

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE AND NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

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Abstract

The major thrust of this paper is to critically examine the implications of leadership on Nigeria's developmental initiatives. There is no doubt that leadership defect is the bane of Nigeria's development from independence in 1960. Therefore, the paper examined the missing link in Nigeria's quest for credible and plausible leadership in her development strides over the years. Also, the paper considered the elite theory as the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study. This is due to the fact that most of the developmental initiatives carried out by successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960 was a calculated attempt to perpetuate the sectional interest of the political elite. Methodologically, the content analysis of documents, reports, articles, journals, and books was adopted since so many scholars have written a lot of works on the subject matter of this study. The study found that the level of development in Nigeria is far below expectation despite the laudable initiatives by successive governments. This, it argued, is not unconnected with the fact that both past and present political leaders lacked the political will to improve the quality of life of average citizens. The crave for materialism, transient and ephemeral comfort of life in place of selfless and dedicated service to humanity has badly affected the efficacy of leadership in Nigeria. Therefore, the paper recommends the overhauling of the electoral processes in order to produce credible leadership required for the crafting and effective implementation of developmental initiatives in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Leadership, Development initiative, corruption, good governance*

Introduction

Nigeria as a nation is richly endowed with human and material resources such that she cannot afford to lag behind among the comity of nations. If the development of a nation were to be measured by the quantum of natural endowment, Nigeria would have been highly developed. However, the generality of her population have continued to wallow in abject poverty, penury and squalor due to lack of access to basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, electricity, qualitative education, affordable health care delivery and portable water. There is no gainsaying that successive governments in Nigeria since political independence have made laudable initiatives aimed at engendering development but the results obtained have fallen far short of the citizens' expectations.

One cannot but agree with the position that Nigeria is a victim of poor leadership. For instance, Agbor (2012) argued that the success or failure of any

society depends largely on the mannerism of its leadership. He adds that the result of poor leadership in Nigeria is embodied as poor governance manifested in consistent political crisis and insecurity, poverty of the extreme order among the citizens, debilitating miasma of corruption and rising unemployment indices. The role of leadership in the growth and development of the Nigerian nation can therefore hardly be overstated. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that this paper seeks to critically examine the interface between leadership defects and the implementation of Nigeria's development initiatives.

Conceptual Framework

i. Leadership

The concept of leadership has been conceived in different ways by numerous scholars in the field of administration and management. Some looked at it from national perspectives, while others considered it from an organizational dimension. For instance, Bedeian (1986) defined leadership as the art of influencing individual or group activities towards the achievement of organizational or societal objectives. Also, leadership involves the inducement of followers by the leader to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivation, the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leader and followers (Burns, 1978).

After a careful examination of the leadership impasse in Nigeria, Achebe (1983:10) concludes that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to its responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership.

Humphreys (2002) conceived of leadership from an organizational dimension. To him, leadership is the individual behaviour to guide a group to achieve the common target. Fry (2003) explains leadership as the use of leading strategy to offer inspiring motive and to enhance the staff's potential for growth and development. The extent to which members of an organization contribute in harnessing the resources of the organization equally depends on how well the managers (leaders) of the organization understand and adopt appropriate leadership style in performing their roles as managers and leaders. Thus, efficiency in resource mobilization, allocation, utilization and enhancement of organizational performance depends, to a large extent, on leadership style, among other factors. In the opinion of Cole (1997), leadership is a dynamic process at work in a group whereby one individual over a particular period of time, and in a particular organizational context, influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group tasks or goals.

ii Development

The conceptualization of development has undergone metamorphosis since the Second World War ended in 1945. The meaning and the conceptualization of development was greatly influenced by the ideological contradiction between the Socialist East and the Capitalist West. This issue of ideology of development posed a problem for conceptualizing development. Growth theorists argued that development is an outcome of economic growth; scholars like Rostow (1952), Harrod-Domar (1957) posited that economic development and growth result from structural changes, savings and investments in an economy.

The failure of economic growth in most developing countries of Latin America and Africa, in the late 1970s, to deliver corresponding social goods and solve problems of unemployment, poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy and ever increasing crimes and wars, necessitated the new thinking, and redefinition of development from economic growth centered perspective to human centered approach. In this light Chandler (2007) sees development as a broader concept that recognizes psychological and material factors that measure human well-being. Development therefore is a multifaceted phenomenon and man-centered. It is the process of empowering people to maximize their potentials, and develop the knowledge capacity to exploit nature to meet daily human needs (Rodney, 1972; Ake, 2001). The transformation of the society and the emergence of new social and economic organizations are critical indicators of development (Stiglitz cited in Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013).

Socio-economic development is a product of development and can be defined as the process of social and economic transformation in a society. Socio-economic development embraces changes taking place in the social sphere mostly of an economic nature. Thus, socio-economic development is made up of processes caused by exogenous and endogenous factors which determine the course and direction of the development. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Changes in less-tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm, and the extent of participation in civil society. Causes of socio-economic impacts are, for example, new technologies, changes in laws, changes in the physical environment and ecological changes.

Theoretical Framework

This paper considered the elite theory as the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study. This is due to the fact that most of the developmental initiatives carried out by successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960 was a calculated attempt to perpetuate the sectional interest of the political elite. The elite theory as popularized by Michels, Pareto, Mosca, Wright Mills among others, no doubt vividly explains the nature of power play in the Nigerian public service, considering the fact that few office holders are either classified as elite class which manipulates the sentiments of the non-elites for the selfish objective of

acquiring greater privileges, or co-opt those who shared divergent views through juicy appointment, award and others necessities of life.

These manipulative devices of the non-elites by the political elites according to the elite theorists exist because the elites are better organized and possess class consciousness when compared to the non-elites (Robert, 1976). In the Nigerian State, the manipulative process is a complex one that threatens the survival of the polity not only because of the contradiction of interests amongst the elites as a result of hedonistic manifestations, but also because the political elites tend to manipulate the bureaucracy as tools for the acquisition of political support.

Pareto emphasized the psychological and intellectual superiority of elites, believing that they were the highest accomplishees in any field. He discussed the existence of two types of elites:

1. governing elites
2. non-governing elites

He also extended the idea that a whole elite can be replaced by a new one and how one can circulate from being elite to non-elite, or vice versa. Mosca emphasized the sociological and personal characteristics of elites. He said elites are an organized minority and that the masses are an unorganized majority. The ruling class is composed of the ruling elite and the sub-elites. He divides the world into two groups:

1. ruling class
2. class that is ruled

Mosca asserts that elites have intellectual, moral, and material superiority that is highly esteemed and influential (Putnam, 1976).

Sociologist Michels developed the *Iron Law of Oligarchy* where he asserts that social and political organizations are run by few individuals, and social organization and labour division are key. He believed that all organizations were elitist and that elites have three basic principles that help in the bureaucratic structure of political organization:

1. Need for leaders, specialized staff and facilities
2. Utilization of facilities by leaders within their organization
3. The importance of the psychological attributes of the leaders

In a nutshell, Mosca's term for political elites – usually have “a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority” over those they govern (Robert, 1976.13). Pareto postulated that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies, elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections. Pareto sketched alternating types of governing elites, which he likened, following Machiavelli, to lions and foxes. Michels rooted elites (“oligarchies”) in the need of large organizations for leaders and experts in order to operate efficiently; as these individuals gain control of funds, information flows,

promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning power becomes concentrated in their hands (Linz., 2006). Emphasizing the inescapability and also the relative autonomy of elites, all three men characterized aspirations to fully democratic and egalitarian societies as futile.

It is however important to emphasize that from a very broad perspective, there are different types of elites: political elites, bureaucratic elites, religious elites, military elites, traditional elites, etc. It is also important to state that elitist classifications are not mutually exclusive in the sense that a person can fall into more than a classification, such classification also varies from time to time. For instance, military elite during a military regime could also be classified as political elite, especially when he is involved in the authoritative allocation of State resources. And after a transition to civil governance, the military elite when retired could be elected a traditional ruler thus becoming traditional elite.

The implication of the above is that since elitist classifications are not mutually exclusive, it does mean that the political elites could easily depend on other elite class for the manipulation of support for power acquisition. This is quite visible in Nigeria in the form of say bureaucratic elites implementing the agenda of the political class in order to keep their jobs.

Elite theory is a theory of the state which seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in contemporary society. The theory posits that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy-planning networks, holds the most power and that this power is independent of a state's democratic elections process. Through positions in corporations or on corporate boards, and influence over the policy-planning networks through financial support of foundations or positions with think tanks or policy-discussion groups, members of the "elite" are able to exert significant power over the policy decisions of corporations and governments.

The application of the elite theory to this study derived its impetus from the fact that both the political and the bureaucratic elites always seek to maintain the status-quo. In other words, they are diametrically opposed to revolutionary or transformational administrative changes in the bureaucracy. By implication, all the reforms introduced in the Nigerian public service by successive administrations since independence in 1960 have consistently maintained the existing tradition of impunity, general inefficiency, ineptitude, sycophancy, corruption, deception, maladministration and mediocrity in the bureaucracy. Any attempts to change the existing order are vehemently disregarded with a view to safeguarding the interest of the elite. All efforts are geared towards co-opting any individual who intends to change the hitherto existing system by all means. As a matter of fact, every bureaucrat is committed towards the implementation of political agenda in order to keep his or her jobs.

Nigeria's Development Initiatives

According to Nnoli (1980) Nigeria is involved in the second phase of its struggle for national liberation. The first phase ended with the achievement of political independence in 1960. Now, instead of the path of national freedom,

Nigerians must tread the path to national development. In a historically short period of time, she must emancipate the vast majority of her population from the pervasive and high incidence of poverty, ignorance, disease, squalor, poor diet, and poor shelter. Life for the majority is intolerable and these characters are peculiar to the rural areas. Attempts at curbing the above mentioned problems that confront Nigeria as a nation prompted the creation of various developmental initiatives by successive governments. Among these initiatives are:

(a). The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)

This programme was launched by the Federal Government in 1972. It was the first major attempt to improve, though indirectly, the lot of the rural farmers through the promotion of agricultural development. It was a joint programme between the federal and state governments on the one hand and the farmers on the other. The programme was centered on the development of improved crop varieties by research institutes and their trial on farm field in small plots. NAFPP was beset with innumerable constraints which did not allow it to achieve its objectives. These problems, according to Offorah (1988:13), were “inadequate finance, poorly motivated and non-committed extension staff, lack of feedback from the farmers and inability to replicate the miniskirt trials”. There was inadequate supervision and monitoring of the trial plots while the activities of NAFPP were not properly coordinated with the result that expected linkage between the farmers, the extension officer and the research was not experienced.

(b). Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)

By 1976, Nigeria was faced with a deteriorating food situation as a result of greater emphasis on petroleum and the drift of potential farmers to the cities. In order to step up food production, the then dynamic young military government of late General Murtala Mohammed introduced Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) which was vigorously pursued by General Olusegun Obasanjo after the tragic death of General Mohammed in February 1976 in a coup d'état. Though this programme was aimed at boosting food production, it was also intended to improve the living standard of the masses, especially the rural farmers. The programme stimulated interest in agriculture among the Nigerian society. The programme however failed to achieve the policy objective because it was poorly executed.

(c). The Green Revolution

In 1980, Operation Feed the Nation was replaced by Green Revolution by the civilian government of Shehu Shagari but its achievements did not justify the huge sum of money invested in the programme. The green revolution like its predecessors failed because it lacked relevant strategies and thus its activities were eroded by partisan politics with the result that Nigeria according to Offora (1988: 14-15), ended up becoming the world's greatest importer of food.

(d). The Agricultural Development Project (ADP)

This was an integrated agricultural and rural development programme launched in 1975 designed to give new impetus to agriculture. It was believed that if all small scale farmers who produce more than 80% of the nation's food need and occupy about 55% of the nation's land mass are able to increase their production, the nation's need for food and fibre will be adequately met. Thus, rather than engage in direct production, the programme was designed to stimulate and motivate the rural farmers. It may however be difficult to claim that ADP has achieved its main goal of transforming the small-scale farmer into a sufficient and successful farmer since that objective has not been realized more than thirty years after its establishment. The major constraints of the programme in almost all the states of the federation included: mismanagement of funds, lack of basic infrastructural facilities like electricity, good water supply and feeder roads in rural areas and inadequate feedback from the farmers.

(e). The Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW)

Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW) was initiated by Late Mrs. Maryam Babangida in September, 1987 to improve the lot of the rural women. The blue print of the programme as indicated by Azikiwe (1992:1-3), has its major objectives as to stimulate and motivate rural women towards achieving better living standards, and sensitize the rest of Nigerians by educating rural women on simple hygiene, family planning, the importance of child care, and increased literacy rates; to mobilize women collectively in order to improve their general lot and for them to seek and achieve leadership roles in all spheres of society; to raise their consciousness about their rights, the availability of opportunities and facilities, their social, political and economic responsibilities; to encourage recreation and enrich family life and inculcate the spirit of self-development, particularly in the fields of education, business, arts, crafts and agriculture into rural women.

The general goals of the BLPRW from the foregoing as Azikiwe (1992) observes is to educate women especially those residing in the rural areas in order to improve their socio-economic status and consequently enhance their participation and contribution to national development process. Although the (BLPRW) was widely acclaimed in government circles, it was observed that soon after its establishment, the programme became elitist and was therefore hijacked by 'Urban women'. In this respect, Okeke (1999:37) notes that the onset of BLPRW normalized the office of the First Lady as the official director of the federal, state and local government levels rural development programme and this contributed meaningfully to failure of the programme in realizing its objectives. By 1997 Maryam Abacha assumed the office of the First Lady and renamed the BLPRW, the Family Support Programme (FSP). Mrs. Abacha introduced a number of cosmetic changes that could not economically support the families of the rural masses.

(f). National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

Perhaps, the first direct government programme designed to tackle the problems of poverty alleviation and mass unemployment in Nigeria was the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) inaugurated in November 1986. As Afolabi (1999: 229) puts it, “the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) was specifically designed to deal with the problem of mass unemployment among school leavers and graduates in Nigeria”. In order to realize the above objective of the NDE, the Federal Government designed the following strategies: training of the unemployed for the acquisition of skills in different fields to enable them become self-employed or employable; rural employment promotion programme; small-scale enterprises promotion; formation of co-operative groups; loan to the unemployed in form of credit facilities; ad hoc employment. In spite of these lofty objectives and strategies, the NDE has continued to perform below expectation.

(g). The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)

The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established in 1997. As a poverty alleviation programme, this strategy like its predecessors, the BLPRW and the Family Support Programme (FSP) were intended to address the various economic problems of the rural masses especially with regards to income generation. Afolabi (1999: 230-233) notes that;

the noble objectives of the programme which include to utilize all available local resources for the benefit of Nigerians through improved production, storage, preservation, recycling, packaging and marketing; to improve the living standard of the people; to promote production and development consciousness; create employment opportunities at ward levels etc could not be achieved.

Like the Better Life Programme, FEAP also became elitist. Its funds were grossly mismanaged. The programme was consequently abandoned at the inception of the current democratic dispensation on May 29, 1999.

(h). The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)

The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in January 2000. PAP was a stop-gap-measure designed to tackle the problem of unemployment especially among youths in Nigeria. The specific objective of the programme was to set in motion effective economic empowerment for citizens in urban, sub-urban and rural communities. The programme was to last between January and September 2000. Participants who were mostly unemployed graduates were to collect a monthly stipend of N3,500. The programme was hijacked by politicians and beneficiaries were predominantly based on loyalty to the ruling party, People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Funds meant for the programme were

grossly mismanaged as stipends to participants were embezzled in some states while some states that paid were not regular in paying it.

(i). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in January 2001. Unlike the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), which was a stop-gap, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) is a permanent programme designed to eradicate poverty in Nigeria through a number of strategies. The major strategy of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) is the Youth Employment Scheme (YES). This also has other sub-strategies, which include the Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) and the Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP). All these strategies are essentially designed to help the teeming population of unemployed youths in Nigeria to acquire some useful skills, which could help them become self-reliant. There is indication that the billions of naira earmarked for the programme in the various appropriation bills are being embezzled by the officials of the commission as has been the case in the past. It was also observed that the NAPEP forms never got to the intended beneficiaries.

Nigerian Development Initiatives and Leadership Defects

Despite the highlighted developmental initiatives above, Nigeria still ranks among the poorest countries in the world, ranks low in all socio-economic indicators such as life expectancy, death rate, access to water, poverty rate, mortality rate, and crime rate, and still carries the tag of a developing economy. Nigeria is a classic illustration of an oxymoron, a poor country in the midst of abundant human and natural resources. This scenario has contributed to security challenges that have bedeviled the country since independence till now with grave consequences for socio-economic development. There is no nation that can achieve socio-economic development in an environment of social and physical insecurity. The increasing challenge of insecurity in Nigeria has also been linked to failure of leadership to deliver good governance, and secure the welfare of persons on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice. The ruling elite in Nigeria in both the military and democratic dispensation are dependent, parasitic, and very corrupt in nature (Ali, 2013).

Amidst the deteriorating security situation in the country, Nigeria is also confronted with daunting developmental challenges which pose serious threat to socio-economic development. These developmental challenges include endemic rural and urban poverty, high rate of unemployment, debilitating youth unemployment, low industrial output, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate, high inflation rate, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, very large domestic debt, and rising stock of external debt (Ewetan, 2013)

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's unemployment rate increased to 23.9 percent in 2011 compared with 21.1 per cent in 2010 and 19.7 per cent in 2009. The country has a youth population of 80 million, representing about 60

per cent of the total population with a growth rate of 2.6 per cent per year, and the national demography suggests that the youth population remains vibrant with an average annual entrant to the labour force at 1.8 million between 2006 and 2011. In 2011, 37.7 per cent of Nigerian were aged 15-24 years and 22.4 per cent of those between ages 25 and 44 were willing to work but did not get jobs.

The current level of social insecurity is alarming and unacceptable. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that every day, Nigeria loses about 2,300 under-five year olds and 145 women of childbearing age, making the country the second largest contributor to the under-five and maternal mortality rates in the world. A greater proportion of the population do not have access to pipe borne water, health care facilities, electricity and affordable quality education (Ewetan, 2013).

Conclusion

To recap, a lot of lofty developmental initiatives have been introduced by successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Such projects have gulped billions if not trillions of tax payers' money without any meaningful progress and will continue to be drain pipe for draining our common fund into the private purse of politicians and other functionaries of government if urgent steps are not taken to check the menace. The current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari is taking giant stride to check the problem of corruption but one tree cannot make a forest. All hands must be on deck to reduce the level of corruption by political leaders. This will go a long way in ensuring that the dividends of democracy are enjoyed by all Nigerians.

Recommendations

After a thorough assessment of the above issues, the following recommendations are considered fundamental:

1. The on-going war against corruption should be fought and won. All ill gotten wealth belonging to Nigeria at home and abroad should be collected and used for the development of critical infrastructures.
2. Government should be committed to probity and accountability. Every kobo spent for any project should be properly accounted for.
3. The electoral laws should be reviewed in order to ensure internal democracy in the process of selecting candidates for elective offices at party levels. Also, hard work, merit, integrity and fair play should be used as yard stick for electing people into public offices.
4. It is not enough to formulate lofty programmes and initiatives, frantic efforts should be made in ensuring effective implementation.
5. Any politician who fails to keep to his electoral promises should be voted out of office by the electorate
6. There is need to ensure free and fair election in order to produce credible and committed leader

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