Leadership Challenges and Nigerian Development

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the extent to which inept and corrupt leadership have over the years, adversely affected the development of Nigeria as a nation. It argues that Nigeria's failures have come about largely as a result of frequent leadership challenges; lack of ideology, policy reversal and weak institutional patterns. The study adopts descriptive approach and content analysis as its methodological orientation. The paper also examines the leadership selection process in Nigeria and found that the leadership selection process in Nigeria takes the imposition pattern and that Nigerian leaders have frequently come to their position with limited experience. Hence, the decline in moral and high level of corruption caused by bad policies, eroded professional standards and ethics and weakened the system of governance. The paper observes that for Nigeria to overcome the crises of leadership in the country, those on whom the burden of leadership will fall in the future must fully comprehend their responsibilities, duties and obligation. They must also be exposed and be prepared to face the challenges of leadership in developing society. Since the long term salvation of our country depends on the quality of its future leaders. The paper concludes that only leadership that has maximum empathy for the people can be relevant to the qualitative development of Nigeria.
Keywords:

I. INTRODUCTION

In Fifty five years of nationhood, the most critical challenge confronting Nigeria as a nation appears to be credible leadership. Many scholars at one time or the other have queried why Nigeria seems to find it difficult to address her perennial leadership problems in spite of abundant human and material resources available at her disposal. Some have argued that leadership challenge of the country could be traced from the emergence of colonial misadventure in Nigeria, while others dismissed such argument on the basis that corruption and lack of vision among past and present leaders of Nigeria culminate to hamper any meaningful effort in the quest for good governance in the country. These leadership challenges are evidenced in political, social and economic instability and the prevalence of ethnic, communal and religious crises, which have bedevilled Nigerian socio economic development. In other words, the staggering wave of violence, insecurity, increasing crime wave, economic recession, coupled with the break in law and order are the attributes to the problem of

leadership in Nigeria. Therefore, the quest for good leadership is a *sine-qua-non* for sustainable development.

II. METHODS AND MATERIAL

Conceptual Clarifications

According to Graig (2005) leadership is defined as a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals. While Robert et al (2004) affirms that leadership involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers, and the situation.

Transformational leadership is inward looking and conscious of the benefits that its society can derive from the international environment. It takes the responsibility of the national or local problem depending on the layer of leadership; deploys skill, knowledge imagination and energy to solution to most problems and assists followers to realize their hidden and untapped capabilities. The transformational leader is always physically present to monitor projects at sites. He also

receives report from the subordinates to ensure that policies and projects are implemented according to designs and specification. This style of leadership relegates corruption to the background, and brings sanity, transparency and accountability to the fore. This is the legacy of transformation left by transformational leaders in many countries of the World (Ukaegbu, 2010). Omolayo (2005) describes leadership as an essential oil that keeps the wheel of government working without any difficulty. According to him, leadership makes the difference between success and failure in a country. It involves giving direction to citizens who are the critical assets of the nation.

Development according to Rodney (1972) is a phenomenon which is inherent in all societies. Olewo (1995) says that development means growth or change or planned change. Gbenga Lawal (2007) expressed that development is the process by which a type of (social) change is introduced into a system in order to produce a better production method and improved social arrangement. It involves a structural transformation of the economy society, polity and culture of a country. The level and rate of development of a particular society are influenced by so many variables such as the political culture, leadership style and corruption. Development in human society is not a one sided process rather multi-sided issues; some scholars perceive development as an increase in the skill and ability. It is viewed as maximum freedom, and the ability to create responsibly.

Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria

Lack of rule of law : The leaders in Nigeria do not show respect to the rule of law, especially, judicial decisions. This hampers the judiciary to effectively discharge its duties. The predictability of the judiciary is not yet a reality in Nigeria, the political executives still undermine the independence of the judiciary through patronage appointments, and judicial administration is characterized by weak enforcement capacity.

Absence of Development Oriented Leadership : Many observers of the development and crisis in Nigeria since independence agree that poor leadership has been a major factor. Most of the Nigerian leaders were not committed to development of their society. Available evidence in the development literature on

transformational leaders who have significantly reduced poverty in their respective countries during the past quarter century does not generate any consistent conclusion regarding the factors that contributed to the successes.

Absence of Accountability and Transparency : In Nigeria, there is complete absence of transparent and accountable leadership. A government is deemed to be accountable when its leaders (both elected and appointed) are responsive to the demands of the citizen. Accountability is best enforced through the instrument of rule of law and independent judiciary. Citizen can seek redress in the courts for acts of omission or commission by a government and its officials. However, Nigeria has not done well in this regard; it has been corruption at all levels. And this corruption is not unconnected with profuse index of weak accountability and lack of transparency. The leaders abuse public office for private gain.

Corruption : although corruption is a global scourge, Nigeria appears to suffer tremendously from this malaise. Every one appears to believe that the nation has a culture of corruption; Nigeria is a rich nation floating on oil wealth, but almost none of it flows to the people. The countless reforms and lack of transparency and integrity of our leaders have left Nigeria corrupt as ever. Politicians are expunged and later re-admitted into their parties, then, what hope for good governance when the leadership is deeply entrenched in corrupt practices.

Electoral Malpractices : This problem has become a popular phenomenon in Nigerian politics. As a matter of fact, an average Nigerian believes that elections cannot be won except it is rigged. Yes, this is an extent at which our electoral system has deteriorated. Electoral malpractice is not a recent phenomenon; in fact, it has existed since independence and has continued to exist, even, in a modernized fashion.

Lack of Political Will : A political will is the compelling force for sound leadership quality, the ability to do what is right, what is relevant and what is attainable within the context of patriotic nationalism. Political will very often means personal or group sacrifices. It implies the ability to implement policies that have a nationalistic important and relevant without

allowing pockets of interest to detract from what should naturally be of national benefit.

Lack of Experience before ascending to Leadership Positions: Most Nigerian leaders assumed their role with limited experience and training in the art and science of directing and effectively managing the affairs of a modern state (Kamuntu, 1993).

Pressure on Public Servants: A further cause of leadership trouble in Nigeria is the fact that Nigerians at times push their leaders into corrupt practices. People, villages, towns and communities whose sons and daughters are in government departments often make demands of them; such demands that can only be met by a corrupt use of one's office.

Emphasis on Ethnic Origin: Emphasis on ethnic origin is yet another leadership challenge in Nigeria. It was Ojukwu (1989) who observed that "tribalism is perhaps the one factor that has nullified all our efforts at evolving a national leadership capable of fulfilling our national aspiration".

Recommendations

1. We recommend that education is in itself a way of addressing these aspects of the challenge of nation-building. Much depended on the leaders and the extent to which they play an even-handed role in balancing the interests of the various ethnic, cultural and religious groups and be seen to do so.
2. We also recommend that local government autonomy could be seen as one way of encouraging a return to the autonomy of the local community and reducing the presence of the central government. Much however still needs to be done in this regard. It was noted for example that whereas Britain has 1900 local government units for a population of 48 million inhabitants, Nigeria has only 304 local government units for its population of about 120 million.
3. The challenge of orientating education to the African context should be seen as a part and parcel of building on the indigenous African cultures, including values, institutions and patterns of behaviour. Development must be seen not so much as a process stimulated by external inputs, but rather as a process of self-enhancement from within, building on material and human resources available to the people from the grassroots level of the farmer to the level of the national decision-makers.
4. This study therefore recommends that for sustainable development to be achieved, specific and deliberate strategies should be evolved to remedy some of the problems identified. The study suggests that more and dedicated leaders should be identified and responsibilities aimed at improving the welfare of the people assigned to them. Also, all citizens of our country should be made to contribute his or her quota towards sustainable development; such contributions will enhance sustainability in terms of security, acceptability, usage and identification of the people with the said ideals.

Finally we recommend that the fight against corruption should be number one priority of the present government, civil society groups, the religious institutions and the media. The anti-corruption institutions in the country should be made independent of government interference. There is a need for strong political will among the political leadership ensuring continuity and doggedness in the fight against corruption in the country; the cost of election into political offices by people who vie for them should be reduced so as to reduce the rate at which the political office holders engage in corrupt practices. Punishment for corruption should be made to be higher than the gains in all political institutions and other high places.

III. CONCLUSION

Investigations in this paper show that the Nigerian leaders take the greater blame for leadership failure in Nigeria but the led also have a share of the blame because of their various ways of encouraging bad leadership for the sake of selfish gain. If the facets of leadership challenges in Nigeria are to be surmounted, Nigerian leaders must shun selfish tendencies and promote the common good of the Nigerian people through people oriented leadership.

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