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LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Nigeria's political and economic system is being faced continuously with the issue of effective leadership, political stability and national development. The problem of leadership in the Nigerian state has been aggravated by Nigerian size, history and colonial experience. Thus, the issue of poor leadership has extensively hindered the implementation of various national development plans which could have fostered the economic and political growth of the nation. It is against this background the paper takes a critical view on the problem of Nigerian leadership and its consequent effect on the nation's national development.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Nigeria's independence on October 1st. 1960, the country has made various attempts to establish a political system that will guarantee an orderly society with an efficient and effective development plan that will not be exclusively related to economic and political terrain, but will also be intertwined with certain socio-political factors. The state of any nation's national development largely depends on the nature of leadership in operation. Thus Oshionobe (2007) is of the view that, virtually in all human endeavours, leadership is actually the pivot in achieving any atom of change and development, be it positive or negative. The problem of Nigerian leadership cannot be totally eradicated from the polity where most political parties which are the engine drive of democracy are regionally and ethnically based. Thus, the actions and reactions of Nigerian leaders are interpreted along ethnic and religious lines, and elections have become a perfect avenue for the emergence of corrupt men and women (Cyril, 2013). Nwankwo (2012) pointed out that with no specific theories of structural transformation, the leaders of Sub Saharan African countries are bound to fail in their national development endeavour since this goal cannot be achieved through a process of elitist self-promotion and personal aggrandisement as the case of Nigerian has shown. Despite attempts at promoting the country's economy and making it the fastest growing economy in Africa, the nation is still at a rudimentary stage in its national development as compared to other countries in the international community. Adeyemo (2013) has observed that the poor state of the nation's national development is evidenced in the low rankings it always gets during surveys by international bodies. Records also reveals that the nation is the most populous nation in Africa with 75 percent of the citizens living in perpetual poverty slightly below 2.75 US dollar per day.

Conceptual clarification

- Leadership

One of the most intriguing aspect of human existence and relationship is the process of determining who becomes a leader and a follower. Henman (2012) observed that since the beginning of civilization, man has adopted various

techniques to determine who actually becomes a leader, as such, various theories and literatures have been produced to guide the definition of leadership. Despite the numerous theories, there have been no clear acceptable definition of leadership. Early theorists however conformed the acquisition of leadership position on nature and inheritance. It was assumed that leadership was acquired through personality traits such as intelligence, perseverance, and ambition. Thus only those born with these inherited traits were allowed to become leaders. Eventually, other theorists began to argue that leaders can also be made without necessarily being born in nature, as such, successful leadership was based on certain identified learnable and prescribed behaviour. This eventually brought about the nature versus nurture arguments of leadership and the ambiguous nature of the definition of leadership.

Chemers(1997) maintain that just like most social concepts, there is no acceptable definition of leadership, as such, leadership generally involves a process of influence, be it political, social, economic, or religious influence which an individual employs in getting the support of others in accomplishing certain organizational tasks. Wiston and Patterson (2009) pointed out that a leader is an individual who has the responsibility of selecting, equipping, training and influencing one or more followers to willingly and enthusiastically put a coordinated effort in achieving certain organizational goals. The influence of the followers can only be made possible if the leader clearly identifies the organizational goals which are in consonance with the beliefs of the majority population. Leadership in a multi ethnic society entails recognizing the diverse nature of the people, achieving a unity of common values and directions without necessarily destroying the unique nature of each individual. According to Bolden (2004), leadership is based on a process of influence whereby people are given the inspiration to work towards achieving specific identifiable goals without the use of force, but through personal motivation and skills. Leadership according to Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) involves setting up directions through identifying the vision of the future, developing certain techniques, methodologies and strategies through which such visions can be achieved. Thus, leadership entails creating an agenda for achieving specific objectives of an organization. Effective leadership is actually the engine drive of success in any institution or organization and a major key to achieving national productivity and growth in any nation. This is because leadership involves transforming a potential goal into reality. It follows therefore that analysing the negative or positive national performance of any country depends largely on the absence or presence of good and qualitative leadership.

- National development

The primary focus of any national development is to improve the welfare of the people in the nation. National development is therefore the ability of a nation to improve the living condition of its citizens through fostering qualitative transformation in the process of production and distribution of services in the society. According to Oluwatoyin (2009), national development is the total development or collective socio-economic, religious and political transformation in any nation. This transformation can be achieved through proper developmental planning and national development strategy. Abimbola&Adesote (2012) maintain that national development is simply the ability of a nation/nations to ameliorate the living conditions of the citizens through the provision of basic social amenities like good education, adequate infrastructural facilities, and adequate medical care among others. In the view of Balogun (1972), national development entails having adequate food for the nation to feed and survive, ensuring the existence of a healthy and happy nation, provision of proper shelter for all citizens, provision of an improved transport and communication system, provision of quality education, and establishing an avenue where people will have free access to money. This therefore means that any type of transformation experienced in the society should be one which has a positive impact on the lives of majority of the masses.

Leadership in Nigeria

Some leadership theories in the 20th century were premised on the fact that exceptional leaders were born from birth and not made through constant leadership trainings. However, current studies have debunked such views stating that leadership is a more complex concept and as such, cannot be limited to certain natural traits of an individual which is achieved through inheritance. Leadership, although largely talked about, is one of the least understood concept across all cultures and civilization, most especially in African countries. Researchers in the social sciences and other related fields have gradually placed emphasis on the continuous existence of this misconception, pointing out that the existence of several primitive assumptions about leadership often affects individual's conception of what leadership actually entails. Leadership is not only naturally embedded in an individual, it also passes through developmental stages to achieve perfection. Thus, hard work and careful observation can aid in effective and efficient leadership growth. According to Nwankwo (2012), leadership is a form of power, which is not exercised over the people. Rather, it is a power that exist with the people and established as a reciprocal and interpersonal relationship between a leader and the followers. Scholars in the Nigerian political scene are of the view that one key ingredient missing in the nation's drive towards development is quality leadership. According to Dike (2006), the expectations of good governance has been quite high since Nigeria's return to democratic rule. The narrative is that,

the military government was delinquent, corrupt and unaccountable, thus, democratic government will offer answers to critical matters such as unemployment, poverty, insecurity, poor infrastructures, corruption etc. Despite the many expectations, Nigerians are still searching for one key ingredients needed to achieve effective national development, which is quality leadership. Ribadu (2007) opined that the progress of any nation rests on the quality of its leadership, however, observation shows that virtually all leadership administration in Nigeria come into political positions with the primary objective of adding more value to their pockets, rather than offering self-less service to the citizens of the nation. He is of the view that political leadership seem to be totally caught in the uncomfortable web of corruption, whose unavoidable consequence has resulted to the constant and perpetual hardships experienced by Nigerians. Dike (2006) has observed that it is difficult to think of any social problems in the country which is not directly or indirectly linked to the embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds by the political class.

According to Achebe (1983) the problem of Nigeria is simply and squarely the failure of leadership, there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else, but the problem lies with leaders. A flash back at the events and happenings in the political scene during the first republic shows that corrupt practices and poor leadership structure had always been part of the nation's history. The elite class in the Nigerian political scene have not been able to realise the fact that not every individual has the capacity to rule a country like Nigeria. Unfortunately, Nigeria has had many non-leaders occupying the leadership seat. The country has been characterized by leaders who misuse ethnic relationships in promoting societal ills like nepotism, god fathers, tribalism and favouritism. There are certain elements which are associated with leadership, and these includes influence, group goals, direction and vision. Thus, a leader is a person who perceives the need of the group's vision, initiates a course of action towards the vision and takes responsibility for the group by showing the way towards the goal achievement (Frank, 2009). Frank (2009) further proposed that before a leader is capable of perceiving the group's needs, he must have dwelt and existed with the group, and identified the various needs of such group. The reverse has however been the case in Nigeria's political system as the leaders have not critically analysed and understood the needs of the masses. Ajibola (2008) is of the view that despite the country's enormous oil wealth, Nigeria's band of leadership have not been able to establish identifiable structures which will aid the growth of a viable industrial base for the country or launch any form of revolution to liquidate poverty. Ukeje (2010) observed that some political leaders in Nigeria find it quite easy to occupy leadership position of trust, and proceed methodologically to strip the nation of its finance mainly for personal use, thereby reneging on their manifestoes. In the view of Dike (2006), corruption has become part of most African leaders, and this has caused severe loss in the economic, political and social sectors of the society. Dike (2006) further posited that the continuous presence of corrupt leaders in the polity has brought about devastating effects on general condition of living of most of the masses. Leadership corruption has virtually become part of the political system as this is evident in the fact that quality and efficient health services have gradually vanished into thin air with the "out of stock" syndrome, there is an annual increase in the rate of infant and maternal mortality, justice is perpetually for those who can afford it, poverty is on the increase, and educational sector which is the foundation of development has been delegated to the background. Tokumbo (2007) observed that for sometimes now, the poor quality of Nigerian leadership has become a trending issue in the political system because economic progress have been undermined in recent times, funds which could have aided the growth of development is being diverted, while policy changes required for development are being impeded. Nigeria's politicians perceive the occupation of leadership positions as an avenue to amass wealth by stealing the nation's collective wealth. According to Osagie (2009), those in the corridors of power in Nigeria today cannot afford the scrutiny of their stewardship as their leadership is fraught with fraud, injustice, corruption, selfishness, violence, immorality and all other social vices. Jega (2002) maintained that the tragedy of democracy in Nigeria is that the major actors in Nigerian politics are essentially anti-democratic. Many of them are merely interested in power and its acquisition by any means, with their primary objective of being in charge of the political machinery, dispensing patronage and amassing wealth.

Isiakpere (2006) is of the view that the present crop of Nigerian leadership inherited certain values from the military regime that handed over power to them on May 29, 1999. These values includes greed, selfishness, intimidation, oppression, violence and corruption. He further observed that political candidates who aspire for certain political positions flatter the electorate with promises, showing kindness to them by giving them money and food items so as to gain their votes. However, after gaining such positions, they forget the promises made to the masses, as such, the basic necessities which are needed for survival are delegated to the background. Leadership qualities has been largely abused in Nigeria as it is being characterized by a bastardizing of revered tradition, convention and culture, as such, it has become an avenue of exploitation and manipulation.

ISSUES IN NIGERIAN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Described as the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria's economy is largely dominated by oil with a relatively high percentage of federal government revenues and foreign exchange earnings dependent on it. The country in recent times has had an increase in its per capital income, however with a comparatively unfavourable social indicators which in fact has made it one of the poorest oil producing countries in the world. Evidence reveals that Nigeria is a country endowed with both mineral and natural resources, the world's eighth largest exporter of crude oil, with majority of its citizens living in poverty and are not able to afford the basic necessities of life. According to Tokumbo (2007), the problems faced by the Nigerian polity is a clear indicator of poor national development, and a noticeable consequence has been the distortion of government expenditures on large scale projects rather than the provision of the basic amenities of life. Dike (2012) has observed that those who occupy political positions in the country often times spend more funds on executing difficult projects as this creates a conducive avenue for fraud and other social ills. This invariably makes national development projects unnecessary complex so as to justify the allocation of huge amount of money on them, and consequently diverting such funds into private pockets,

Ariyo (2007) observed that Nigeria has fashioned out various national development plans to foster development, but these plans which aims at establishing a system that will eradicate such issues as low standard of living, unemployment, insecurity, poverty and other social vices have been frustrated as a result of leadership performance. After gaining independence, Nigeria launched the first plans for national development with major emphasis placed on health, education, employment and possibly ensuring an improved access to these opportunities. This national development plan did not achieve its stated objective as the country was expecting 50 percent of the required finance needed to execute the plans from their colonial government but only 14 percent was received. In addition, the collapse of the first republic and the commencement of civil war also disrupted the execution of the development plan (Ogunmike, 1995). After civil war in 1970, the country launched its second development plan and it spanned from 1970 to 1974. The policy makers aimed at achieving agricultural and industrial growth, transforming the transportation sector, ensuring the provision of adequate electricity, water and other social services, ensuring the defence of the territorial integrity of the nation and establishing an international communication between the country and other parts of the global community. The third plan which spanned from 1975 to 1980 was considered more ambiguous as emphasis was on rural development and agricultural sector. The national development plans of 1981 to 1985 recognized the importance of social services in the affairs of government, as such, the plan was aimed at improving the living conditions of the masses. The specific objectives were an increase in the real income of the average citizen, more even distribution of income among individuals and socio economic groups, increased dependence on the country's material and human resources, and a reduction in the level of unemployment and under employment (Ogunmike, 1995). Ariyo (2007) observed that during the period of the development plans of the first republic, the country had not utilized its enormous oil wealth properly. The wealth of the nation was not invested into the economy, as such, there were no established industrial foundation which could aid in promoting development in the nation.

Various programmes have been formulated in recent times to foster the growth of the national development in Nigeria. The plans are anchored under such programmes as National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), Seven Point, Transformation Agenda among others. Focus will be placed on NEEDS, Seven point Agenda, and Transformation Agenda.

- National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS)

According to National Planning Commission (2004), NEEDS Programme was a response to the development challenges of Nigeria and a national plan for prosperity. The programme core values recognized the importance of respect for elders, honesty, accountability, industry, discipline, self-confidence, and moral courage. NEEDS had the objective of achieving the direct principle of state policy and pursued four clear goals which was anchored on;

- Creation of wealth
- Generation of employment
- Re-orientation of values
- Reduction of poverty.

It had a clear but ambitious macro-economic targets for Nigeria with focus on welfare, health, employment, political power, physical security, and empowerment of the Nigerian masses. The vision of NEEDS was articulated in 2001 KURU declaration. According to Abdu (2011) economic data and statistics revealed that NEEDS had made some efforts in adding more credence to the economy. Statistics presented by IMF (2007) indicated that Nigerians had

experienced growth in virtually all its sectors of the economy during the first phase of NEEDS implementation. Real GDP annual growth rate averaged 6.6 percent as against the annual target of 6.0 percent. Phenomenal growth in the net inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and portfolio investment particularly in the banking and telecommunication sector was achieved.

Just like other national development plans, the NEEDS programme also had its setbacks and challenges. Abdu (2011) observed that the NEEDS programme was criticized to have aggravated poverty instead of ameliorating it. It was unable to improve the basic infrastructure that could aid in reducing poverty to a minimal level. According to the UNDP 2009 report, 2001 to 2007 records showed that Nigeria's Human Poverty Index (HPI) had an increase from 34.0 percent to 38.8 percent and ranked 114th with HPI-1 value of 36.2 percent among 135 selected countries. Gentilini and Webb (2008) found out in a research on poverty and hunger reduction, that Nigeria was seriously behind when measured against the new poverty indication called Poverty Hunger Index (PHI). They found that Nigeria had 0.156 values on matching towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Abdu (2011) also maintained that there was a high level of corruption during the SEEDS implementation period. Relative to lack of transparency and institutional capacity, Nigeria's senate investigations had revealed the corrupt practices of some political leaders. The Corruption Perception Index report of 2009 revealed that Nigeria scored 2.5 out of possible 10 marks, emerged 27th out of the 47 nations under survey in Sub Saharan Africa, and 33rd out of 53 countries in Africa. In spite of the reform structures, packages, and institutions established by the government to ensure economic efficiency, transparency and management, the development plan did not achieve its maximum objectives.

- Seven-Point Agenda

The MDGs and the attendant Seven-point Agenda have their basis in the economic growth model of the neo classical theory which states that the reduction of long term poverty requires sustainable growth, which in turn depends on technological advancement capital accumulation (Odisola 2008). It is based on this premise that the seven-point agenda was established, with focus on power and energy, food security, wealth creation, transport sector, land reforms, security, and education.

- The infrastructural reforms in the power sector aimed at the development of sufficient and adequate power supply to ensure Nigeria's ability to compete as a modern economy and achieve full industrialization by 2015.
- Food security reform was primarily agrarian based. Emphasis was on the development of modern technology, research, production and developments of agricultural inputs.
- Wealth creation reform focused on wealth creation through diversified production especially in the agricultural and solid mineral sector.
- Transport sector reforms focused on the construction of new roads, rehabilitation and modernization of Nigerian railway system across the country.
- The main focus of land reforms was to change the existing land laws and ensure the emergence of land reforms that will optimize Nigeria's growth through the release of lands for commercial farming, and other large scale businesses by the private sector.
- Under security reforms, the Niger Delta Security issue was the primary subject which was to take an honest and accurate dialogue between the government and the people.
- There were two fold reforms in the educational sector. Emphasis was on ensuring minimum acceptable standards of education for all and excellence in both tutoring and learning skills in science and technology.

Despite the avowed commitment of the government to the policies in terms of money, men and materials, the policy may not have achieved the stated goals. According to them, reasons for such failure may be attributed to the failure of past policies, the level of executive corruption in high places, the global economic recession, government contradictory policies, and government insincerity among others.

- Transformation Agenda

Just like other development plans, the transformation agenda was introduced by the present administration in 2011 to foster the growth of national development between 2011 and 2015. Nwankwo (2012) maintains that this development strategy does not differ from others as its objectives were premised on other previous plans for national development. The transformation agenda aims at pursuing the following goals:

- To improve the micro-economic sector by achieving a baseline GDP growth rate of 11.7 percent per annum. This objective is expected to be achieved through pursuing sound macro-economic policies that will facilitate effectiveness in fiscal and monetary policies.
- Creation of job opportunities especially for the youths who constitute the majority in the unemployed population.

- Establishing good governance throughout the nation. This should be achieved through improving the efficiency of the public service, the strength of the security, the efficacy of the various arms of government, and the economy which is the driving force of the nation.
- The policy also aims at achieving human capital development through emphasizing the growth of educational and health sector of the society.

In addition to those objectives, the transformation agenda also aims at achieving the proposed objectives of the seven point agenda which was anchored on power and energy, security, wealth creation, transport sector, land reforms, security and education. There have been serious government commitment to the actualization of the transformation agenda since its inception, however, just like other plans for national development, there have been series of challenges in its implementation process.

Odisola 2008 observed that in spite of series of national developments strategies put in place by successive governments and sometimes with good intentions, all attempts to generate meaningful development has proved futile as the nation continuously gets low ranking in its national development assessment by the international community. Thus, based on the Human Development Index Parameter of accessing a nation's level of national development, the United Nations Development Programme 2014 report revealed that Nigeria ranked number 152 out of 187 countries in Human development, which is average quality of life and standard of living. The report puts Nigeria's Human Development Index at 0.381 which is below the prescribed level. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report stated that the disparity between economic growth in a country, and the welfare indicator, can be analysed by lack of inclusiveness in the economy's growth trajectory. In line with the human development paradigm, the report took a people centred approach, paying particular attention to disparities between and within countries, by identifying the structural vulnerability. That is, the group of people who are more vulnerable than others by virtue of their history or their unequal treatment by the rest of the society. (UNDP Report, 2014). According to the UNDP's coefficient on human inequality, Sub Saharan Africa is the most unequal region in the world. About 585million people, the equivalent of 72 percent of the region's population are either living in multi-dimensional poverty with overlapping deprivations in education, health, and living standards or at a risk of falling into poverty. The reports also revealed that these groups do not experience improvements in their standard of living because they have limited political participation, livelihood options, and access to basic services. From the analysis of the characteristics of nations with low human development index, evidence revealed that Nigeria may have fallen among these groups of countries. Thus, the UNDP 2014 report ranked Nigeria as the number 9th nation among 42 countries in the list of low human development countries. (UNDP Reports, 2014). The reports clearly indicates that despite the tremendous resources possessed by Nigeria, her national development has been negated to the background by poor leadership and corruption which attendant consequences in the nation are poverty, unemployment, insecurity and a host of other social vices.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS

Most national development problems in Nigeria arises as a result of poor implementation of policies and subsequently policy inconsistency. Makinde (2005) maintains that the primary problem of policy implementation in developing nations lies in the nature of the policy itself, the policy maker and the environment which such policies were formulated. He argues that most policies of developing nations are imposed on the masses. The policies are made by the government without considering the target population, as such the masses are not given the opportunity to contribute in the formulation of policies that concerns their wellbeing. This invariably leads to absence of continuity in such policies when the tenures of such governments come to an end. This therefore explains reasons for numerous abandoned projects found in most developing nations.

Makinde (2005) also pointed out that problems of implementing national development policies arises as a result of bribery and corruption on the part of political office holders. Often times, funds which are set aside for implementing these policies and other government contracts are usually syphoned into private pockets at the detriment of the entire nation. In addition, it has been observed that most developing nations actually lack credible leaders who can recognize and articulate the specific needs of the people. Eminiue (2005) is of the view that implementation problems also arises because most policy makers fail to access the goal achievement-gap factor. This means that most leaders present policies which are too cumbersome and difficult to achieve within the short period spent in office. This overambitious policies are usually presented so as to establish support and gain legitimacy from majority of the masses. Such plans for national development are usually abandoned at the end of such tenures and subsequent governments also fail to continue the execution of existing policies because each regime deems it necessary to formulate its own development plans, thereby leading to policy instability.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The national development of any nation adds credence to its status in the international community. The situation in Nigeria has not been a very interesting report as evidence reveals that its national development is still at its rudimentary stage. This is reflected in the low rankings it usually gets from international assessment made by the global community. The economy which is the driving force of any vibrant nation is relegated to the background as a result of poor leadership and corruption in almost every sphere of the nation. Thus the paper suggest that the situation may be managed if the following recommendations are adopted.

- The plans for national development should be people-centred. The masses should be involved at the formulation stage so as to put inputs on what concerns their lives and provide suggestions on how those inputs can be achieved.
- Political leaders should analyse concretely the goal achievement-gap so as not to present manifestoes that would not be realised during their stay in office.
- There should be continuity and stability in policies so as to avoid the continuous presence of numerous abandoned projects in Nigeria. Thus, Nigerian leadership must learn to build on already existing projects rather than to abandon them for new ones for the sake of political parties and other personal interests.
- Electoral processes in Nigeria should be reformed so as to promote a free and fair selections of leaders.

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