

Leadership Challenge in Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria, 1960-2015

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Abstract

The failure of leadership in Africa after independence to address the question of underdevelopment in the continent have manifested into problems bedeviling African States like; increasing crime wave, drug trafficking, advanced fee fraud, terrorism, economic crisis, political instabilities, etc. The work therefore, shows the political systems and primordial attachment that help to build the leadership in Africa and its resultant issues that lead to the poor performance of African leaders especially Nigerian leaders in governance since independence. The work narrates a general view of African States leadership and reasons why in spite of the challenges of the crisis of under development in the continent of Africa leadership performance have been so poor. It shows the sit light nature of Nigerian leaders in governance even when they are performing poorly, the use of ethno-religious sentiments as measures to either remain in power or as means to acquire political power and use it for selfish reasons. The study also gives tips on the various leaders that mounted the leadership of Nigeria since independence in 1960. The research will adopt analytical and descriptive method in its findings and anchoring the study on game theory. The work concludes that there is nothing wrong with the political systems in practice in Africa. The struggle to acquire power by our politicians or military personnel at all cost by using or generating sentiments in order to be in control of the resources and the people is where the problems is in the continent of Africa - as there is no personal zeal to leave the legacy of an exemplary leadership.

Introduction

The numerous problems which have been bedeviling African states vis - a vis ethnic and communal clashes, increasing wave of drug trafficking, advance fee fraud, terrorism, economic crisis, political instabilities, etc, have been blamed on ineffective leadership.

The failure of leadership in Africa after independence to address the question of underdevelopment in the continent has been the cause of the backwardness of the continent. Today, Africa faces the challenge of political, social and economic crisis in the 21st century even when there is abundance of natural resources that can accelerate development in the continent. This total failure of leadership in Africa is because there has not been the emergence of leaders in African States that are able to launch the continent into the path of growth and development, that one can feel in the daily living of the people of Africa.

African States leadership since independence have been enmeshed in ethnic nationalism instead of national interests of the various people in the different States they exercise these role of leadership responsibilities. They are selfishly corrupt instead to lead for the overall growth and development of the people of the States they rule. Even when they are ideologically prepared to take the lead of their continent towards the march for growth and development; neo-colonial tendencies in reap up ideologies set in problem that results in crisis of underdevelopment.

On this note the paper will discuss the following issues; the nature of party politics and political power in Africa, the parochial nature of African leadership, the syndrome of sit tight in governance, the lack of political will that are associated with African leadership after independence and the case of Nigerian leadership.

The Nature of Party Politics And Political Power in Africa

The party politics of African states since independence are geared towards creation of one State system. This of course no doubt resulted in the emergence of leadership that had not been able to wake up to the challenges of governance in the continent. As this resulted in the emergence of personality cult in the governance since the leader on acquisition of power is revered and seen above the political

institutions that brought them to power. Majority of African State embraced one party system as a condition for democratic pursuit after independence. The idea behind the acceptance of the one party system was that the "**Westminster model of Parliamentary System could not be transplanted to other areas of the globe successfully**"¹ without problem. That the African condition cannot be subjected to competitive parliamentary democracy without crisis; Mazrui and Tidy quoted the view of Jomo - Kenyatta to make the above point clearer that:

Constructive opposition from within is... not an alien thing in so far as the traditional African society is concerned. In other words, democracy could flourish in a single party political system. At the same time, the divisive tendencies of a multi-party system should be avoided... One party system may succeed in eliminating ethnically based Parties.²

There was high hope and belief that one party system would encourage stable leadership of the continent because it was believed then that it had the potentiality to put ethnic and divisive politics under check in African States. Countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Guinea, Ivory Coast, etc emerged into independence with one party State by popular vote in their respective States. In practice this did not stop ethnic politics rather it became a rally point for dominant ethnic group to exercise their dominium in the polity of their States. For instance, the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya had a greater control of the governance in the country given the practice of one party system.³

Leadership Challenges in Nigeria

In some countries of Africa like Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda that practice multi-party system, the leadership at independence concerned itself with how to acquire power without political ideology. The political parties lacked political ideology thereby giving the politicians an opportunity or freedom to jump from one political party to the other unhindered. This lack of political ideology breeds corruption in politics resulting to military intervention in politics in Africa. To that effect W. F. Gulteridge explained that

economic problems, corruption, political schism and general disillusionment have combined to create the climate in which coups can successfully take place.⁴

That is why Arthur A, Nwankwo noted that :

The introduction of the military into Nigerian politics is a sociopolitical phenomenon which cannot just be switched off like a machine. It is simply a phase in our effort in the three decades to build the Nigerian Nation – a phase that is an integral part of the socio-political metamorphosis of the geographical expression called Nigeria, a large nation of differing people welded into one citizenry, but who unfortunately live as strangers to one another.⁵

R. N. Okwudo could not agree less when he noted that the emergence of the military in Nigerian politics:

..... by 1966, social evils such as bribery and corruption, tribalism and nepotism had permeated all levels of government. Under the circumstances, the soldiers saw no alternatives to a drive against the civilian politicians, and the population generally welcomed their intervention.⁶

In most cases they defect to the ruling parties in governments instead of being in opposition in defense of their political ideology. The political parties are not divided along ideological lines or based on how to lead their countries to the paths of development, instead the political interests of the politician dictate their movements, actions and inactions. That is why Schuman noted that

“..... the ultimate technique of politics is the apportionment of material benefits among major strata of the social hierarchy ---the technique is ultimate in the

sense that the political process may be regarded as a product of competition and conflict among social groups for material and psychic satisfaction”⁷

B.J Dudley observed that those who hold positions in the power structure determines the location and distribution of scarce resources. Exclusion from this power position is hence very costly. In this regard, all gimmicks ranging from rigging, thuggery, rascality and violence are employed by the political class to capture power. He noted that

“the shortest cut to influence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics. To get politics there is always a price.....to be a member of the government party means open avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the likes.”⁸

He further posited that,

having known the profitability of having power, the party (and the individual members) naturally uses the same governmental machinery to remain in power. The leadership becomes a self- recruiting oligarchy and no self-recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate opposition to itself.⁹

In Nigeria, the situation has degenerated to ethnic and religious sentiments and considerations. The multi- party practice resulted in the domination of one political party over other political parties in a winner takes all bases. This helped to breed poor leadership, ethnicity, corruption, nepotism, religious sentiments, and all sorts of evil tendencies that help to degenerate governance and set in crisis associated to hindering nation building the more. This one party dominance system in Africa since the 1990s does not follow the normal pattern of party competition in a democracy. In some cases, it takes fraudulent practices to retain power by leaders of the ruling parties in Africa. In these countries of Africa where there is one party dominance; despite free - electoral competition, relatively open information systems, respect for civil liberties, and the right of free political association, a single party has managed to govern alone or as the primary and on - going partner in coalitions, without interruption, for substantial periods of time.

The continuation of a single party in African politics is of both ethnic and other divisive corrupt practices employed by the African leaders to manipulate governance to their favor even at the detriment of their citizen’s poor conditions. For instance, Nigeria had experienced such in her party politics in recent past, where the Peoples Democratic Party (P. D. P) dominated the governance of the country from 1999 to 2015; until the party was defeated out of power by the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC). The African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa is also an example in this case. The party has been in power since the 1990s in the country.

The condition of African States today show that whether one party or multi-party system practiced by leaders in governance none has been able to transform into good governance. From experience both systems in Africa as practiced did transform into autocratic leadership in Africa that subjected the people into hardship due to dependency syndrome created by former colonial powers and their African collaborators that has mortgaged African States economies under the direct control of the countries of the West.

The Parochial Nature of African Leadership

Most African leaders are parochial in nature. They lack the charisma for purposeful leadership that would be national in their programs in the continent. That is, they lack the capacity to inspire followers with devotion and enthusiasm. Apart from Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and others in their categories who emerged from colonialism into their various independent States with sound ideological programs to develop their States and the African continents¹⁰. Most of the leaders that came after them in independence States of Africa were leaders with parochial ideological tendencies whose economic cum political policies are often directed from the Western nations to the disadvantages of their citizenry. This kind of leadership in Africa personalized and

privatized political power for selfish agendas due to lack of vision and mission to transform their States for meaningful development. Afegbua and Adejuwon throw support to this kind of leadership in their work that;

. . . they are characterized by primordial parochial, Personalized and selfish tendencies, political -Brigandage, ethnic rivalry and cleavages clientelism and privatized States apparatuses.¹¹

The histories of great nations like Britain and America have been linked to visionary and purposeful leadership with mission to deliver their people from the challenges of their period. They have clear cut ideologies that were practicable and applicable to the problems of the societies they found themselves. African States lack this kind of leadership who could harness the resources and the ingenuity of their people for national development. The consequent of this kind of leadership is the underdevelopment of the African continent.

The Syndrome of Sit Tight Leadership in Africa

The greatest challenges to leadership in Africa are the tendency to remain in power perpetual even when leaders are performing poor in governance. This results in the abuse of power and the waste of the people resources to remain in power at all cost. There is a common saying that it is only the led that can keep their leader in power. This can only be possible when the leader has performed to the satisfaction of the people, economically, politically and otherwise. Most of African leaders that had tried to stay in power for long even when their people clamored for their removal did it at the cost of their lives. Others escaped from their countries when it became apparent that the people whom power belongs to were determined to take the power at all cost. Examples in recent time are; Idi Amin of Uganda, Samuel Doe of Liberia, Mobutu Tsetse Seko of Zaire, Muhammed Abacha of Nigeria, Muama Gaddafi of Libya, etc.

A good leader relinquishes power when the people demand it. He has nothing to do with power not willingly given to him by the people. He is guided by the constitution of the people he leads. There is a saying that **"a good leader is a good leader only because the people he is leading wanted, and allowed him to lead them. Whenever they say no, the good leader becomes a bad leader automatically"**¹². This is not the case of African leaders except in few cases like Nigeria in the 2015 general election where the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan was voted out of power and humbly handed over power to the opposition without crisis. His predecessors whether civilian or military rulers had reason to perpetuate themselves in power even when they were not wanted by the people and even the constitution do not allow them. This resulted into crisis that consumed the nation human and financial resources.¹³

Lack of Political Will

Most African leaders' lack the political will to face the challenges of underdevelopments in their States. Political will is the ability to do what is right within the context of national interest of the citizenry. The overturn of national interest for selfish pursuit is the lack of the political will to do what is best for the people that are led. It is the ability to apply solutions to problems of African States; to come up with nationalistic policies to confront issues of underdevelopment and poverty in this era of neo-colonialism in Africa. To demonstrate this as an example of what I mean- is the sacrifice of Nelson Mandela in South Africa to redeem the blacks from white minority oppression in the days of apartheid. The sacrifice of Mandela brought major breakthrough to blacks in the country today economically, politically and otherwise. The blacks are taking giant strides in industries and other vital areas of the country¹⁴. These were places of no go area in the days of apartheid in South Africa. That is the kind of leadership African needs in this period of neo-colonialism. A leader that can implement policies that would put Africans at the advantages side of imperialism-not the imperialistic belief by African leaders that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in independent African States promote sustainable economic growth and industrialization, even at the detriment of the Africans, there is no bold step to confront the menace of the multinationals to the favor of the continent. This of course led to poor performance in governance and the eventual underdevelopment of the continent of Africa.

African Leaders are Unproductive

Colonial model/System of Education helps to institutionalize mental colonialism Africa. Mental colonialization is a state where a person never a mental sees anything good in his/her culture, tradition, values and ways of life. It's a mental state that make a person treat with disdain, neglect and reject anything that has to do with his root and prefers foreign and imported cultures and way of life. One can pass through Western or American education and still remain mentally colonized. These people can best be described as educated illiterates cum remembrance tool for servitude.

It is vital for African leaders to remember that the blood of their ancestors is still running inside them and that their true identity is their mother tongue coined with their original culture and tradition which they were taught to disdain via one sided story of the Western and African world.

Political Instability

Political instability is not unfamiliar phenomenon, it is a characteristic found in Africa, middle East and Latin America. Since, all these areas are usually regarded as Undeveloped, it might be thought that political instability is a characteristic of the developing countries.

Taking an historical perspective, the political instability which has marked the progress of the new state could be seem as a phenomenon or a characteristic which seems to followed the process of establishing a centralized political authority over any territorial area. Britain, France and United State and practically all of the present western European States have gone through a similar experience. Besides, one could only have to think of the expedience of the new states.

Thus Finer noted that states falling into the class of countries with a low political culture are marked by political instability and the evidence that a country has a low political culture, is that it is politically unstable. One is the evidence of the other and vice versa, and we are faced with a circularity.¹⁵ The argument so far has attempted to suggest that instability should be seen as a necessary and inescapable condition in the creation of political order and is thus intimately bound up with the process of modernization and political development. This was also argued on the parallelism between game and politics.

However, for Pye, who concluded that the military is an Organ of modernization and that military in undeveloped countries can make a major contribution to strengthen essential administration function and are therefore instruments through which political stability can be maintained.¹⁶

A different and contradictory conclusion was arrived at by Coleman and Brice, that

"African State lack what many new state of the former colonial world has had, namely an army which would be a modernizing and stabilizing source of organizational strength in society, a standby resource which could be called in or could takeover to prevent external subversion or total collapse of political order".¹⁷

The recent coups have not merely disproved the former assertion, but go to show the essential adhoc nature of such generalization.¹⁸

The imbalance in the military was a product of Nigeria colonial heritage. As the ultimate instrument of coercion, the army was not only the institution over which the colonial administration was last to relinquish formal control, it was also the last to be indigenized. At the time of independence in 1960, only 17 percent of the officer corps of the army were Nigerian. The slow rate of indigenization is in sharp contrast to what obtained either in the police force or on the public service.

Thus, Ilorin watch magazine in a caption "for the stability of the third Republic" noted that military cannot be exonerated from these acts of brigandage. While every military administration comes in as a corrective regime, they end up messing the country. It is of the opinion that military cannot bring a

change overnight. The Nigeria people knows problems and are the best people to solve it. It concludes by saying that military should not interrupt the third republic¹⁹.

According to Odetola, while the military has proved progressive in some areas, it has not been so in others. The military is by definition and tradition an apolitical, institutionally conservative force, untrained in the tactics and strategies of civilian rule and political management. They have the desire to rule but they cannot lead these modernizing nations to advancement. The military is not a force for change.²⁰

It is important to note that military coup are forms of collective behaviour which as defined by Neil Smelser is an unconstitutional mobilization for action in order to modify one or more kind of strains on the basis of a generalized reconstitution of a component of action. Smelser, point to the fact that episodes of collective behaviour tend to occur when conditions of strain have arisen, but before social resource have been mobilized for a specific and possibly effective attack on the source of strain and add that, this is one reason for defining collective behaviour as uninstitutionalized, it occur when structure, social action is under strain and when institutionalized means for overcoming the strain are inadequate.²¹

On military intervention in Nigeria politics, Luckham, view the internal security operation in which military was asked to play a part mostly notably in pacifying the Tiv in 1960 and 1964, maintaining essential service during the 1964 general strike and policing the western region after the regional election of 1965 made it quite clear to those soldiers who cared to think about it that the survival of the existing political order depend upon them. He believes that thus was the instigator of intervention.²²

As Nwankwo noted, that military obstacle to democracy can only be broken by civilianizing the soldiers and militarizing the civilians. He observed that with the exception of January 1960 coup, all other military interventions were planned by the Bourgeois class who points accusing finger at their civilian counterpart. The soldier belongs to the society, saying that their political system is fake and illusive, as they vote for candidate during election. According to him military coup should be regarded as another way of election malpractice as it is unconstitutional.²³

Coming to election malpractice, according to Ugwuala analysis, election malpractice as the reason for the military intervention in first republic and second republic in Nigeria.

"We must not forget too quickly that it was similar allegation of election rigging in the former Eastern Region and the subsequent violent re-action against it, that threw the nation into chaos in 1965 and as a result gave military men the excuse for overthrowing the government on January 15 1966.²⁴

In the words of Luckham, it was the suffering and imposition of unfavourable political environmental condition from the civil violence in the western region that was set off by the regional election of October 1965 which provided the immediate stimulus for January 1966 coup.²⁵

But as Dudley noted that there may be no way of preventing the military for as long as they have superiority in means of mass destruction, for seizing political power in the newly independent states of one way to try to justify such seizures.²⁶

In his view Eze noted that "for authority to breakdown connotes the collapse of political system", which means that a party system had lost the legitimacy to rule, resulting to open invitation for military intervention in political order. He observed that

"In a situation where political power is seen as access to wealth, there is no doubt that there will be a lot of performance failures. Despondency among the governed and support-Input withdrawal are enough to provide the military with the excuse to intervene and arrest the situation

-----the regular changes against the overthrown government are corruption, squander mania etc, no matter the degree. In this case, power grows out of the barrel of a gun and the military in a broadcast to the nation or speech to the press can always give reasons for their intervention".²⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, leadership in Africa is marred by plethora of problems ranging from the above point raised in this paper and others not mention in this discuss. The reason for the underdevelopment of African continent is simply the failure of leadership. There is nothing bad with the political system in operations. What is bad is the character of the leaders. The struggle to acquire power in Nigeria by Nigerian politicians or military personnel at all cost, using or generating sentiments in order to be in control of the resources and the people is where the problems rest in Nigeria in particular and the continent of Africa in general. Hence there is no personal zeal by leaders in Africa to leave an exemplinary leadership.

Endnotes

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