

Re-Engineering African Political Leadership Through Good Governance for Sustainable Development and Growth in Africa

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Abstract

The history of Africa from the pre-colonial till date clearly shows that it is a continent with all the potentialities for greatness. What is largely lacking is the proper leadership that could successfully harness abundant natural resources of Africa for sustainable growth and development. The development of Africa is in the hands of Africans as President Barack Obama of the United States of America rightly observed in his recent trip to Ghana. Therefore, what Africa needs to step into the terrain of greatness are a political leadership that has integrity, accountability, transparency, vision, the education, the will, the credibility and the capacity to manage the process of change and a followership that is ready to change its attitude, its ways and taste. These are necessary qualities and attributes required in African Leadership to guarantee sustainable growth and development of the continent.

Key Words: Good governance; Sustainable development; Leadership; Africa

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INTRODUCTION

One way of measuring the success or failure of governments in modern societies is to assess how successful such governments are in developing the

conditions for satisfying the basic needs of the people they govern. These needs include basic infrastructure, social services, public services and helping to create an efficient and productive economy. In addition, the effectiveness of such government is measured by their ability to mobilize or generate adequate resources (financial, human and material), and to optimally utilize these resources to meet basic needs, as well as facilitate opportunities on the path of socio-economic development generally (Ayo, 2000, p. 19, citing Stohr, 1981, p. 1-2). But there is also the presupposition that the capacity of governments to achieve these goals depends on the style or approach adopted by them in pursuing them (Ayo, *ibid* in Taylor, 1992, p. 214-258). As far as African countries are concerned, several scholars have argued that the crisis these countries are facing stems essentially from the structurally-defective pattern of governance adopted by the elites since political independence in the 1960s (Wunsch & Olowu, 1990, p. 3-4 cited in Ayo, 2000, p. 19).

Good governance is the missing link in African leadership as was identified recently by the President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama, in his recent visit to Ghana. The history of Africa in the 20th century was fraught with reports of conflicts, domination, exploitation, dehumanization etc., none of which is an index of development, not to talk of sustainable growth and development (Okoye, 2001, p. 122). This situation can only change when the respective countries of the continent achieve a positive change in the character and orientation of their government leadership. The leaders can bring this desired change by promoting good governance in African leadership through integrity, accountability and transparency, which would lead to attainment of sustainable growth and development in the continent. Thus, Chinua Achebe (1983) cited in Okoye (2001, p. *ibid*) argues in respect of Nigeria that the Nigerian problem is the indent unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge

of personal example, which are the hallmarks of true leadership. He however, opines that Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision.

The logic and imperatives of a change from the present state of underdevelopment and widespread human misery in Africa to a state of sustainable development are rooted in the fact that the prevalent failure of leadership in the continent is simply a socio-political phenomenon which would be reversed in the desired direction once peoples who have been intellectually, experientially and morally equipped for that purpose take up the mantle of leadership (Okoye, 2001). The leaders needed in Africa must be integral part of the people in terms of the socio-economic and political experiences and vision of a better tomorrow for all. Those qualities are additional to the qualities of high intellect, far-reaching experience, consciousness of being an integral part of the people and sound moral life which African leaders must exhibit in order to bring about good governance in African leadership through integrity, accountability and transparency, considered as the antidote to sustainable growth and development in the continent.

This work is intended to examine critically:

1. What kind of leaders is needed in Africa?
2. How can they be recruited?
3. What kind of political system is to be developed in Africa?
4. How can this political system be developed?

It is necessary to examine the African Political Leadership in historical perspective in order to contextualize and understand the kind of leadership we have at present in Africa.

AFRICAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The discussion on African political leadership in historical perspective is aptly captured in the works of Okoye (2001, p. 118). In this work, Okoye attempted a succinct and vivid explanation of the background of the African States, which gave rise to the present poor leadership in the continent and the attendant underdevelopment.

The experiences of politicking at the early years of the post-colonial African states actually suggest that the first generation of African political leaders were nurtured as part of the artifacts of the colonial state and, consequently, part of the colonial legacies bequeathed to the post-colonial states. After all, 'the basis of the post colonial state in Africa is the colonial state'. Therefore, the orientation of leadership that has developed in virtually all the post-colonial African states perceives state power as a market tool in a capitalist system. The massive investments by politicians on political activities are done with business motive and risk. In that respect, Ake (1981, p. 129) remarks that tendency to accumulate through the use of state power rather than through productive makes

post-colonial capitalism less conducive to the development of productive forces and the increase of surplus. With private economic interest tacitly tied to state power in Africa, and the consequent unscrupulous struggle to capture and exercise it which has continued to exacerbate endemic conflicts and economic underdevelopment in the continent, leadership in Africa has remained a primary excruciating burden that the continent must successfully address before its dreams of development would be realized. What exists presently has been succinctly described by Ake as a government tendentiously used by the hegemonic faction of the bourgeoisie to manipulate state power, a state with limited potential for mediating the class struggle, and endemic political instability arising from too high a premium on political power.

With particular reference to Nigeria as the giant of Africa, Kalu (1995, p. 1) in his book titled: *The Leadership Question -- Power and Poverty in Nigeria*, critically examined the political leadership in the country since independence and concluded that just like other African countries it is based on what he called "Deliberate Buffoonery". "Deliberate Buffoonery", Kalu meant "cheating and deceit" which had kept the majority of the citizens perpetually marginalized and exploited.

According to Kalu (1994, p. 1), Nigeria is a wealthy African country where billions of dollars are made annually from the sale of crude oil. During the 1970's, the nation was so over-flooded by petro-dollars that its leadership, groaning under the pains of opulence and over-abundance, openly declared "... our problem is not money but how to spend it". But that was a false claim. The truth is that Nigerian leaders know what to use money for: they expend it on the direct greasing of repression which make millionaires out of a few, and beggars out of millions of the populace.

Kalu identifies Leadership in Nigeria, as always been synonymous with success in plundering the national wealth. This accounts for why, in spite of the uninterrupted flow of petroleum from 1958 to 1991, very many Nigerians still live substandard life. They roam the slums in herds, feed from garbage dumps, drink from infested springs and sleep in caves. Paulo Freire would define those millions as 'animals' because, like animals, they lack objectives, which they cannot set for themselves. They live submerged in a predatory world to which they can give no meaning. And the immediate consequence? Nigeria has regressed to an instance where Paulo Freire's "animals" have formed a political system for themselves -- a system where the head instinct is the moving psychological force; and where, because of the progenic inclination to loafing, Nigerians have become incapable of objectifying both themselves and their activity.

Kalu (1994, p. 4) observed that it is consoling to say that 50 years in the life of a nation is like a fleeting seconds. It is another consolation to say that the developed countries did stumble and fall, did try and fail,

as Nigeria is doing, before they assumed prominence in the annals of world history. But Ray Ekpu has shown that this consolation merely begs the question because “it is the prerogative of man, as a rational being, to profit from the lessons of history, to benefit from the experiences of others and to achieve in a shorter time what it took others before him a longer time to achieve”. Furthermore, Kalu summarized his findings about the government of Nigeria by her leaders as equivalent to the lunatic contradictions identified in the Syed Hussein Alata’s concept of “the fool in government”. A fool in power sleeps comfortably on a heap of debts, allows the quality of life of its own people to degenerate at a frightening rate, facilitates the collapse of moral responsibility; and connives with private interlopers or multinational financial institutions to subject the national economy to an unyielding massive plunder – with neither a thought for tomorrow nor a merciful concession to the generations unborn. Who, then, are the “fools” of Nigerian government?

What easily comes to mind are those who sneak into office and steal political power and use it to act out their reliance on violence as a legitimate political instrument, debase the moral foundation of the political process and the people’s inalienable right to direct its course; those who use the marginal power at their disposal to loot the national wealth, instigate ethnic and religious crises to their own advantage and organize the systematic liquidation of those whom they are paid to protect; and those whose traditional instrument of terror are mass starvation, the detention and imprisonment of challengers and other anti-populist measures which impede the speedy mobilization of mass discontent.

Accordingly, stated metaphorically, a fool in government is the surgeon with a blunt scalpel, a teacher incapable of creative thinking and the distribution of positive knowledge; the soldier armed with a political Dane-gun of Machiavellian statecraft; an engineer who is ignorant of the theoretical perspective which governs structure and design, the pharmacist who lacks knowledge of the chemical components of drugs, etc. Such enfooled professional categories are comparable to the leader or regime without the relevant strategy for development; or the follower who perpetuates his own slave-status with the plea that the forces against his liberation are too enormous to be surmounted. The above is the scenario of government in Nigeria by her leaders.

RE-ENGINEERING AFRICAN POLITICAL LEADERS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – THE WAY FORWARD

The review of African political leadership in historical perspective by Israel Okoye (2001) and Victor Kalu (1994)

are both disturbing and worrisome. Africa according to Professor Achebe (1983, p. 3) had lost the twentieth century and the activities of the present political leadership in the continent from all indications are hell bent on seeing that our children also lose the twenty-first century as well. However, God will not allow this to happen again. Consequently, the only option open to African leaders to prevent the repeat of the tragedy of the twentieth century is to promote Good Governance in African leadership through integrity, accountability and transparency which are the antidote to sustainable growth and development, which is what the continent requires to move forward and take its proper place among other continents.

In order to redirect the course of events in Africa towards a sustainable growth and development, Africans, especially those who exercise political authority need to be re-socialized, re-conscientized, and imbibed with a new sense of people-centred development.

Africa needs strong and self-confident leaders who should be creators of great ideas, who command the loyalty of their people, who are totally committed to the development of their countries and to peace and brotherhood among nations. The kind of leaders required to promote good governance in Africa in the 21st century are those leaders who possess strong character and principles founded in integrity, accountability and transparency. Such leaders must live above board and most importantly have strong mission and vision to attract the desired support both from within and outside the continent.

The situation of political leadership in African countries at present is nothing to write home about. It has nothing to cheer up anybody or make Africa proud in any form. Most African countries suffer hunger, insecurity, instability, unemployment, diseases, and underdevelopment. There is high level of corruption, mismanagement, embezzlement, dishonesty, lack of transparency, unaccountability, irresponsibility and indiscipline within most governments in Africa. African leaders pay lip service to good governance. In Nigeria for example, just like in most other African states, the indicators of good governance is very low when assessed and evaluated. The level of infrastructural development such as roads, housing, electricity, hospitals, etc. are sub-standard. The educational system is in disarray; the life expectancy is very low; insecurity is the order of the day with threats from armed robbers and assassins, etc. The institutions of government, namely - the executive, judiciary and legislature could not provide for responsible government. The majority of the citizens live in poverty and under sub-human conditions. This is an indication that good governance is far-fetched.

The present generation of Africans cannot take care of themselves talk less of providing for future generation yet unborn. The condition of misrule and bad governance does not give room to talk of sustainable growth and

development in the continent at the moment. The major concern in African leadership at the moment is how to enthrone the culture of good governance to make life more meaningful to the citizens.

Consequently, African states need leaders with strong moral character that can govern the various countries with integrity, accountability and transparency. The main problem is how to recruit such leaders that can turn things around and lead by good example.

The majority of African scholars in the past had blamed misrule and bad governance in the continent by the political leadership on our colonial experience and heritage. The question that we must ask ourselves and which had remained largely unanswered is how long would we continue to blame our woes and underdevelopment arising from bad governance on colonialism which had ended several years ago with the attendance of independence by all the African countries. The truth of the matter which some of us share is that African leaders and the people do not want to take their destiny into their hands. As the popular saying goes "the down fall of a man is not the end of his life". Therefore, that Africa was sometimes colonized just like some other countries which had made it development wise is not enough excuse for the leaders not to rise up and embrace the challenges required to bring about sustainable growth and development in the continent.

It is necessary if hard truth must be told for Africa to restructure its political and administrative institutions in order to promote good governance in the continent. The urgent need for this restructuring can be illustrated using Nigeria as an example.

In Nigeria both in the past and at present, by whatever standard of assessment and evaluation that may be applied; there had been absence of good governance e.g. life expectancy has dropped to 45 years, unemployment rate is about 50%; inflation rate 25%; per capita income below \$1 U.S. dollar etc. (UNDP Report, 2002). The leaders for benefit of doubt may have had good intention; but good intentions are not enough because they could not translate these intentions into practical and tangible things. The previous and present governments of the country have continued to battle the same problem of poverty, corruption, diseases, insecurity, unemployment, moral decadence, decay in infrastructures etc. All sectors for development in Nigeria are sick e.g. agriculture, education, economy, power (electricity), health etc. No matter the extent any leadership may claim to be visionary and mission oriented, the fact remains that if the regime could not impact positively by improving the standards of living of the people that is an indication of bad governance.

The desired leaders that can promote good governance in African leadership through integrity, accountability and transparency could be recruited through the following ways:

- (i) Institution of transparent, integrity-driven and accountable electoral system.

- (ii) Institution of the culture of integrity, accountability and transparency into the three arms of the Government - Executive, Legislature and Judiciary.
- (iii) Reforms in the health sector to ensure emergency of healthy leaders and followers that understand the meaning of good life and strive for good governance.
- (iv) Reforms in the educational sector to ensure training of qualitative leaders and followers who can bring about good governance in the near future.

Development in agriculture to ensure food security and emergence of well fed leaders and followers that can show patriotism to their fatherland.

The following steps are considered apt to achieve the desired objective above:

ELECTORAL REFORMS

There is need for urgent electoral reforms in the electoral systems of various African countries in order to build into it the culture of integrity, accountability and transparency into the electoral process. The electoral process through which most African leaders came to power is flawed with corruption, irregularities, dishonesty, fraudulence and violence. The electoral commissions that handle and conduct elections in Africa lack the culture of integrity, accountability and transparency required to elect men and women of goodwill into offices. More often than not, the votes cast by the electorates in most African countries do not count in the election/selection of their leaders.

To quote the words of the Executive Governor of Anambra State, Mr. Peter Obi, "it is not wise or advisable for one to answer His Excellency, when he knows that the process that brought him to power is not excellent". The process that brought most political leaders in Africa as we know are not excellent, therefore we cannot have such leaders promoting good governance in African leadership through integrity, accountability and transparency which would bring about sustainable growth and development in the continent.

It is advisable that all African countries should undertake urgent electoral reforms which should guarantee the complete independence of the Electoral Commission and ensure that the electoral process is transparent, integrity-driven and accountable. This is the only way to recruit leaders that would be acceptable to the electorate and command the respect, loyalty and support necessary for sustainable growth and development in the continent. Anything short of this will be asking for a revolution, which is in tandem with the popular saying that "those who resist peaceful change, call for violent one".

INSTITUTION OF THE CULTURE OF INTEGRITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY INTO THE THREE ARMS OF GOVERNMENT – EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY

The executive arm of the government must come up with policies that would eliminate corruption in government. The setting up of Anti-Corruption Agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in Nigeria for example without the adequate political will to deal with corrupt practices are not good enough. Until those in government who enrich themselves through corruption are adequately dealt with like what happened in Ghana sometimes, integrity, accountability and transparency would hardly be observed by those leaders in government to bring about good governance. The reason being, that, the only instrument for quick, easy material and financial acquisition without hard work is through political office facilitated by corruption. Therefore, corruption must be eliminated in our public office through whatever means possible before sustainable growth and development can be attained.

Furthermore, the legislative arm of the government must rise up to the occasion by passing relevant laws and carrying out necessary oversight functions in order to ensure that the executive and those who hold public office observe the culture of integrity, accountability and transparency necessary for good governance. This follows that the members of the legislature must be honourable men and women who live above board by shunning all forms of corruption and corrupt practices.

The implication of this is that members of the legislature must be elected through a transparent, accountable and integrity-driven electoral process that would give them the self-confidence and public support necessary to pass the relevant laws and perform oversight functions which will result in good governance; sustainable growth and development. The legislature in most African States as presently constituted lack this quality and character desired to bring about the necessary change.

The Judiciary is another arm of the government that has failed to live up to the expectations. The judiciary in most of the cases had remained complacent and allowed a lot of things to go wrong. In fact, the consensus of opinions has it that the judiciary in several cases when they were put on trial had compromised and failed in giving justice which would have compelled the political leaders in Africa to show integrity, accountability and transparency necessary for good governance in the continent. Moreover, most members of the judiciary rose to their positions through political patronage and they see it as a duty to payback those in power that facilitated their

rise by perverting justice whenever occasion demands for such favour. Therefore, the three arms of government in Africa in most countries require radical transformation to become instruments for positive change which would usher in good governance through integrity, accountable and transparent leadership for sustainable growth and development.

Similarly, African governments require an independent free press that should serve as watchdog over the electoral process and the activities of the various arms of the government to guarantee good governance and leadership. At present the Press in most African countries lack the required freedom and independence necessary to recruit such leaders desired to bring about the necessary changes in governance through integrity, accountability and transparency. It is advisable that the press should be encouraged and allowed to play the necessary role like their counterparts in Europe to guarantee good governance in Africa.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

There is need to reduce poverty in Africa by improving the standard of living of the people so that they rise up to their civic responsibilities. The greatest harm and damage which poverty does to its victims is to remove shame from their faces. It is because of poverty that most electorates and other citizens make themselves available as instrument in the hands of politicians to facilitate and perpetuate bad governance in Africa. The citizens as a result of poverty are willing to accept any kind of conditions imposed on them and incapable of taking their destiny in their hands by protesting against lack of good governance. Therefore, if government can adequately address the issue of poverty in Africa through provision of food, employment, health-care, industrialization, good roads, hospitals, schools, electricity, housing, portable water, etc., this will help to create the necessary climate change required for emergence of good leadership in Africa that will reflect the culture of integrity, accountability and transparency which would spur sustainable growth and development.

IMPROVEMENT IN QUALITATIVE EDUCATION

The major reasons for Africa producing leaders that cannot give good governance while in office is because of the total decay and collapse of her educational system. The educational system in most African countries such as Nigeria has suffered from serious brain drain, which undoubtedly had affected the quality of graduates from the tertiary institutions. The education system in Africa had produced graduates who rig elections; engage in thuggery; armed robbery; drug trafficking; violence; cultism and other social vices. This is very unfortunate. It is a paradox.

The institutions of higher learning like university, was once regarded as “Ivory tower” where men and women of integrity, accountability and transparency are trained and prepared for future leadership of their countries.

Presently, the universities in Africa have become fortresses and centres for corruption. It now harbours and trains graduates not equipped for challenges of national leadership and development but for facilitating underdevelopment of their countries through engaging in all kinds of unwholesome practices which are anti-development. Therefore, there must be radical transformation in the educational system of most African countries especially Nigeria, if leaders who will promote good governance in Africa leadership through integrity, accountability and transparency are to be developed through qualitative education.

CONCLUSION

The history of Africa from the pre-colonial epoch till date clearly shows that it is a continent with all the potentialities for greatness. In other words, all the human and material resources for development are in abundance in Africa. What is largely lacking is the proper leadership that could successfully harness these resources for development purposes (Okoye, 2001:130). The development of Africa is in the hands of Africans, as President Barack Obama of the United States of America rightly observed in Ghana recently and the key to sustainable growth and development in the continent is good governance by African leaders. Consequently, what Africa needs to step into the terrain of greatness are a political leadership that has vision, the education, the will, the credibility and the capacity to manage the process of change, and a followership that is ready to change its attitude, its ways and its taste (Adebo, 1991). Finally, to enhance sustainable development and growth in Africa through integrity, accountability and transparency in leadership, such leadership must have credibility and attract the support, loyalty and commitment of the people. It must emerge through the democratic process in which the people enjoyed an unencumbered right to exercise their franchise. In that context, their votes should be relied upon in proclaiming electoral verdict.

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