

THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The question of leadership is an essential ingredient in the process of nation-building. However, the tragedy of most post-colonial African states is that they lack visionary political leaders who are poised to transcend primordial interests. Against this backdrop, it is clear that the African problem is the unwillingness or inability of her leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of demonstrating personal examples which constitute the hallmarks of true leadership. It is a matter of fact that the development of any nation revolves around the humanistic and altruistic approaches adopted by her leaders. It is sad to observe that Nigerian leaders personalize and abuse power. Thus, instead of using the state for initiating development, most Nigerian leaders utilize it as a vehicle for terrorizing citizenry and political opponents. Most times, their approaches lead to disenchantment and disengagement of the populace from the public sphere. Amidst many problems in Nigeria, ranging from the problem of leadership, inequality in allocations, injustice, poor system and structure, corruption, marginalization and their like raises the alarm for restructuring. Therefore, adopting the philosophical methods of analysis and hermeneutics, this study examines the problems of leadership in Nigeria. It is a strong conviction of this study that the various problems

of leadership in Nigeria can hardly be resolved unless Nigeria and Nigerians undertake a thorough and sincere restructuring which will bring about peace, unity, national consciousness, development and good governance.

Keywords: Leadership, Nigeria, Restructuring, Governance

Introduction

What has fundamentally distinguished the most successful countries from the less successful ones is generally the existence of visionary leaders with the capacity to anticipate changes and to respond to them positively. Most political and legal philosophers have interrogated the leadership style which is a major constraint in the quest for integral development. The reason for this interrogation is to emphasize the need for nations all over the world, both the developed and the developing to engage in various forms of reforms with the intention of ushering in responsible and respective forms of leadership. The policies of leadership which most African countries have adopted have from inception seemingly failed, largely not just because their policies were not suitable but rather as a result of selfishness, greed and lack of the “will power” to implement these policies that will be beneficial to the entire citizenry or the majority of the people. It is no doubt that most African countries are yet to adopt for themselves a system of leadership that reflects its general worldviews and values in this contemporary world of change. But one cannot negate the fact that there are some leaders in Africa who are striving tirelessly for the betterment of their continent and the future of young generations, the likes of Mr. Peter Obi and few others.

Leadership problem is a global phenomenon which is noticed everywhere including Nigeria. With over 200 million citizens, Nigeria is said to be the most populated black nation in the world. Its population should not rather be a reason for poor leadership. Nigeria is facing security challenges including the menaces of the terrorist Boko Haram, kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen and farmers’ conflict, etc. The high rate of unemployment, corruption, poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment has questioned the capability of Nigerian leaders. The myriads of problems which include human capacity development, infrastructural decay, electoral malpractice, judicial malfunctions, and deficit in institutional functions, military overbearing and the absence of the rule of law are quite

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worrisome. The result is that the masses are suffering. They are suffering from poor policies and their executions, and from the injustice and marginalization accruing from them. Kidnapping that started as a joke in the Niger Delta in the 1990's has spread all over the country.¹ Many people are kidnapped, killed for not being able to pay the ransom and some other pay the ransom, and yet get killed. The terrorist herdsmen go about un-arrested to dispossess lands, destroy and kill farmers. They have displaced many farmers in the middle belt, North West and South West regions of Nigeria. It is always on daily basis and they are presently still controlling the forests of some communities in Nigeria.

Moreover, Restructuring is a song on the lips of many Nigerians. It has trended for decades and seems to be an inter-generational topical issue in Nigeria. The persistent call for restructuring takes numerous dimensions, but particularly outstanding is in the dimension of politics. It is no surprise though, because the philosophy behind the existence of every state and the control of its resources bothers on politics. Therefore, when there is a damaged cog in the wheel of the politics of the state, it becomes imperative to politically restructure the state. Since this is so, the big questions then are: What is the damaged cog in the wheel of the politics of Nigeria that is a necessity for restructuring? What are the challenges of political restructuring in Nigeria? And what is the way forward?' It is against this backdrop that it becomes quite necessary to rethink the conception of leadership in Nigeria. This paper centers on the question of leadership in Nigeria; it shall also examine the problems of leadership in Nigeria and as well proffer solutions to the problems. Finally, the study explored the Nigeria's restructuring dilemma and the critical issues, which must be focal point of the restructuring for those have been the unifying and thorny issues in the unity and prosperity of the Nigerian state.

Leadership: A Brief Exposé

The term "leadership" is derived from the old English word *laden* meaning "to lead or guide". A leader according to the *Encarta Concise English Dictionary* is someone whom people follow, a guide or director; someone or something on the lead; it is somebody in charge of others as in the case of head of a nation, political party, legislative body or

¹ Cletus Obasi, "Leadership Issues and the Problem of Security in Nigeria: An Appraisal," *Maryland Studies: An International Journal of Philosophy and African Studies*, Vol.16 & 17 (2020): 106.

military unit. Leadership on the other hand is the office or position of a leader; it is the ability to guide, direct, or influence people. There are varied definitions on leadership but the one that appeals to the authors of this paper is the description of leadership by James Mc Gregor Burns. For him, leadership has to do with the proper understanding of the nature of power. It is only when one understands power, the intrigues surrounding power that one can now find a way to use power appropriately. He posits that “leadership is not just a top-down phenomenon with clear unidirectional causality between leaders’ and followers’ behaviour but also a series of complex, reciprocal relationships involving a use of power and the control of resources.”² This is the general understanding of leadership as conceived in this study.

Restructuring: A Conceptual Delineation

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (9th ed.)* the term “restructuring” means to organize something such as a system or a company in a new and different way. What this means is that restructuring entails alteration and re-organization of an existing system in ways different from how it uses to be. To restructure is to change an existing status quo in order to make it more functional. This implies that restructuring is a purpose-driven activity that hinges on replacement of an existing nature of a system with a new one that will be suitable to achieve the purpose of the system.³ In view of this, restructuring is operationally seen in this paper as a significant alteration, re-organization, reformation and re-arrangement of an existing structure, form or status quo in a revolutionary or evolutionary manner, with the aim of making it more improved, effective, efficient and functionally competent. We therefore use the term restructure to refer to the gamut of transformations in the nature and structure of the Nigeria State where competition and hard work drive success.

In giving meaning and content to restructuring within the context of the Nigerian state, one can postulate that, it is an idea that relates to the constitutional, political, economic, social and cultural condition of the present Nigerian federation and the perceived

² James Mc Gregor Burns, as cited in https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/45143_Gill_2e.pdf

³ Ideobodo Nwafor- Orizu, “Political Restructuring in Nigeria: The Need, Challenges and Prospects,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Public Policy and Governance*, Vol. 5, No. 1(2018): 28.

requirement of examination, diagnosis, and prognosis of its present and possible future configuration, apparatus, institutions, powers, resources, administration, operation, management, personnel, development, and impact on the Nigerian people, elites, geo-political and socio-cultural groupings, and ethnic/tribal nationalities.⁴

Leadership in Nigeria: A Quick Retrospect

This subsection of our study takes a very brief look at the characters of Nigerian leaders. By the time Nigeria came out from their colonial masters in 1960, some basic values were preserved and protected leading to a lot of achievements of leaders at various fields of endeavors. During this period, however, leaders were younger than what we have now and a lot of them were anxious to serve the people and uphold a set of values that made civil and public service attractive. Leaders then had conscience and worked very hard to render meritorious service to the people. When leaders made speeches to the people, the speeches would be a collection of truism. Civil service rules were sacrosanct and a set of rules that incorporated such values; loyalty, honesty and discipline were firmly enshrined and rooted in the civil service code.⁵ The messengers in the offices at the rung of the ladder and ministers of various ministries at the top were amenable to law and were also conscious to uphold the integrity and dignity of public and civil service. The leaders in government at their youthful age worked very hard to bring the country to the next level in terms of development of infrastructure, agriculture, industries, rail- projects, sea and air transports and so on.

With the passage of time, governance in Nigeria started collapsing, giving way to Nigerian leaders seizing powers by force either through palace coup or coup d'état, thereby perpetuating themselves in office. Leaders started applying militancy in their approach to governance, leading to truncation of constitution and other codes of law. In effect, those basic laws and principles that a country is governed by were thrown away which result to preparation of laws and constitution of the country according to the whims and caprices of the leaders. In the course of time, instead of Nigeria to develop, they keep on suffering the effect of bad leadership. Even though Nigeria is endowed with

⁴ Oyelowo Oyewo, "Federalism and Restructuring of Nigeria: Back to the Future," *Nigerian Journal of Contemporary Law*, Vol.19: 1 (2018): 118.

⁵ A. N. Maduegbuna, "Values and Leadership in Africa," *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)*, Vol. 1, No.1 (2017): 66.

mineral resources as well as immense human resources, it refuses to grow to expectations due to corruption in high places. Confirming this state of affairs, Transparency International (TI) released its 2013 global corruption barometer of which Nigeria is inclusive. With this running commentary on the Nigerian leadership, it has become obvious that the present habits acquired by them are inimical to economic growth of the nation.⁶ In Nigeria for instance, when elections are held, whether loss or won, the exercise invariably is subjected to endless litigation. Even after adjudication by the courts, whoever comes to the mantle of leadership, instead of delivering on his electoral promise to run an all-inclusive government as well as tackling some of the problems such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity and other challenges to stimulate the economy, he will turn round and begin to clampdown on the media as well as using judicial system to persecute his perceived political opponents.⁷ At the end of the day, the leader will come out of the government doing nothing for the electorates.

The Problems of Leadership in Nigeria

Nigerians were optimistic at its independence in 1960. The change of baton of leadership from colonial British administration to Nigerians they hoped, would usher in good leadership and rapid development. Leadership experiences of Nigeria in the following years after independence showed negative in idea and in action. They became clannish, corrupt and lost focus. Madubuike affirms that with the exception of a few leaders who had clear vision on good governance, the majority had little idea as to what direction they desired to lead Nigerians.⁸ Because of their myopic leadership, they did not meet up with the expectations of Nigerians.

Many questions were raised and begged for answers as to why African countries especially Nigeria had a history of failure at governance. With recourse to a gamut of literature and based on the views of scholars, the causes of poor governance readily come to mind. In the first instance, most African countries have not been operating a

⁶ Ibid, 67.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ M. Madubuike, "Forward," in *Governance and Leadership in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges*, eds. Julius O. A and Apollos O. N (New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing, 2015), 11.

democracy.⁹ Nwabueze as cited in A. N Maduegbuna observes that the true democracy must be constitutional in value, meaning that democratic constitution must be adopted by the people in a referendum or through a constituent assembly specially and specifically mandated in that behalf. What is prevalent in Africa is that of the leaders tinkering with the constitution and preparing the nation's constitution with a handful of people without required referendum in line with the law.¹⁰ Each leader in Africa uses his power to effect a new constitution without necessary inputs from the people. This constitute a very serious problem to leadership in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.

Corruption has been the major problem of Nigeria's governance since independence which yields underdevelopment, backwardness, poverty and conflicts in the different states. It has been evidently proven that most leaders in Nigeria have used their political positions to embezzle the economic resources meant for the generality of the people in the development of the society into their personal foreign accounts living the nation in a deteriorating state as well as living the masses impoverished.¹¹ Also Nigerian leaders divert funds meant for the development of the country into their personal accounts and this, sometimes, brings about increase in crime due to lack of employment. Also, most Nigerian leaders have failed to delve into literature that deals with development problems, or consult economic and social experts as to what should be done.¹² There is no other factor that can kill leadership with ease as corruption. It has eaten deep into the political system of Nigeria in such a way that no matter the height of the amount of revenue Nigeria generates daily, corruption will consume 70 percent.¹³ Check for instance, the recent redesign of Naira notes; it is disheartening to see that many Nigerian leaders stored money in their private rooms when the masses find it difficult to have 3 square meals a day because of lack of access to cash.

⁹ Maduegbuna, "Values and Leadership", 68.

¹⁰ Nwabueze, as cited in Maduegbuna, "Values and Leadership", 68.

¹¹ Wisdom Enang, "Problems of Leadership in Nigeria", Retrieved from: <https://proguide.ng/problems-leadership-nigeria/>. (Accessed: 23/12/22).

¹² Paul Haaga, "Resolving African Leadership Failure Using the Agent Sensitive Archetypal: A Jurisprudential Approach," *Nasara Journal Of Philosophy (NAJOP)*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2018): 89.

¹³ Wisdom Enang, "Problems of Leadership in Nigeria", Retrieved from: <https://proguide.ng/problems-leadership-nigeria/>. (Accessed: 23/12/22).

Again, Nigeria lacks capable and competent leaders imbued with high sense of nationalism, foresight, dedication, integrity, patience, accommodation and fairness. Thus, the intense competition and rivalries among ethnically diverse group for political power have retarded meaningful nation building in post-independent Nigeria.¹⁴ This has resulted in mass confusion and uncertainty which sent a wrong signal as to its political direction whereby many people seeks to acquire power in any way possible. As a matter of fact, one of the perplexing dilemmas confronting post-independent in Nigeria is how to find a high quality leader, that is to say, one who is a unifier, patriotic, enlightened and visionary.¹⁵

Also, it is believed that “power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely”¹⁶. Although leaders enjoy certain forms of privileges and immunity by the reason of their position of authority, the constitution states clearly that no one is above the law. Over time, some leaders have been seen evidently going against the law and going away with it, thus disregarding the rule of law. The truth about the problem of impunity of leaders in Nigeria is that we have strong and influential individuals, instead of strong and influential institutions. This gives them an advantage over the institutions and in some cases, these institutions could be used to oppress other individuals. Furthermore, some individuals view politics as a dirty game and for this reason most Nigerians tend to shy or should we say run away from political activities. This is also one of the major problems of leadership in Nigeria. This is so because some Nigerians believe that their votes do not count, even if they vote, their votes will not count and so they shy away from politics. Also most of Nigerian Youths believe that leadership is for the older ones since most of the political positions are occupied by older men, they regard politics as something not meant for them.

¹⁴ O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimensions Publishers, 1978), 173.

¹⁵ Ukoro Igwe, “Transparent and Visionary Political Leadership as an Essential Element in Nation-building in Post-colonial Africa: Nigeria as a Paradigm,” in *Self Determination and Challenges of Nation-building in Contemporary Africa*, ed. John Ekei (Okpuno: Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2018), 138.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Atenaga, “Leadership in Nigeria”, Retrieved from: <https://infoguidenigeria.com/leadership-in-nigeria/>. (Accessed: 23/12/22).

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In sum, the government is transitional in nature. Elections play a vital role and are very vital as far as Democracy is concerned. Electoral processes in Nigeria have over the years been characterized by violence and malpractices where electoral materials were carted away by hired thugs, manipulation of results, and shedding of blood. This has resulted in the imposition of leaders who have little or no services to render to the country other than exploiting and looting public funds. Economically, the dependence on the oil sector for revenue and neglecting other sectors like the agricultural and industrial sectors is a very bad idea. It should be recalled that it was when the oil prices dropped that Nigeria went into recession. Again, there is this saying “*my people perish because they lack knowledge*”.

Solutions to the Leadership Question in Nigeria

Indeed, having gone through the gamut of analysis of Nigerian leadership and political situations, this study identifies major obstacles that slow rapidly the expected growth of Nigeria. In the opinion of the present researchers, the following recommendations could be of immense assistance to Nigerian leaders. In the past or before independence of Nigeria, there were cherished values that guided the behaviours of the people. At family level, you could see a set of values which direct the attitude of children born into such family and if any child born into the family is called up to serve; you will see humility, loyalty, obedience in the performance of his duties. All these character traits were as a result of family upbringing. If such character is employed in the public service, it could help to uphold the dignity of labour and serve the state to the best of her ability. It is advisable that these values are preserved to actually uphold the dignity of public service, unlike now when people in offices burn down documents to cover their misdeeds in their various serving capacities.

Most leaders in Nigeria are selfish and they keep on amassing wealth and invariably forget people’s mandate to them. For instance, certain bills they pass at National Assembly do not help the economy of the nation. Some of the things they do sometimes depend on individual selfishness and interest and if some heavy lobbying is not made they could not show interest in passing some bills. As this country faces security challenges and other similar problems they could read between the lines and formulate policies that can take care of restiveness of the youth and thereby reduce crimes and all manner of terrorist activities in the country.

The governance in Nigeria is dominated by gerontocracy, that is to say governments by elders. Instead of the old ones to bring close to them new crop of young leaders, they create gulf between them and younger ones. Instead of the leaders to teach and direct younger ones, they introduce “divide and rule” and break smaller power groups in order to avoid a challenge politically. Nigeria should go back to the drawing board and protect the traditional values which will help to produce true leaders who are patriotic and who also mean well for her country.

Again, excess expenditure during electoral campaigns should be discouraged. This is to reduce corruption associated with such phenomenon as this breeds monumental corruption after election in an attempt to recoup their investment into the exercise. Also, to talk of a country being democratic, there must be democratic constitution in place which is adopted by the people through the referendum or constituent assembly in line with Abraham Lincoln’s view of democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people. Nigeria leaders should respect law and abide by constitutional provision which is the supreme law of the land.

Most importantly, the above recommendations cannot work very well with the current structure of Nigeria. This explains the urgent need of proper restructuring of the socio-political structures of Nigeria. E. J. O. Ndubisi observes in this regard: “It is true that the foundational sociopolitical structure of Nigeria had some selfish undertone. It appears not to have been properly built giving the 1914 experience. It is now high time Nigerians began to strategize and restructure for a better and more progressive and united Nigeria.”¹⁷ Proper restructuring is the only way to salvage the current socio-political challenges in Nigeria. We wish to affirm the submission of Ndubisi that

[T]he current socio-political structures of Nigeria are defective, shaky and beg for total overhauling. The fact is that some persons or group of persons are benefiting from the present structure [of Nigeria]. This has led to series of conflicts, violence, agitations for secession, and the likes. As Nigerians, we need to go back to the drawing board of the purpose of articulating and re-building the socio-political structure of this great country. Whether we like it or not, the fact remains that most of

¹⁷ E. J. O. Ndubisi, “Contemporary Nigerian Socio-political structures: Towards a Restructured Society” in *Self Determination and Challenges of Nation-building in Contemporary Africa*, ed. John Ekei (Okpuno: Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2018), 210.

the social and political problems we have today in Nigeria will never be resolved unless we restructure.¹⁸

The above submission is *ad rem* but how can it be achieved without committed and selfless leaders?

Concluding Reflection

From the foregoing exposé, one obvious fact to be noted is that the cumulative negative effect of bad leadership in Nigeria is the instability in the policy. It has resulted in the over-concentration of authority in the hands of a relatively privileged few. The result is the subsequent misuse of power. This has ultimately led to a situation in which the democratic process has been thwarted. Thus, the various leaders in Nigeria history, with few exceptions have failed to advance democracy. That is why, the present regime and subsequent regimes should distance themselves from the criminals and anti-democratic forces of the past. It should instead open up credible channels of communication and dialogue. The approach will enable it to listen to the grievances of the opposition. This is with a view to resolve them. Again, the regimes should intensify the anti-corruption campaign and not to use it to terrorize, and witch-hunt the political opponents. Those found guilty of corruption by law should be punished accordingly, irrespective of their political affiliation.

The process of true and progressive nation building requires the clamour for restructuring of the Nigerian state. But the approach should fall within the current democratic dispensation. It should be integrated within the holistic re-invention of the structures and institutions of governance. This is with a view to deepen the democratic culture of popular participation, accountability, and transparency. The overall intention is to increase the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. A joint effort towards restructuring the Nigerian federalism will make Nigeria a better country where needless tensions and conflicts are minimal and where the sub-national government are not reduced to mere appendages. Therefore, to achieve this, urgent steps should be taken in the execution of the recommendations of this paper so as to change the status quo to one that will work despite the multifarious ethnic-regional nationalities and religious affiliations in the country.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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