



MANAGING THE CHALLENGE OF LEGITIMACY IN ENTERPRISE REFORM AGENDA IN NIGERIA: A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

By

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Abstract: Critical reflection on the trajectory of socio-economic and political reforms in Nigeria raise serious doubts about the potency and mechanics of the methodological approaches adopted for the reform exercise. The trend shows that several attempts at socio-economic and political reforms in Nigeria have aggravated rather than ameliorate the existing bad conditions which they were intended to resolve; creating in their stead, even more serious concerns than providing answers to existing problems. After applications (or mis-application) of prescribed dosage of economic and political reform policies and programmes, poverty, political crisis and social decay have become exacerbated in Nigeria. Even new forms of social malaise hitherto unknown are engendered. Consequently, Nigeria's socio-economic and political conditions continue to deteriorate, despite bogus agenda of reforms and claims of accolades by various governments and regimes of the day, of making giant strides that lead to economic recovery and political stability in the country. Typical examples of reform that have worsened Nigeria's economic and political condition include the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986-1993 and the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) of 2005. With the benefit of hindsight, all that could be considered recalling from these great reforms remain the huge contradictions and distortions they represents with each begging for explanations. This paper therefore, is an attempt to explain this phenomenon using Jurgen Habermas Legitimation Crisis theory, which is contextualized in the theory of social evolution. The theory explains, inter alia, that modern capitalism is susceptible to legitimation crisis which according to him is the withdrawal from existing order of the support or loyalty of the mass of the population as their motivational commitment to its normative bases is broken." This in turn is the function of the fundamental contradiction of capitalist society which Nigeria shares in. In the light of Habermas 'Legitimation Crisis Theory, this paper seek to explain why socio- economic and political reforms in Nigeria have consistently failed. Based on this, recommendations are made as to the way forward.

Key words: Reform, Legitimacy, Legitimation Crisis, socio-economic, Legitimation Crisis Theory.

Introduction

Perhaps, the best approach to begin this discourse is to operationalize the key terms in the topic, even if their meanings may seem appraise and often taken for granted. It will be useful therefore to defined and explain the concepts so as to avoid any ambiguity or misinterpretation.

Conceptualizing Reform, Legitimacy; and Legitimacy problem/ Legitimatization Crisis

Reform:

The term reform has been an engaging concept, in society as far back as the 16th century. In the Oxford English Dictionary, reform is defined as "the amendment, or altering for the better, of some faulty state of the things,

especially of a corrupt or oppressive political institution or practice, the removal of some abuse or wrong'. This definition implies that reform connotes 'change' or 'improvement' in a given condition or state of affair towards better condition. Hence, it is often taken to be synonymous with progress. It is a deliberate move to change the status quo, seeking for higher qualitative order. What this means by implications is that the status quo is not good enough and therefore ought to be changed. But the status quo in any system serves the interest of some people; hence any threat to it is resisted by those benefiting from it. That explain why reforms are not easy task to undertake. It requires proper planning and implementation if desired ends are to be achieved.

So, reform is a consciously planned process of bringing about change or improvement in a social order, be it economic or political. Reform is a goal oriented enterprise.

Legitimacy

The success of failure of authority is largely dependent on the degree of its reasonableness and general acceptance by the people – ie its legitimacy. Legitimacy is indeed a fundamental concept in contemporary governance and one that has a long history. According to Dogan (2004) the concept of legitimacy has always been in the mind of political thinkers like Plato, Aristotle and John Locke, Plato's idea of justice bears on the problem of legitimacy. Similarly, Aristotle's distinction between monarchy aristocracy and democracy has implication for legitimacy. And in his analysis of the nature of government, John Locke substituted the consent of the people for the divine right of king, as the source of legitimacy. Indeed, no discussion of the concept of power and authority could be complete without reference to legitimacy.

In practical terms, legitimacy is what makes people to voluntarily follow and obey the authority of their leaders. It is also the reason why people accept and maintain authorities and institutions. As Dogan (2004) stated "if people hold the belief that existing institution are appropriate or morally proper, then those institutions are legitimate." Thus Lipset (1959:77) more formally defined legitimacy as "the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society". In governance, authority or power is legitimate if it is reasonable and acceptable.

The attributes of reasonableness and acceptability in governance not only confers legitimacy on the authority structures and institutions themselves, they similarly legitimize their programmes and agenda, such as economic reforms or policies. Thus, legitimacy is as fundamental in reforms as in governance. The attribute of legitimacy is important for economic and political development. It facilitate policy implementation, which otherwise would be impeded and attainment of desired change or improvement becomes elusive. That is why those in authority strive hard to gain and to retain legitimacy at all cost. Even authoritarian regimes that lack legitimacy, still feel the need to acquire it.

Legitimacy problem and legitimacy Crisis: When authority reigns without the basic acceptance and support of the people. Such authority is said to be without legitimacy, or it is called illegitimate.

A programme or agenda of reform undertaken by an authority or institution that lacks legitimacy, would similarly lack legitimacy too since whatever begets, begets it's like. The existence of authority that lacks legitimacy signifies

the existence of legitimacy problem in a polity. When a government comes into being by force (such as coup de' etat) or by fraud, (such as election rigging), such a government lacks credibility, nay, legitimacy. This creates legitimacy problem in the polity. Unreasonable and unacceptable policies and programmes too breed problem of legitimacy in governance. Unresolved cases of legitimacy problems may result into legitimacy crisis, which is when people lose faith in the values, undergirding a system, the regime in power and, perhaps, even the entire system itself, comes to be at risk, (Peterson, 2007). In other words, the existence of legitimacy crisis questions about the nature and efficiency of the system. Some empirical indicators of the existence of legitimization crisis are feelings of frustration, anguish, among the people, etc. in such situations. Habermas would contend that the seeds of a new evolutionary development, which ultimately will lead to the overcoming of capitalisms underlying class contradiction, can be uncovered

Main Thrust of Legitimation Crisis Theory:

In his opus, **Legitimation Crisis (1976)**, Jurgen Harbemas sought inter alia, to analyze in greater details the pattern of change in contemporary society/late capitalist society. This he did in the context of the development of social evolution. He identified in the (social order of society) the existence of two extant conditions:

- Possibility spaces; and
- Crisis tendencies

By the former, he meant potential avenues for development which society's core structures create, and by the latter, he meant vulnerability of these structures to crisis tendencies (see Habermas in Held 1989:981) what this means is that reforms explore these possibilities spaces for development and the efforts are vulnerable to crisis.

Habermas main focus was on the social order created by modern capitalism. He explored in particular the way organized capitalism is susceptible to legitimization crisis (Held 1989:81; Peterson 2007). According to Habermas, legitimacy crisis means "the withdrawal from the existing order of the support of loyalty of the mass of the population as their motivational commitment to its normative basis is broken" (Habermas in Held, 1989:81).

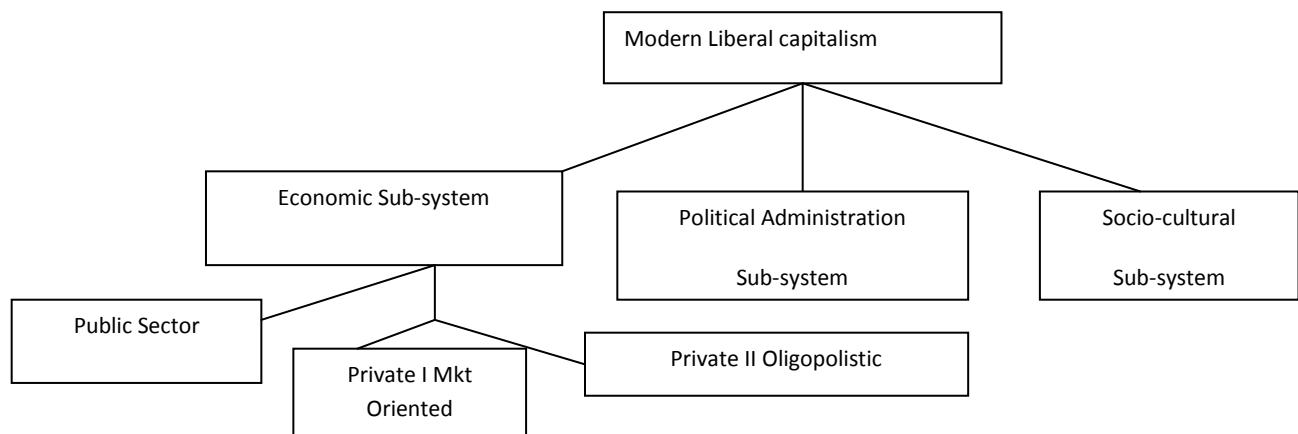
As Habermas focused on modern capitalism, he relied on the Marxian tradition to provide an analysis of liberal capitalism. He expatiated on the organizational principle of this type of society, that is, the principle which circumscribes "the possibility spaces" of the system. This principle is the relationship between wage-labour and capital (Held 1989:81). The fundamental contradiction of capitalism lies, as formulated in the Marxian tradition, between social production and private appropriation. All social production are geared towards the enhancement of particular interest of capital. Habermas delineated three basic subsystems in modern liberal capitalism as:

- The Economic
- The political
- The socio-cultural

The economic sub-system consists of three sectors: a public sector and two distinct types of private sector. The public sector (such as armament and oil industries), is oriented towards state production and consumption. And within the private sector, one sub-sector is oriented toward market competition, and the other oligopolistic sub-sector which is

much freer of market constraints. Advanced capitalism he stated, is characterized by capital concentration and the spread of oligopolistic structures.

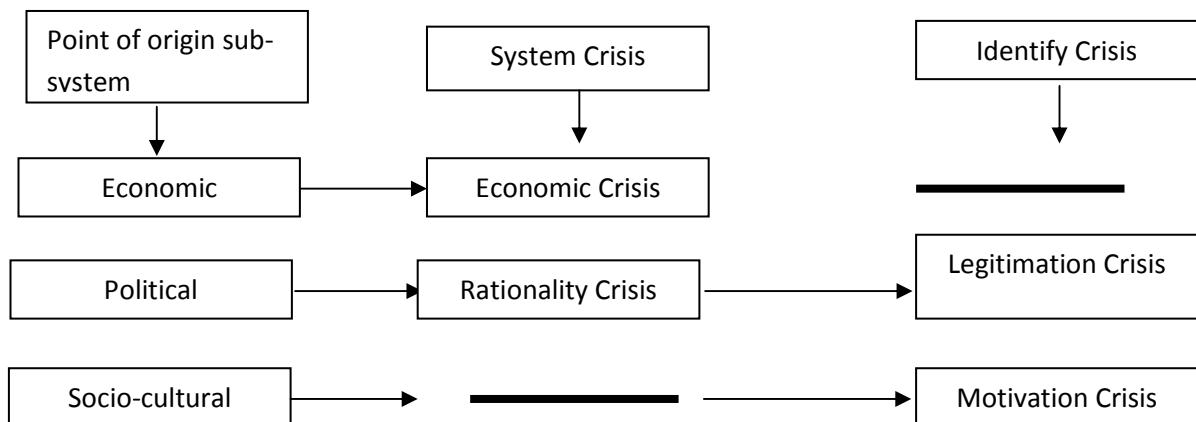
Fig 1. *Structured presentation of Habermas Analysis of liberal Capitalism*



Source: Habermas Liberal Capitalism in Held, 1989.

According to Habermas, crisis specific to the current development of capitalism can arise at different points. That is, the sub-systems are susceptible to four possible crises tendencies, namely-Economic, Rationality, Legitimation and motivation crises. Habermas contended that modern capitalists' societies are endangered from at least one of these four possible crisis tendencies whereas Economic crisis originates from the economic subsystem. Rationality crises issues from the political administration sub-system, but both are systematic in nature. Similarly, legitimacy crisis has its origin from the political sub-system, via rationality and has an identify-crisis related nature. The socio-cultural sub-system yields motivation crisis.

Fig. 2 *Origin, Source and Nature of crisis in capitalism*



Source: *Habermas' Origin/source and nature of crisis in capitalism (Held 1989:82)*

By economic crisis, Habermas means that the requisite quantity of “consumable values” is not produced. This would be akin to situations of scarcity of goods and services in the system.

By rationality crisis, he means that the requisite quantity of “rational decisions” is not forth coming. This would mean poor quality decision/public policies for rational decision would imply “obtaining”, according to Herbert Simon, “the maximum of what is wanted”, perhaps, choice of policy options are not maximized. All possible alternatives and their implications are not considered before choice is made.

When people lose faith in the values undergirding a system, the regime in power and perhaps, even the entire system itself comes to be at risk” (Peterson, 2007). And by motivational crisis he means that the requisite quantity of “action-motivating meaning” is not created (*Ibid*). The expression “the requisite quantity” refers to the extent and quality of the respective sub-system’s products: consumable value, administrative decision, legitimization and meaning (Habermas 1976:49). These forms of crisis emanate as a consequence of the fundamental contradiction of capitalist society. That is the relationship between social production and private appropriation.

Regarding the interconnectivity of these forms of crisis, Peterson (2007) asserts the primacy of economic crisis, as he observed that the underlying engine of the crisis is the economic system. And as Habermas himself noted “in Liberal capitalism, crises appear in the form of unresolved economic steering problems” and “crisis become endemic because temporarily unresolved steering problems, which the process of economic growth produces at more or less regular intervals, as such endanger social integration”. Peterson further contends that Economic crisis might occur when output decline and its distribution become increasingly unequal, so misappropriate that it raises questions about the fairness and viability of the system. In this way, the ideology supporting capitalism would come under question and cease generating loyalty from the people. If government capabilities are questioned too much by citizens crisis develop, and people come to lose faith in the ideology supporting the system and the system legitimacy in deviling up the pie so that all gain fairly (Peterson, 2007).

Specifically about legitimacy crisis, Peterson argued that people will not be actively involved in politics as long as their careers, family lives and enjoyment of consuming material goods continue. Under such circumstances, they allow the capitalist economy and government to operate with rather little question. In other words, by providing an appropriate level of “goodies” to the people, the system renders the masses quiescent and allows the elite to remain in power. When questions arise as to whether the system is generating consumer goods at the appropriate rate, then the political disengagement may end and a legitimization crisis begins as people begin to doubt the validity of the current system.

Legitimation Crisis Theory Outcome of Reform Programmes

The pertinent questions here therefore are: How does Habermas legitimization crisis theory explain the outcome of Nigeria’s reform programmes such as the Structural Adjustment Programme’ (SAP)? Does the undemocratic nature (design and implementation) of reform programme make it susceptible to legitimization crisis? What lesson can be learnt from the outcome of past reform experiments in Nigeria?, and what measures can be taken to ensure that reform programmes do not fail or result in legitimization crisis? Before the application of the legitimization crisis theory to explain the outcome of the reform programme such as (SAP), it would be necessary to highlight the objectives and strategies adopted for their achievement. This is necessary to give real focus and direction to our discourse.

The Objective of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and strategies for their Achievement

In broad terms SAP was adopted in Nigeria to broaden the productive and resource base of the economy, eliminate distortions, reduce the role of government and encourage competition; (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2000). Specifically the programme sought to:

- i. Restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy in order to lessen the dependence on the oil sector and on imports;
- ii. Achieve fiscal and balance of payments viability over time
- iii. Lay the basis for sustainable, non-inflationary or minimum inflationary growth and
- iv. Lesson the dominance of unproductive investments in the public sector, improve the sector's efficiency and intensify the growth potential of the private sector. (see Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1986:8 in C. C Soludo 1995).

The strategies adopted to realize these objectives included the following:

- i. The adoption of a realistic exchange rate policy coupled with the liberalization of the external trade and payments system.
- ii. Adoption of appropriate pricing policies in all sectors with greater reliance on market forces and reduction in complex administrative controls and
- iii. Further rationalization and restructuring of public expenditures and customs tariffs. (Soludo, 1995) These strategies were characterized by discussion, compensation, amelioration, co-option, coercion and repression (Okome, 1999).

The critical question therefore is, were these strategies effective in realizing the objectives? What was the total outcome of the experiment?

Although there are intense controversies concerning what SAP achieved or did not achieve in Nigeria (Adedeji A. 1989; UNECA 1989; CBN 1993: 121; World Bank 1994), what can be regarded as the final verdict is that SAP failed in Nigeria. In Nigeria, for instance, against the background of implementation of SAP, there followed acute deterioration in the living standard of the people. For the average Nigerian, most of his economic woes were blamed on SAP which it was believed aggregated the economic crisis in the country (Soludo 1995). Some analysts observed that though SAP may be described as the most dramatic and innovative economic programme ever adopted in Nigeria, it may be true, on balance, that the programme was dramatic and innovative more in the promulgation of objectives and announcement of policy instruments, than in actual achievement of desired results (Ikpeze, 2007).

The inability of SAP to achieve its stated objectives has been attributed to many factors prominent among which include:

- i. Its short frame and poor sequencing of its reform measures,
- ii. Poor implementation of policies and
- iii. Policy instability and lack of political will (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2000; Elbadawi *et al*, 1992; Hussain 1994a)

However, beyond these apparent attributive factors to the failure of SAP in Nigeria, there is the latent fundamental contradiction of capitalism which is the relationship between wage labour and capital, between social production and private appropriation and which circumscribes the potential avenues for development in capitalist society like Nigeria.

Bringing this into focus in understanding SAP experiment in Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that SAP steeped in the free market capitalist ideology (Ikpeze, 2004) was intended, ab initio, to sustain this contradiction: the conflicting relationship between labour and capital; between social production and private appropriation.

It must be recalled that the implementation of SAP was sequel to the outcome of the IMF public debate, which showed that public opinion (Nigerians) rejected the taking of the IMF loan. In response to the anti-IMF loan public sentiments, the government of General Ibrahim Babangida at the time opted for the adoption and implementation of a home-grown Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which nonetheless was World Bank/IMF inspired. Thus former President Babangida said;

After due consideration, of all the opinions expressed by Nigerians and other residents, as embodied in the Interim Report on the IMF Loan, government has come to the conclusion that for now the path of honour and the essence of democratic patriotism lies in discontinuing the negotiations with IMF for a support loan. This is clearly, the will of majority of our people on the issue. We have therefore decided to face the challenge of restructuring our determination of our own people to make all the sacrifices necessary to put the economy on the path of sustained growth, doing so at our own pace and on our own volition. (Babangida 1986).

This shows that at inception SAP was not a popular/democratic programme supported by the people. By that legitimacy problem (the seed of legitimacy crisis) was sown. Furthermore, the decision of government not the people, to implement SAP, and the contributive factors to its failure were indicative of rationality crisis, which meant that the **requisite quantity** of rational decisions was deficient. This rationality deficit issued from limited consideration of all possible alternatives (to SAP) like Adedeji alternative, and their implications, before choice was made. It also showed the inclination of the power elite to maintain the *status quo*, and thereby protect the interest of capital. So long as public opinion/social production did not satisfy the interest of capital, there was a shift to a compromise decision to implement the programmes of SAP, without IMF conditionality's but nonetheless, supervised by the World Bank and the IMF. All these reflected the fundamental contradictions in the capitalist ideology. The implementation of SAP unleashed lingering hardship on Nigerians, as the measures worsened the harsh economic conditions of scarcity and uncertainty in the country. This ultimately led to social discontent during the period. Nigerians were disillusioned and alienated, and discredited government openly. Law and order, including respect for human rights which are perquisites for the effective functioning of any system, were lacking. In all, there was loss of faith in the leadership and the Nigerian state as these social indicators depicted. The students-led violent SAP riots of the late May 1989 summarized the situation, aptly described as a 'cacophony of Dissent' (Newswatch, July 10, 1989). There was indeed legitimacy crisis in the country depicted by the loss of faith in the values underlying the system, the regime in power, and the entire system were at risk.

This situation was further tensed by governments' closure of six universities for one academic year as penalty for their role in the anti-SAP riot. This action of government did not bring peace, but rather further fuelled the anti-government/anti-regime feeling in the larger society, despite government's approval of relief packages for workers to cushion the effect of SAP, and give it human face, as strategy to divert attention. The phenomenon of anti-SAP riot did not convince the government of the day that the programme was doomed to fail, again evident manifestation of rationality crisis or it realized that fact, but had no choice than to hang on to it in order to sustain capitalism, until its final collapse.

Conclusion

In itself, reform in any sector is a desirable, positive venture, since it connotes change or improvement. But for reform to succeed, that is, have its objectives realized, it requires a conducive environment, cardinal among which is the legitimacy factor. And for legitimacy to subsist, it must be embedded in democracy. In other words, these two criteria – legitimacy and democracy are a sine-qua-non for a reform programme to thrive. This environment was lacking when SAP was fashioned and implemented. No wonder then it was disabled and its collapse inevitable.

The nexus between reform, democracy and legitimacy comes out vividly in the proposition that if reforms are not democratically designed and implemented, then legitimacy crisis is likely to be the result.

Drawing from Jurgen Habermas' legitimacy Crisis Theory, Nigeria's past reform experiment, such as the SAP experience, suffered double tragedy: uncondusive domestic environment (i.e legitimacy problem and absence of democracy) and the inherent contradictions in the capitalists' ideological garb that circumscribe the implementation of SAP in Nigeria.

The relevance of ideology in national development discourses is not in question. But what is in doubt is what ideology? Whose ideology? The era of clinging unto the bogus ideological garb of the west, even with caution, has passed. The repercussion, we know, is the repeatedly ignominious flop of socio-economic and political reform programmes such as SAP, the 1988, 1994/1995, and 2005 constitutional reform efforts in Nigeria. These efforts failed because they were not anchored on indigenous ideological foundation and they lacked legitimacy. The present National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), States Economic Empowerment Strategy (SEEDS) and the Local Government Economic Empowerment Strategy (LEEDS) programmes are likely to go the way of SAP and other reform programmes of the past, if there is no proper adjustment or adaptation to make them authentic and legitimate.

Recommendation

Leadership is the hallmark of governance as the behavior of the governed is often shaped by the type of leadership in place. A legitimate leadership or authority is ideal and generally acceptable and for legitimacy to subsist, it must be embedded in democracy. This is needed for reform and development to thrive in the polity.

Secondly reform, in whatever platform, should be anchored on indigenous ideology. This will enhance the ability of the masses to assess its reasonability and proffer their acceptance or rejection. It will be difficult for any reform hinged on indigenous ideological foundation to fail. Therefore, NEEDS, SEEDS and LEEDS should be fine-tuned towards indigenous ideological anchor. This will be towing the way of alternative approaches to Nigerian and African development in the new millennium.

Thirdly, those in authority should ensure that the reform so introduced is not subject to legitimacy crisis. This is because any reform that lacks legitimacy will be difficult to implement as was the case with Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Such will be inimical to the attainment of the desired socio-economic and political development. A legitimate reform that has the approval of the people will have a smooth sailing in its implementation.

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