

# **LEADERSHIP DEBACLE: THE BANE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The success of governance in any organised political system is determined by the quality of leadership in government. Nigeria, a country blessed with natural and human resources still battles with leadership and governance problems after fifty-one years of independence. This paper analysed the causes of governance failure and the problems of leadership in Nigeria. The data used for the paper was basically secondary in nature. The paper concluded that transparent, committed and transformational leadership is highly required for good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria

**Key Words:** Leadership, Governance, Nigeria, Crisis, Development, Government, independence, debacle and Service Delivery

## **BACKGROUND**

The socio-economic and political development of any country depends largely on the ability of its leadership to facilitate, entrench and sustain good governance. Essentially, good governance is a function of committed, patriotic and discipline leadership. Nigeria

as a country has attained mature and productive age of 51 years, thus expected to be at par with its contemporaries in terms of socio-economic and political developments, its progress in these areas has been stunted by lack of transformational and functional leadership.

It is logically unbelievable and appalling that despite the long years of independence, Nigeria the so called “giant” of Africa is still battling with the problem of good governance. The crop of leaders that have attained leadership position since independence had in one way or the other lacked vision, most of them have been engrossed with corruption and political bickering leading to the entronement of maladministration and mismanagement of public resources, and consequently economic setback and abject poverty as nation heritage.

Significantly, Nigeria is among the countries of the world endowed with natural and valuable resources that are capable of improving socio-economic status and living standards of the citizenry. But the reverse has always been the case. In view of this ugly trend one begins to wonder the kind of “giant” Nigeria is bearing in Africa, after fifty one (51) years of independence of both military and civilian rulerships.

Many observers of the development crisis in Nigeria since independence, for example, agree that poor leadership has been a major factor. According to the renowned novelist Chinua Achebe, the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.

It is against this background that this paper examines leadership and governance crisis in Nigeria since independence with a view to providing alternative method and style of leadership that can enhance good governance.

## **DEFINING THE CONCEPTS OF LEADERSHIP AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) research project, “Good governance is the process and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised; the process by which governments are selected, held accountable, monitored and replaced; the capacity of governments to manage resources efficiently, and to formulate, implement and enforce sound policies and regulations; and, the respect for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them” (cited in Onigbide, 2007).

UNDP (1997) described good governance as the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country’s affairs, comprising the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences. It encompasses the political, economic, legal, judicial, social and administrative authority and therefore includes; government, the private sector and the civil society. It also includes both a broad strategy and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objective of making government more accountable, more open and transparent and more democratic (Minogue, 1997 cited in Abe, 2010). In the words of Healey and Robinson, it implies “a high level of organizational effectiveness in relation to policy formulation and the policies actually pursued, especially in the conduct of economic policy and its contribution to growth, stability and public welfare (1994). In addition to participation, accountability and transparency as enunciated by the UNDP report, good governance according to Healey and Robinson also include openness and the rule of rule.

The World Bank offered a more comprehensive and insightful explanation of good governance when it averred that, “it is the means by which power is exercised in the

management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank, 1992). Potter (2000) calls good governance "sound development management" that is a broad sphere of public sector management; accountability; legal framework for development (reforms); information and technology; the legitimacy of government; the competence of governments to formulate appropriate policies, make timely decision; implement them effectively and deliver services. Good governance can also be linked to the extent which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, committed to improving the public welfare and responsive to the needs of its citizens, competent to assure law and order, and deliver public services, able to create an enabling public environment for productive activities and equitable in its conduct.

Adamolekun (2002) simply views governance as the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. He listed the main elements of governance as; rule of law, freedom of expression and association, electoral legitimacy, accountability and transparency and development oriented leadership.

Governance means making and managing public policy, organizing people, controlling subordinates to exercise skill and commitment to achieve excellence in a given set of assignments. It is concerned with ensuring that constituents follow established process while instruments of governance provide means to maintain accountability. In the realm of public affairs, governance refers to the range of policies public officials enact and actions they take to manage the affairs of society (Ukaegbu, 2010). The need for good governance has been emphasized as a precondition for progress. It is highly desirable and very much needed in Nigeria. This is because it can yield positive incremental changes.

A leader can be described as any body that can influence others to perform beyond their formal authority. Leadership emerge because every society is organized. The masses cannot lead. There is a need to have a few people who will lead (Ujo, 2001). Leadership is both the adhesive that binds a work group together and the catalyst that triggers employee motivation, thereby having major influence on organization performance.

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.

Leadership is a bundle of attributes including knowledge, vision, courage, imagination, determination, transparency, decisiveness, motivation, patriotism and nationalism deployed by occupants of strategic positions to lead their citizens and or followers towards profound and positive societal transformations. Profound society changes require extraordinary leadership exemplified in transformational policies and actions (Ukaegbu, 2010).

Transformational leadership makes bold statements of goals, has bold visions, takes bold steps to unite with followers to achieve those goals, takes initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the process of change, and encourages a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy. Importantly, transformation leadership makes leaders out of followers. The leaders so generated and dispersed across sectors and geographic areas ensure that the goals and visions of progress established at various centres of power are implemented in accordance with the needs of citizens and that the later actively participate on goal implementation. By so doing the transformational leader moves

people beyond pre-occupation with basic needs and scraping by, as is currently the case in most parts of the country, and sets the stage for individual and national self-actualization.

As a matter of fact, transformational leaders will assert independence and exercise courage in making choices in the best interest of the country within the global system of economic, political and cultural interaction; lead the people to return quality and excellence to education, revolutionize infrastructure and modernize productive activity in agriculture and industry; insert indigenous professionals and labour centre stage of building of building national development infrastructure.

Transformational leadership is inward looking without isolating its society from the global system. It assumes ownership of the national or local problem depending on the layer of leadership; deploys intelligence, imagination and energy to lead followers to solve problems and enables followers to unleash hidden and untapped capabilities. The transformational leader constantly monitors the status of policies and project through his physical presence and reports from subordinates, with checks and balances to ensure the reports are genuine. This philosophy of leadership relegates embezzlement of public revenue, mismanagement of public resources, and other forms of corruption by indigenous and international actors, the margins of national affairs and brings transparency and accountability to the fore. This is the history of development left by transformational leaders in many countries of the World (Ukaegbu, 2010).

### **A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA IN THE LAST FIFTY ONE (51) YEARS**

According to World Bank study of sub Sahara Africa (SSA), “The problem of Africa’s Development is a crisis of governance; the study affirms that because of the

countervailing power that has been lacking, state officials in many countries including Nigeria have served their own interests without fear of being called to account. Politics becomes personalized, and patronage becomes essential to maintain power. The leadership assumes broad discretionary authority and loses its legitimacy. Information is controlled, voluntary associations are co-opted or disbanded. This environment cannot readily support a dynamic economy” (World Bank, 1989)

Basically, fifty one year independence is worth celebrating. But candid introspection shows that Nigeria has lagged behind other countries in the march to development, whether defined by measures of quality of life, provision of basic needs, productive capacity, or degree of technological advancement. This development lag was at independence, attributed to number of factors, such as lack of qualified manpower to direct the ship of development, absence of finance and technological capitals, a post colonial state and marginal participation in a world economy dominated by the great powers. But should these factors still be blamed for Nigeria’s lacklustre performance in the march to development half a century after independence? Of course No, the major constraint to Nigeria’s development is lack of transformational leadership. According to Onigbude (2007) “regrettably poor leadership performance has remained with us despite years of complaints and grumbling. We have acquiesced in our own progressive destruction by submitting ourselves to the leadership of political misfits”. It is surprising that the so much expected dividends of democracy eluded the mass of the people, while the leadership has remained unaccountable to them.

Odekunle (2007) assets, “faulty as the system may be, our elites significantly contribute to its low productivity in development output by distorting, exploiting and abusing the system and its inherent loopholes”. In terms of accountability, transparency and service

delivery, despite the abundance of human natural resources that make the country the toast of many nations, our leaders have not been at their best as people's expectations of a better hope and opportunities have long be dashed, with governance ingredients still at its elusive stage to Nigerians. The leadership problem that has confronted Nigeria since independence is making the polity deteriorating. Few of the leaders if any, work for the development of the country more often than not, their policies are hastily put together and poorly executed.

As a matter of fact, going by all the development parameters and performance indices, Nigerians leaders have failed, economically, macroeconomic stability, fiscal discipline, economic reforms, due process and relatively low inflation rates that the state could claim to have achieved sit alongside weak business confidence, low growth, massive unemployment, and rising inequality between the rich and the poor. Nigerians per capita GDP is nothing to reckon with, poverty is widespread and about 54 percent of the population is living on less than One US dollar Per Day. Nigeria ranks low on Human Development indices (HDI), ranked by the United Nations in 2007 as 157<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries, down from 148<sup>th</sup> out of a total of 173 in 2003. The country's human development index of 0.453 in 2005 was lower than the average index for sub-Saharan Africa (0.515) and thereafter was rated as 13<sup>th</sup> least viable countries of the World. While corruption, which every government has always promised to eradicate at its inauguration continued unabated. (Azeez, 2010).

The current republics are a semblance of the previous republics in terms of leadership and governance. It becomes difficult for one to distinguish military leadership from civilian leadership in Nigeria. Though, Nigeria has been ruled by the military for a longer period



since independence than by civilians. But yet, there is no evidence of leadership performance to differentiate civilian leaders from military rulers.

### **LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE VICES**

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 governance 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. The leaders of the success stories in Chile, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan; all demonstrated strong commitment to development, with clarity of vision and of goal (Adamolekun, 2002).

Absence of Accountability and Transparency: - In Nigeria, there is complete absence of transparent and accountable leadership. A government is accountable when its leaders (both elected and appointed) are responsive to the demands of the governed. Respect for the rule of law and the governed. Respect for the rule of law and an independent judiciary constitute key mechanisms for enforcing accountability. 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 aspect; it has been corruption everywhere both at the federal, state and local 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 challenges: 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 genuity 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 challenges: 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, infact, it has been existing since independence and has continued to exist, even, in a modernized fashion. Our leaders are the architect of electoral fraud, for instance, in the first republic, the leadership of various political parties were accused and alleged of election rigging. The same happened in the second republic. And forth republic was also not different. If by now, our leaders, the so called politicians are not ready to face free and fair election I doubt if good governance can be entrenched by these same set of people who are so desperate in their bid to clinch to power at all cost.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The paper, having analyzed and discussed leadership and governance in Nigeria since independence went ahead to suggest viable means of generating transformational leaders who are capable of entrenching and sustaining good governance in Nigeria. It is advocated that candidates with clear visions and strategies for achieving such visions, strong commitment and determination for development should be elected into political and leadership positions. It also entails returning merit appointments to the society as opposed to deterring to the ubiquitous federal character in all situations. A society that desires development must, as a matter of necessity respect competence. In addition to this, the electoral system and process must provide citizens of every social status the chance to hear question and receive answers from candidates on their visions, policies and specific strategies as well as timetables for implementing and achieving them.

On a final note, it is instructive at this juncture to note that Nigeria, since independence has produced a pattern of leadership characterized by coups, countercoups, corruption and instability, and stepping into the path towards another half century, Nigeria needs more than ordinary managers of national affairs. It should aspire for actors that push their people to achieve profound institutional changes. The latter is the role of transformational leadership; in fact the quality of leadership determines the nature of governance. Good governance inheres in good leadership. Without transformational leadership, Nigeria may continue to lag, while other societies continue to speed to success in some cases using Nigeria's resources.

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