their society are socially secure and their people less open to crisis that would threaten the social fabric of society. The central theme of this paper is good governance with emphasis on its role on social security. This paper also reveals the impact of good governance on rural areas especially in stabilizing society to ensure a crisis free society for civilizations to survive within their cultural environment, thus preventing extinction.

To enthrone social security in an age of globalization, good governance is emphasized. True democracy is one useful standard of good governance but improved rural governance is necessary for technological transformation and social security. There is need for democratization. The actors identified in fig. 1 as a, b, c, d must be factored in decision making and implementation in the rural areas and even in the urban areas. To ensure social security, crime, crisis poverty and hunger are the most important factors for assessing good governance at the national level. Governments performance in providing these basic needs for majority of its citizens, determine security. These essential needs are socio-economic and include - internal peace, rule of law, investment in infrastructure and the security of social life that would allow the transfer of culture and tradition of our people from one generation to another. Only when good governance is enthroned and our security personnel schooled that their primary concern is to protect the life and property of the citizens, (not harass or intimidate,) only then can we achieve sustainable development. Only when our culture and traditions of culture groups are passed on from generation to generation can we have a stable social system.

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