

The leadership question in Nigeria's underdevelopment since 1960

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Abstract: *The gross underdevelopment in Nigeria is a common sight. Every segment of the nation's socio-economy is in shambles. Endeavor at turning round this ugly development since independence has not yielded significant outcomes. The political elite who took over the mantle of leadership from the colonial masters have since discovered that the deep-seated woes are caused by feckless leadership and unbridled level of corruption. This paper is centred on the character and the nature of our national leaders since independence. The general thrust of this study is that poor visionary leadership and corruption have been the bane of development in Nigeria, not necessarily the intrusion of colonialists' forces.*

Keywords: Leadership, Political Leadership, Underdevelopment and Corruption

1. INTRODUCTION:

Since Nigeria attained political independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, there has not been any well-co-ordinated development strategy to leap-frog the nation's socio-economic wellbeing. Independent Nigeria has been grappling with inept leadership, which tends to be at the root of the country's development crisis. Nigeria is so endowed with both human and natural resources incomprehensibly, she champions as one of the extremely mismanaged countries in the world. African renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe when lamenting on the situation, insisted that the fundamental cause of Nigeria's under-development predicament ought to be squarely laid at the foot of bad leadership. He argued:

...the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.

There's nothing basically wrong with the character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigeria land, climate, water, air or anything else.

The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which are the hallmark of true leadership(1).

The truth of Nigeria's underdevelopment is unquestionable. For instance, there is massive lack of infrastructures and a significant percentage of her citizens live below \$1 daily. This paper contends that political leadership cannot vindicate itself from the current travails of underdevelopment in the country. Leadership has been and is still the clog of steering wheel that has rubbed the nation of her developmental advances. A recurring question in Nigeria's political evolution in the post-colonial period is the monopolization of the political field by corrupt self-arrogant leaders (2).

A reminiscence of our past revealed that at independence Nigeria, Brazil, Indonesia and Malaysia were at the same level of economic development. However, while the economies of these other countries are developed, Nigeria is still an economic toddler fifty-seven year's on (3). In Nigeria, what lacking is not the absence of laudable developmental visions, policies and plans but the political will on the part of the leaders is largely responsible for underdevelopment in the nation (4). Most often, African's developmental predicaments and Nigeria in particular are blamed one "Dependency theory". The focal contention of the hypothesis, which was targeted at the modernization theory, stressed that the wealth of the metropolis was a result of the poverty of the third world. The theory insists that the monopoly capitalist transfers surplus from the under-developed countries to the developed countries. Consequently, economic, technological progress and social change is hindered. It professed that the balance of trade was unfair, leading to consistent inequalities between two different worlds and two systems with different historical background (5). This theory blamed colonial legacy as responsible for most Third World countries economic stagnation. Perhaps, that may have contributed a great deal to the remote causes of the country's developmental quagmire. But a critical look at some of the countries that have suffered similar economic subjugations revealed that they have moved beyond 'blame games'. It will be irresponsible for Nigeria to continue to blame the issues confronting the country on its colonial past (6).

Historically, visionary leaders have played key parts in the transformation of their various countries. This has been achieved through intelligible policies which leap-frog their societies from the downward spiral of underdevelopment to an enviable level of development. This study focuses on the effects of bad leadership on

Nigeria's development, with an emphasis on the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. However, there is recourse to leadership question since independence.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS:

Leadership

Prominent scholars such as Plato (7); Aristotle (8); Maslow (9); and many others, have written on the role of leadership in transforming a nation. Despite the fact, they advocated divers' strategies, they were all focused on who governs and who should occupy a of position authority in a society. Okadigbo defines leadership as the process through which one person regularly exerts more influence than others in the goal of group (10). Munroe gave a more far reaching definition, when he maintained that leadership includes the capacity to influence, inspire, move, direct, encourage, motivate, mobilize and trigger others to pursue a common goal or purpose while keeping commitment, momentum, self-confidence and courage (11). According to Oyedepo cited in Folarin, leadership simply means service. He asserted that, a leader is actually a servant, a selfless servant who is preoccupied with the tasks assigned to him and delivers as expected or positively as unexpected (12). The general thrust of leadership is a process of social impact by which a person influences others to perform an objective.

Flowing from the above understanding, most individuals have exercised some level of leadership in their lives one way or the other. Notwithstanding, the context of this paper refers to the leadership of an organized state, irrespective of who is at the helm of affairs of the country, whether civilian or military. Furthermore, the level of government strata involved does not matter much, whether federal, state or local government. What is important is the capacity to influence the machineries of government. Leadership determines to a very large extent the pace of development of a country.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Underdevelopment is a circumstance in which a country, society, and so forth has few industries and low standard of living (13). As indicated by Walter Rodney, underdevelopment is not the absence of development, because every country has developed in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent (14). Imhanlahimhin buttressed this, when he observed that all countries are not on the same development pedestrian (15). Under-development only makes sense as a means of differentiating the level of development. It will be easy to compare the economic condition of two countries or regions at two different periods and determine if one is better developed. According to Offiong "An underdeveloped society or country is characterized by backwardness, tribalism... lack of modern differentiated institutions, state of poverty of the society...." (16).

Regardless of Nigeria's 2014 statistical "rebasings" which put the country as the most significant economy in Africa, the reality on ground demonstrates the opposites. The country has been tottered by inadequate infrastructural development, lack of power, pervasive corruption, and shoddy poverty and so on. According to a report by National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS), cited in Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto and Nkah, the maternal and infants mortality and morbidity in Nigeria is one of the highest in the world, with an approximate 545 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births (17). Additionally, it is estimated that 158 of every 1,000 children less than five years of age die of avoidable diseases yearly. These facts are more pathetic when set in regards to Nigeria that has earned N98.293 trillion since exploration of crude oil from 1958 to 2015(18).

The term corruption has different connotations. Defining corruption is quite daunting and challenging, to avoid confusion of definitions this paper adopts some of the frequently used definitions. Orite understood corruption from this point "when at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or process by the society or the behavior of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled situations" (19). Ogbeide sees political corruption as acts of abuse by government officials such as embezzlement and cronyism, as well as abuses linking public and private actors such as bribery, extortion, influence peddling, and fraud (20). To sum up the definitions and understanding, corruption is a betrayal of trust, which has negative consequences of deflating the common good of all and satisfying a few.

3. Political leadership and Underdevelopment in Nigeria:

Since Nigeria became an independent nation, there has been series of developmental plans. Unfortunately, many of those developmental plans were either abandoned by successive governments or not fully implemented. An obvious issue in Nigeria has been the lack of political leadership that is nurtured by the pan-Nigerian spirit. At independence tribalism took a center stage, politicians in their quest to wrestle power employed ethnic sentimental attachment to dissuade their loyalists from thinking as a Nigerian but in its stead ethnic cleavages. The following are some of the statements made by Nigerian politicians as a conscious instrument of politics cited in Anifowose (21), Sir Adeyemo Alakija:

The big tomorrow (for the Yoruba) is the future of our children...How they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria...How the Yorubas will not be relegated to the background in the future.

Dr Nnamdi Aziikiwe:

It would appear the God of Africa has created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages....The martial prowess of the Ibo nation at all stages of human history has enabled them not only to conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of preserver....

The Ibo nation cannot shirk its responsibility from its manifest destiny.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo:

It seemed clear to me that (Azikiwe's) policy was to corrode the self-respect of the Yoruba people as a group, to build up the Ibo as a master-race.

A critical examination of the altitude and behavior of post-colonial leaders in Nigeria shows that many of the civilians, as well as military leaders were and are so engulfed in the pursuit of selfish personal goals at the expense of broader national interest. On the other hand, they were "consummatory" leaders. More also, post-independent leaders took on a champion takes all approach and the state was the sole objective. A true political leader must create an enabling environment for the economic and social-political advancement of his/her country. This buttressed Utomi's record that "leadership is not about knowing everything... but getting the right people and empowering them basically allows the ship of the state to flow"(22). However, most Nigerian leaders since independence have used their control of state resources to enhance their clout across ethnic boundaries for their self-aggrandizements. In a civilized society, the call to leadership ought to be an opportunity to serve in which political exercise of power is backed by the constitution of the people and for the enhancement of their overall wellbeing. Leadership in Nigeria since independence has falter in this task. Consequently, the resultant effect is appalling state of underdevelopment.

Historically, it is an open truth that pragmatic leaders have played strategic roles in the transformation of their various countries. Examples of such great leaders are Franklin D Roosevelt (USA) (23); Stalin (Russia) (24); Lee Kwan Yew (Singapore) (25); and so on. This is largely because qualitative development has always been an outcome of good governance. Leaders put things to bear; things do not happen by chance but by deliberate plans to achieve a certain goal. Unfortunately, the same may not be said of Nigeria since independence in 1960, the country has passed through challenging times with regards to economic and political development. Nigeria's failure to achieve sustained growth is simply linked to the lapses on the part of past and present leaders. According to Aliyu Babangida, former governor of Niger State, he asserted that "we get leaders, who are self-conceited, unwilling, unprepared or merely opportunistic, becoming desperate, choosing to get wealth through corruption and becoming dictatorial to outlive power (26)". It is imperative to understand that the responsibility of development rests on the leadership of a nation. So, it is expected that leaders should be conversant with all segments of the society or nation in order to bring about the much needed development.

Another perspective of understanding leadership and underdevelopment in Nigeria is the military regime. The intrusion of armed forces in Nigeria's politics could be best described as an epoch of "dark ages." The military has enjoyed unchallenged rule for about twenty-six years of political independence since 1960. An experience that was characterized by impunity, ridicule judicial system, absence of legislative body and nepotism. It is in accordance with this, that Ake cited in Ihonybere (27), described the manifestation of the unrestrained power of the state in African continent as thus:

There is hardly rule of law, no plausible system of justice, no transparency. The coercive institutions of the state are above the law, civil society is below it. Ordinary people are out of sight for beyond its protection.

The judiciary is disassociated from justices, and the bureaucracy is oppressive arbitrary.

The above mentioned plainly shows that the state does not and would not care about the peoples interest as a primary issue, rather the exercise of power is for self-aggrandizement. These leaders use their control to the state's resources to build empires for themselves. It is in line with this, that African states Nigeria in particular is described as a "Leviathan state." Simply put, the state exists as an organ apart from the society, not answerable to any checks or balances.

Another major flaw in leadership imbroglio in Nigeria is the doctrine of "fatalism," it finds expression in negativity, despondency and submissive frame of mind towards events. It is an assumption that people from other societies outside of Nigeria have a better answer to complex technical and financial problems for the country's development. A fatalistic orientation among Nigerian leaders quashes courage and clarity of purpose and developmental advances (28). It is important to understand, that no country in the world has ever made giant strides developmentally without great inputs from the indigenous people. In that sense there is a need to harness indigenous human capital in order to meet the expected development pace.

4. Leadership, Corruption and the Nigerian State:

It is self-evident that there is no nation in the world that is completely immune from the scourge of corruption. Nevertheless, many societies at one stage or the other have witnessed cases of corrupt practices in various forms, in their socio-political life (29). The effects of corruption is trans-generational, it manifest in all of the segments of the society thereby, creating poverty and drastic lowering of the pace of development.

The enthusiasm that heralded Nigeria's transition to democracy in May 29th, 1999 has been weakened by an unpleasant disclosure of official corrupt practices. Today, the nation's economy is in shambles because of flourishing capital flight which is a reflection of persistent corruption in the polity. According to Transparency World Corruption Index, Nigeria has maintained between 2001 and 2015, an average value of 21.6 points with at least 10 points in 2001 and a maximum 27 points in 2008, which is against an overall value of 100 points (30). Elementary understanding of arithmetic is what is needed to realize that Nigeria has never gone beyond the threshold of failure in this index. The former president Olusegun Obasanjo acknowledged the enormity and level of corruption in Nigeria when he said:

There was corruption! And corruption! Everywhere and the time the corruption was not only life, it had eaten so deeply into the marrow of our existence that looters and fraudsters had become our heroes, and it seemed we could no longer place any faith in honesty and decency and hard work (31).

The Nigerian state, the product of more than fifty-seven years of mismanagement, military dictatorship and reckless civilian leaders, provides a well suitable selling for corruption to flourish. However, some schools of thought believe that corruption flourishes in Nigeria not primarily because public officials lack ethical standard, or are unable to bridle their greedy tendencies, rather public official participate in corrupt activities for various other reasons. Bello traces many of these reasons to negative personal behavior traits, tribalism, poverty, greed, and wrong attitude to public funds, undue exposure to foreign influences and disloyalty (32). While all of these enumerated factors are noteworthy, one majorly stands out as Nigeria's experience. The prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is traceable to impunity. The word 'impunity' is derived from Latin word *impunitas*, it implies without punishment, zero punishment for misdeeds (33). The level of corruption in Nigeria attained its zenith under the military dictatorship, as theft of government property became a virtue, as search for personal wealth was at the leading burner to the detriment of the country's interest. The 1994 Okigbo Panel Report on the Reorganization and Reform of the Central Bank of Nigeria indicted former Military President, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, former Head of State, late General Sani Abacha, and former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the late Alhaji Abdulkadir Ahmed, for mismanaging about \$12.4 billion oil windfall between 1988 and 1994. A summary of the panel's report submitted to the Federal Government discovered that General Ibrahim Babangida's regime colluded with top officials of the Central Bank of Nigeria to squander the entire fortune on unproductive or dubious projects (34).

The Minister of Information Lai Mohammed recently revealed that, a massive ₦1.34 trillion has been stolen in Nigeria from 2006 to 2016. Out of the looted funds, 15 governors took ₦146.84 billion, four former ministers ₦7 billion, eight other Nigerian in the banking sector made away with ₦52 million, while 2 businessmen cornered ₦653 billion. The minister established that using the World Bank rates and cost, one-third of the stolen funds could have provided 635.18 kilometer distance of roads, 36 ultra-modern hospitals per state, 183 schools, educate 3,974 children from primary to tertiary level and build 20,062 units of 2 –bedroom houses. It is however, painful to note that this monumental waste of funds would have provided significant development across the country (35). According to Transparency International's Corruption Index (CPI) for 2014, Nigeria is up eight places to 136 out of 175 countries placed by the index. More than two thirds of the one hundred seventy-five countries surveyed (including Nigeria), scored below 50. Nigeria is evidently not the only country with a minimum score on the index (its score was 27%), but according to Transparency Index International, any country that scores below 50% on the index remains considered "highly corrupt" (36) Also, a recent study by a professional service firm, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC), indicates that Nigeria will lose 30% percent of its GDP to corruption by 2030. The result of this analysis shows that corruption in Nigeria could cost up to 37% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030 if it's not addressed immediately. This cost is equated to around \$1,000 per person in 2014 and nearly \$2,000 per person by 2030 (37).

5. Leadership and the effects of corruption on the Nigerian State:

According to a report released by the World Bank in 2013, about \$400 billion has been pilfered from Nigeria's treasury since independence. This amount is approximately the gross domestic products (GDP) of Norway and Sweden. To put it differently, the ruling class has stolen the equivalent of the entire economy of a European country for four decades (38). This wanton plundering of common resources has led to state of underdevelopment in the country. According to Aiyede corruption poses a serious development challenge in the political realm, because it undermines democracy and good governance by flouting or even subverting formal process (39). The effects of corruption on a nation's socio-political and economic development are numberless. Corruption has taught the people of Nigeria that it does not pay to be hard working, law abiding. In conclusion, corruption diverts public resources into private pocket, ultimately undermines effective governance, while eroding the social moral fabric of a nation.

6. THE WAY FORWARD:

Leadership question has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria; significantly too often government that assumed office proclaiming to attack corruption ended being more corrupt itself. Nevertheless, the leadership must serve as a bright spot for the rest of the country. Corruption can only be reduced when leadership set the moral tone for the country. Leadership by example can be promoted by boldly prosecuting corrupt officials, especially high ranking public officers. It is time we start to adhere to the celebrated sayings of Chinua Achebe, who admonished that "to hold

any useful discussion of corruption, we must first locate where it properly belong in the rank of the powerful” [40] as such measures will convince the populace that no one is above the law and that the government is focused on the eradication of corruption in the culture.

Also, emphasis should be placed on good and enforceable policies towards controlling dishonest behavior and policies should be reviewed periodically. In addition, there should be deliberate policies of transparency and accountability in government functions, especially in most financial transactions so as to minimize and simplify authorities’ regulations, thereby restricting opportunities for rank seeking by corrupt means. Finally, it is important to highlight that leadership is a virtual key to success in development. As Nelson Mandela once said, “real leadership requires the understanding that you are not acting as an individual, that you represent a collective” (41). This is apt and timely, if we must move the nation to a greater height.

7. CONCLUSION:

This paper has critically analyzed the question of leadership and its symptom of corruption. The importance of leadership in boosting national cohesion, socio-economic transformation and development cannot be overemphasized. It is based on this, that Ake argued that “somebody has to determine that development is desirable that a particular kind of development should be pursued and in a particular manner”. My investigation reveals that corruption takes scarce resources away from development process and has negative effects on investment and economic development in general. Also, corruption is a symptom of bad leadership. It triggers massive economical and inter-personal harm. Money disappears into the wrong pocket.

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