

Leadership and Strategic Governance: The Pathway to Socio-Economic Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria, one of the populated black nations of the world have in recent times been embroiled in various hydra-headed menace that have left the country almost incapacitated. A country blessed with profound natural and human resources such as Nigeria would naturally be expected to soar on great wings to the pinnacle of socio-political, economic, and scientific greatness. However this germen expectation of many around the globe have suffered immense despair, as the country is plagued with tremendous socio-pathological situations such as economic collapse, poverty, kidnapping, crisis, terrorism and various degree of violence. In attempting a search as to a possible causal agent and factor to the nation's submergence into this imbroglio, one realizes a polarized view as dimension to this problem. It is a truism, that while some remain convince that the causal string of Nigeria's problems and setback is peculiarly corruption and mismanagement of funds, others hold tenaciously to the claims that there is an immense leadership flaw that culminates into various economic and socio-political collapse. The position of the leadership proponents is casted on the pillars that where the right kind of charismatic leaders with profound integrity are democratically installed, then the nation is bound to witness significant progress. This paper identifies the duo of leadership and strategic governance as an inseparable twin, significantly necessary for socio-political cum economic sustainable development in Nigeria.

Key Words: Leadership, Strategic Governance, Sustainable Development in Nigeria

1. Introduction

Leadership is one of the undeniable weapon of social transformation and dynamic progress. It is an essential tool of social engineering that stimulates religious formulation, political stability, scientific discoveries, economic progress and the dynamism of any state. This vital category of the human society remains greatly indispensable in the continuous pilot of sustainable progress of any human society.

Leadership as the capacity to lead and influence people towards the pursuit and actualization of goals and purposes, remains distinctively necessary for the progress and growth of any organization or state. This being the case, for any institution, organization or state to witness the desired progress, leaders of charisma embellished with sincere passion to serve, men and women who are morally strong must be identified and empowered with the mantle of leadership.

Nigeria and indeed many African countries have witnessed poor leadership at various categories. Leaders who fail to realize the profoundness of offering altruistic service to the people have consistently truncated the joy of the Nigerian democratic state.

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This category of leaders masked with egoism, self-interest, ethnic bias and other sordid traits have often placed their personal gains against the common good. This accounts for why many Nigerian politician see looting of public treasury as a common practice carried out with impunity. The distinct separation of personal account from public account have for these politicians become a forbidden task. They mastermind crisis to rig elections, kill opponent and supervise numerous dirty deals that contradicts the common good of the people.

It is without gainsaying the fact that this failure in leadership has immensely truncated the progress and development of the Nigerian state. Poor leadership and governance is significantly a leading factor to the continuous decline of the Nigerian economy.

Consequently, significant discoveries and progress has not been made in the area of science in Nigerian. Political instability and social disorder has become endemic, as many hoipolios wallow in abject penury.

The quest for effective and transformationary leadership becomes an urgent task for the recovery of the Nigerian socio-political and economic declines. This paper attempts to address the problem of poor leadership in Nigeria. It hold strongly that effective leadership will necessarily culminate to effective political, socio-economic progress and sustainable development of the Nigerian state.

2. The Concept of Leadership and Strategic Governance

Leadership- The word leadership has been accessed by various philosophers and writers from diverse perspectival points of view. It is drawn from the phrase ‘to lead’ which means to direct and influence people towards a desired path. Leadership therefore is the capacity to influence, control and direct people towards the actualization of a particular goal and objective. Eyo and Udofia in their work on leadership, relays Hughe’s definition of leadership as “the process of influencing and organized group toward accomplishing it goals. (Udofia 5)

Myles Munroe conceives it as “the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by a passion, generated by a vision, produced by a conviction ignited by a purpose. (Munroe 54)

For Craig Johnson, leadership is the exercise of influence in a great context... people having the greatest impact on the group or organization (cited in Eyo and Udofia 3). Ikpe sees it “as the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for group objectives” (18). In a further view, Ademolekun conceives leadership “as an interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed through communication process towards the attainment of desired goals” (Ademolekun 44)

Njoku avers this concept as “the ability to lead and coordinate people effectively for the realization of the common good”. (Njoku 219).

Leadership essentially entails influencing people towards the attainment of a set goal. It is broadly applicable to various facet of the human society. In this regards you have leaders in the sphere of religion, politics, co-operate bodies, organizations etc. Onah observes, “that the attainment of organizational goals would be extremely difficult, if not

impossible, if there were no specific individuals with the authority and responsibility to plan, organize, coordinate, lead and control activities” (10).

Strategic Governance

Leadership is essentially about ruling and governing. It revolves around mobilizing people to actualize an end. At the political sphere, it is saddled with the task of governance. To govern therefore, is to be saddled with responsibility of controlling and directing people towards an end. However this has a legal backing of the constitution.

Governance is the act of mobilizing, controlling and influencing people within a social group with the aim of fulfilling a desired goal- backed by the constitution. Good governance which remains essential, is backed with the flair of positive decision making and the process by which such decisions are implemented, for the control, influence and betterment of the people. (Dickson 34).

In leading and controlling people within a sovereign state, the political leader is often authorized to carry out his duties and responsibilities within a legal frame of reference. Having received the full backing and support of the law, he/she is expected to lead with profound dynamism as to influence the people positively. One essential function of the government is the protection of lives and properties of the citizen. Within the sovereign state therefore the governor or leader is fully empowered to formulate policies that will transform the lives of the people positively and promote the common good and wellbeing of the state.

This therefore demands the right vision, good policies and an irresistible drive to actualize the desired goal.

One essential tool to actualization of the common good and proper fulfilment of the goals of the state is Strategic governance. Strategic governance therefore is a visionary governance that is truly dynamic in pattern and policies geared by the determination to attain the common good of the people despite any challenge or problem. It is the skillful pursuit of governance backed by profound vision, towards the attainment of the common goal and the positive transformation of lives of its citizenry.

Government as an institution of the state, must particularly be driven by altruistic leaders of great vision who are determined to serve and impact the lives of the people positively.

3. A Concise Survey of Nigerian Socio-political Experience.

The Nigerian polity has often witnessed numerous socio-political crisis that have truncated the desired progress of the state. It is an open secret that the socio-political experience of Nigeria is broadly characterized by ethnic and religious violence, kidnapping, destruction of infrastructures, and other anti-social activities.

It is disheartening to state that socio-political leadership in Nigeria has been greatly coloured by ethno-religious undertones. Leaders at various political sphere are chosen through the spectacle of ethnic or religious bias. This account for why the right kind of persons are often denied various political positions. One observes with dismay that the idea of political godfatherism plays out greatly in the Nigerian political scene. Here an individual in power handpicks his loyalist against the desired choice of the masses. The

truth remains that in a scenario of such, the individuals handpicked to the leadership position are often not prepared for such office(s) and most often lack the qualities of altruistic and strategic leadership.

One cannot but state that, politics of ethnocentrism where leaders are chosen through ethnic bias, cleavages and sentiment, is immensely inimical to the progress, growth and development of Nigeria as a nation state. Surprisingly, many who are qualified for certain positions are sometimes denied of such position because of their origin.

Politics of ethnic intrusion which colours our choice of leadership projects a boomerang effect on the society at large. This is visible where the leader installed from ethnic fraternities lacks the requisite skills and vision for leadership. It is more the case where such is seen segregating and polarizing favours and attention on certain aspect of the state. More to this is the fact that the welfare of the people are constantly neglected, the economy and infrastructure of the state abandoned as the people wallow in pains and poverty.

Another hydra-headed issue that permeates Nigerian socio-political scene is the recurrent menace of ethno-religious crisis. Violence tailored from ethnic and religious ambience has remained an indelible scar in the Nigerian socio-cultural sphere. It is one of the grievous divides that has set many groups against each other. The strife for cultural and ethnic dominance remains an incubus that has consistently threatened the peace of Nigeria.

One particular recurrent instance is the crisis between the northern region of Nigeria and the southern and eastern region. This instance fueled by religious sentiments has witnessed many northerners killing and maiming many who are not from their ethnic group/region, and many who don't belong to the same religion-Islam.

Ethno-religious violence has distorted the peace and progress of the nation. . Michael Nwokedi and Ngwu observe that; "Nigeria's eighteen years of civilian rule has been dotted with incessant ethno-nationalist agitations which have often threatened the peace and tranquility of the Nigerian State and the orderly conduct of public and private businesses" (2).

The ethno-religious and political tension have in no mean measure polarized the nation in fragmented units and thus provided a more devastating ethno-religious perspectival undertones that threatens the unity and national identity of the nation state. Michael further affirms that:

under the current democratic dispensation, aided in huge measures by crisis of rising expectations, the tensions between nationhood and state-building have become even more pronounced. This has resulted in the spate of ethno-nationalist conflagrations that have engulfed the country for the most part of this dispensation. In essence, the increasing neglect of several ethnic and minority groups and the failure to resolve the national question in which equality of power and resource distribution have been central to have been the cursor of ethnic conflict since 1999" (8).

These crisis has impacted negatively on the citizens. Peace Ngoke and Ezichi observes that:

religious intolerance among Nigerians from different religious groups is the result of misinterpretation of religious teachings of the leaders of leaders of terrorist groups to their followers and that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria affect sustainable development as they lead to loss of lives and destruction of property... the effect of ethno-religious conflict

in Nigeria lead to an increase in the unemployment rate, withdrawal of foreign investment and education imbalance (45).

Halden Canci and Opeyemi further note, that 'Religious ethnic nationalism has led to conflicts about control of state power, unequal allocation of resources, citizenship issues, state collapse, economic decline and ethno-religious crisis'(15). Osaghae in his words affirm, that: "Nigeria has been pushed hither and thither by recurrent crisis of regional or state legitimacy, often impairing efforts at economic transformation, democratization, national cohesion and stability (Osaghae 4).

One cannot but affirm, that ethno-religious groupings has greatly led to the divisiveness of the country, thereby fostering mutual suspicion, anger and agitation. Panden notes that the notion of of "Muslim North and Christian South cleavage enhances ethnic fractionalizations in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria where Islamic identity plays a dominant role" (8).

The zeal of entrepreneur that catalyzes employment and development has often been killed through this violence, as vibrant young men and women whose contributions can lead to the progress of the economy consistently live in fear.

One cannot but assert, that religion is observed as one of the agents of civil unrest in Nigeria. The polarization of Islam and Christianity is distinctly one of the major threats to the peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian state. This is because the clash in religious values, principles and belief, has often witnessed many Muslims in the north killing and destroying properties belonging to Christians. The country has recorded one of the highest bloodshed through religious crisis. Oluduro affirms that Nigeria is a very religious country (Oluduro 209), (Ekundayo 29). These multiplicity in religious outlook and the intolerance amongst them, has led to 'numerous religious crisis and/or conflict between 1980 and 1994' (Warner 38).

Suffice it to state that within the south-south region of the country, violence of various categories have not been spared. The destruction of the oil facilities by the Niger Delta avengers has become a common practice within the region and the economic progress of Nigeria at large.

Kidnapping and other violent crimes have been largely recorded in Nigeria. This is particularly traceable to the systematic failure of leadership in Nigeria.

Amidst the socio-political unrest in Nigeria consequential to the leadership fault and error, the Nigerian economy has consistently been on the decline, especially in the recent past. The collapse of the Nigerian Naira, inflation, and the disappearance of foreign investors has not only left the country in recession but the people immensely impoverished.

It is an open secret, that although Nigeria remain one of the most populous black nations of the world, blessed with enormous natural resources, yet many Nigerians wallow in poverty. The Nigerian economy remains incapacitated in the face of a competitive world. Again, infrastructural development is one of the abandoned aspect of the Nigerian state. Dilapidated infrastructures lie unattended to in most part of the country. The truth remains that the country appears not to have the desired fund to stir developmental projects within the country. Most saddening is the fact that corrupt practices prevail in the midst of the wanton poverty in the country, as corrupt politicians are often carting away with public funds. Looting has become the order of the day in Nigerian polity.

It appears therefore that the fight against corruption is not yielding the required fruit. This is because the court processes appears long and prosecution remain difficult. It is a truism that many politicians who loot unimaginable figures of public funds prevail in distorting the court processes. Many at times they bribe their way through, appearing guiltless. Within the context of seeming undiluted and prevalent corruption, the question arises- who watches the watchman? This question becomes relevant as the anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and other agencies of government seem to have been submerged in this imbroglio. Their officials appear to be corrupt and the whole enterprise of fighting corruption remains almost a mirage.

In the light of the above, it appears therefore that the Nigerian state is in dire need of a leeway for socio-political progress. This quest for socio-political economic progress, can adequately be attained through effective leadership.

4. Leadership as a Pivotal Tool of Socio-political/Economic Progress and Sustainability in Nigeria

Plato, one of the renowned political and leadership philosopher is often credited with popular views that until philosophers become kings and kings philosophers, the human societies will have no rest. This strong terms demands particular attention within the context of choice of leadership. Plato in categorical terms avers thus:

Until philosophers are kings or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and powers of philosophy and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evil and nor the human race...(473)

This Platonian position affirms the need for leaders to be thoroughly trained and schooled in matters of leadership. Leaders in the platonic spectacle must be men and women of profound wisdom, skill and broad knowledge. The essentiality of proper training becomes indispensable as leaders must be knowledgeable in matters of society. This in the platonic position will enable the leader to make proper decision and avoid evil activities that will be detrimental to the social progress. Leadership as a pivotal tool of the human society must be given adequate attention. The task of leading is never an every comer affair.

In fostering socio-political cum economic progress of Nigeria, instituted leaders must possess profound qualities necessary for societal development and progress. One of such lies within the purview of platonic perception. Transformationary leaders required in the Nigerian state must be men and women whose depth of knowledge stands exceptional. They must be people with high level of intelligence and exposure. There must be adequately trained to handle societal issues properly and make good choices. Muyiwa Falaiye observes that in all democratic setting of which leadership occupies a central position, education and the opportunity for individual of this category to develop themselves remains germane. For him, “democracy demands from the common man, a certain level of ability and character: rational conduct and active participation in the government and the intelligent understanding of public affairs, among other things. In order to equip the citizen for the performance of these civic duties, education is the key” (176).

It is important to assert that the task of policy formulation requires proper knowledge on issues of the society. Therefore in making good policies that will impact positively on the populace, Nigerian leaders must have adequate educational foundation. Contrarily people with very low educational qualification and leadership skills must be exempted from pursuing leadership positions. In this light, Njoku affirms categorically thus:

A politician, a legislator, a leader, one who has decided to pilot the affairs of humans should be educated in the basic goods and the various methodological ways for participating in them. Then he/she will be able to co-ordinate well so that fellow citizens will contribute, with better sense of direction, to the common good in their various areas of participation (79).

Adequate training and education fundamentally enhances the charismatic disposition of a leader. To lead and rule effectively, leaders must be very charismatic, skilful and eloquent. The capacity of communicating effectively and efficiently the policies and agenda of the government builds the trust of the people on the leader, and foster democratic progress. Moreover, it also breaches the gap that often exist between the leader and the led. Observes, that the 'ability of any country to consistently improve its performance in terms of economic growth and development depends on good governance embedded in well structured and diligently implemented public policy' (70).

Another indispensable quality of leadership is morality. This stands at the fulcrum of qualities to be possessed by an effective leader. It is imminent on every leader to be morally upright. Akanmidu attempt the articulation of the essential property of morality. For him,

“This property is within the context of the aims that the idea of morality is booked to serve. The mutual alliance that exist between the central core of the notion of morality and human welfare forms the basis of this property. This property is the consideration that morality ought to consist of actions that have values that acknowledge human beings as having intrinsic worth... and lessening human sufferings (cited in Ebijuwa163).

The concept of morality as it subsist in the devotion to that which is good and humane and the avoidance of evil, is essential virtue which must be part of the leaders, as they remain committed to serving the society. To be entrusted with resource of the state, it is incontestable that such a person must be an individual with profound moral stamina and transparency of character. This is because for a society to strive without corrupt practices, the leaders must be devoid of questionable practices that are corrupt in nature as he is the watchman for the state. It is important to assert here that a leader's evil practices automatically become a leading evil. It will consciously or unconsciously set the pace for other evil practice to follow. This being the case, it becomes glaring that the leader who is involved in evil practices will lack the moral stamina and justification to stop others from perpetrating evil. Odinga asserts in this regards that “the absence of moral formulation of political action makes the society vulnerable to rebellion against illegitimate authority. And since society has been denied the art of political organization due to repression, such rebellion easily degenerate into civil disorder”. (138). Immoral actions and character of leaders has the propensity of precipitating civil unrest and all forms of socio-political crisis if left unchecked.

The practice of transparency and accountability becomes a less herculean task if the leaders possess the moral strength to resist the evil. Accountability of office remains a vital responsibility of the leader to led. He or she is expected to transparently relay the activities of the government to the governed. Failure of this, can lead to social crisis.

Nigerian leaders therefore must be morally upright and truthfully accountable to the people. Tamisan Ebijuwa recognizes the foundational importance of morality in political authority and thus proposes a theory of rational consensus that would ensure that political actions are based on moral rather than prudential grounds. (184). For him, morality as the foundation of political authority and leadership will fundamentality project transparency in governance. This will also foster proper representation of all stakeholders and their desires or demands in the daily activities of governance. Proper democratic representation of the people and their views stands propitious to the socio-political progress of the state.

Leadership must transcend the bounds of ethnocentricism or religion. The limitations of ethnic differences and barriers are inimical to the common good of the society. Therefore leaders must be free from ethnocentricism and religious bias. A leader must possess the courage of attending to the populace without any ethnic nor religious sentiment. The intrusion of ethnic differences in leadership has the propensity of engendering strife that can disrupt the peace of the polity. Where certain group of persons are neglected or perceived to be neglected from the affairs of the government or the common wealth of the state, then unimaginable strife is bound to erupt. Asouzu observes that this is the eliminative and exclusivist type of mindset that remain detrimental to the socio-political cum intellectual progress of any society (177).

This appears to be one of the fundamental problems of civil unrest in Nigeria. Certain units of the populace claim denial of certain rights and privileges entitled to them. A case of this is the crisis in the Niger Delta. Many within the region opine that they are the source through which the wealth of the nation is attained, and yet their communities and environment is completely neglected by the federal government. The Niger Delta crisis is fundamentally one of the major insurgencies that has truncated the economic growth of Nigeria. Nigerian leaders therefore must culture consciously the capacity to lead without ethnic bias. All segment of the state must be carried along without neglect of any sort.

Asouzu in his Ibuayidanda philosophy asserts the need for total overhaul of any exclusivist, eliminative and discriminating mindset which for him is “instigated by an unintended ethnocentric intrusion”. Asouzu’s complementary reflection therefore projects the “exploration of those conditions needed for the reformulation and re-education of a mindset whose history can be reversed through alternative, more positive modes of re-socialization and re-education in view of fostering harmony (177).

The mind therefore must be adequately fortified to transcend all intended and unintended forms of ethnocentricism that are antithetical to socio-political cum cultural stability and progress.

The commitment to infrastructural development stands yet as another capacity which must be built and given attention to by leaders. The progressiveness of a state could most times be measured on the level of infrastructural development and its impact on the citizenry. This being the cases therefore, Nigerian leaders must give the requisite attention to building and setting up infrastructural project.

It is disheartening to note that infrastructures in Nigeria had immensely been abandoned. Dilapidated structures and abandoned projects appears a common experience of the system. The cry therefore remains that for economic progress to be attained infrastructures must be given adequate attention.

Suffice it to the state, that the socio-political and economic growth of Nigeria is dependent on strategic leadership and purposeful governance. Nigerian leaders must essentially be innovative in thinking and proactive in action. Leadership within the Nigerian sphere necessary for progress, must be backed with profound vision. A visionless leader is a purposeless leader, and without purpose, progress is unattainable.

Charismatic and dynamic leaders with immense vision for governance stands quintessential for Nigerians. This is consequent to the fact that if the country must move from a point where most vital commodities are imported, to dynamically produce predominantly useful commodities, then leaders of vision must strategically set the model of attaining such. Here creative thinking and strategic planning is required.

Strategic leadership which is fundamentally vision-based and purpose driven remains a non-negotiable option for Nigerian economic progress. The capacity to think critically is an essential unit of category that must be imparted on the leaders for effectiveness. These leaders who are driven by their vision passionately pursue the goals and common good of the state.

The Nigerian economy deserves peculiar attention, as it is the basis through which the Nigerian state can adequately grow and compete favourably with other nations. In building a formidable economy priority must first be given to the kind of leaders appointed or elected into political and administrative offices. Leaders with peculiar passion and vision who are determined to serve the people and pursue altruistically the common good of the state must be given opportunity. The growth of any society is not without the strengthening of institutions for proper checks and balances. Nigerian institutions must be given adequate attention for efficient and smooth running of the state. Abating insurgencies through effective leadership is another dimensional ambience of fostering the economic growth of the country. Peaceful co-existence of individuals in a civil state remains a veritable tool of social progress which must not be undermined. Ethno-religious crisis of all sort must be properly and effectively curtailed, if Nigeria is to make reasonable progress.

Economic growth and progress can only be fostered in a society devoid of all form of civil unrest and conflict. The Nigerian state therefore must be adequately positioned peacefully and infrastructurally for investment, economic recovery and progress. This can non-negotiably be attained through strategic leadership and proper governance.

5. Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it is expedient affirming that although the Nigerian state has been beclouded by myriad socio-political, religious and cultural challenges, which has immensely distorted her progress and development in diverse sphere, yet she has the capacity to address her problems, progress greatly in a competitive world and impact the lives of her citizens positively. The attainment of this herculean task of building a stronger economy in tandem with stable socio-political and cultural society necessarily becomes not

only the responsibility of leaders alone, as citizens in the Nigerian state must participate. This is more the case because for the nation to succeed the various sectors, unit and constituent must be properly handled. Citizen's best behavior, moral and co-operate responsibility becomes a necessary factor to the attainment of the common good. In other words, citizens must show co-operate responsibility, desires and proper actions that will aid the progress of the various sectors in the state.

Moreover, the selection and election of leaders which is the responsibility of the citizenry, must be given more attention, as only leaders with the passion and knowledge for service must be allowed to lead. People with limited knowledge and leadership potentials must not be elected nor given leadership positions. This implies also that the Country's electoral institutions must be adequately strengthened to give credibility to electoral processes.

It is essential reiterating the fact and position of this paper, that leadership is the key factor for the Nigerian economic, scientific and socio-political progressivity, sustainability, and stability. This implies therefore that for the Nigerian state to recover economically and progress geometrically, then the right kind of leaders with profound passion for service must be reflected.

Leaders therefore must essentially be knowledgeable in matters of leadership and society, altruistic in character and committed to the attainment of the common good. Nigerian leaders must be innovative in governance devoting attention to the development of the state and impacting the lives of the citizens positively. It is worthy of note therefore that the duo of good leadership and strategic governance is fundamentally propitious to the economic recovery, scientific and socio-political progressivity of the Nigerian state.

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