

African Leaders And The Need For Political Re-Orientation

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Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of African leadership and governance crises in Africa. The study examined challenges African leadership across countries in the continent. The paper established the nexus between political leadership and re-orientation of leaders which serves as a precursor for good governance. It argued that political re-orientation can be achieved by advocating national consciousness through the educational system and campaign programme through academic intellectuals.

Key words: African Leaders, Governance, Leadership, Political Re-Orientation

Introduction

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. A call for a focus on leadership and governance is timely, important and no doubt topical, reflecting the worldwide thrust toward political and economic liberalization. Throughout the whole world, there has been an urgent desire among various people and government for unity, justice, peace and stability. The resurgence of this desire is not only explicable through their political policies alone; but also it is reflected in the social and economic policies (Obasola, 2002:9). In fact, most constituted governments in Africa have been undergoing serious and deepening politico-

economic crisis. These problems generated by political, social and economic instability and the prevalence of ethnic, communal and religious crises, which have bedeviled Africa, call our attention to the problems of leadership and governance in the continent. In other words, the staggering wave of violence, insecurity, increasing crime wave, economic recession, coupled with the break in law and order are the attributes to the problem of leadership and governance in Africa. Therefore, the quest for good leadership is a sine-qua-non for governance and sustainable development.

Scholars and theorists of development have often advanced external reasons and international politics of economy as prime causal agent of the problem of Africa's developmental quagmire (Rodney, 1981: 7) and others have adduced the inappropriateness of policies and lack of resources as reasons for the current state of affairs, this paper locates the actions and inaction of Africans and her leaders as being responsible for her poor state of development.

It is a truism that sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing "absolute declines on virtually all indices of socioeconomic development" (Lubeck, 1992:520). From one region to another, across Africa, millions of people have no access to safe drinking water and food, over 75% of Africans lack proper sanitation, and every year approximately 2 million children die in the 1st twelve months of their lives (Schwab, 2001:6). The continent is beset with dysfunctional infrastructure, poorer health prospect, wide spread corruption with more than half of her people living below the poverty line. Despite this avalanche of problems, in some African countries, there is an obvious lack of sense of urgency to seek an end to the pains and suffering of Africans. In spite of the so many natural resources in various parts of Africa, there is a lack of commitment to both institutional and personal discipline as exemplified by the level of corruption, unaccountable affluence and unrestrained greed as well as insubordination to the rule of law on the part of the elites and the political class (Meredith, 2006: 3).

Over the years, scholars have attempted to advance reasons as to the cause of the present decay and infrastructural collapse in Sub-Saharan Africa. Historical reasons such as slavery and colonialism, geographical reasons such as environmental factors and topography, bad policies and influences as well as evident failure of African leaders after independence to organize and develop their countries have often been adduced as responsible for the African current state of affairs. Advocates of a new Africa and the need to emancipate the continent from the shackle of poverty, underdevelopment and the like, have often advanced reasons and justifications for African's present predicament. However and most often, they have located these reasons majorly from the external perspective. While various theorists have attempted a justification for the Africa's state of poverty, it is worth noting that the post-colonial zeal of the early nationalist never envisaged this. For instance, the numerous agitations by respective nationalist leaders of the various African countries had the ultimate aim of economic development and physical growth for their respective countries (Ayittey, 2005:57). These dreams can be achieved African Leaders need to re-oriented to be proactive to the demands of their people.

Re-orientation according to Kaura (2009: 9) connotes an awareness of one's temporal, practical or circumstantial situation. It is the process of drawing one's attention to, and helping him to reflect on his societal values which at the end should result to behavioral modification. It is also an act of reconsideration of philosophical and acceptable ideologies that form national belief system which are workable for the individuals and national development. What Africa need is a value based system which would directly translate into value based citizenship from whom leaders emerged. Doing this requires conscious ethical revolution through moral (value) education and value re-orientation through the mass media, the home or family, society, religious organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Leadership and governance in Africa's scenario leaves sour taste in the mouth and depicts abject poverty and misery in the midst of abundance. Attempts have been ongoing to explain these concepts in Africa's history and the continent's contact with colonialism. Ake (1996: 140) contends that it is true that Africa's colonial history and its place in the world system have not been conducive to independence. He however rightly argues that matters have not been helped by the performance of most African leaders in about five decades of independence. With few exceptions, their rule have been notable for oppression, corruption, social disorganization, demise of development project and growing poverty (1996, p. 141). In the same vein, Ottosen (2010: 3) notes that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) recognizes the responsibility of African leaders even if emphasis was still placed on the legacies of colonialism: 'post-colonial Africa inherited weak states and dysfunctional economies, which were further aggravated by poor leadership, corruption and bad governance in many countries.' On his part, Ibrahim (2012) explains that there is nothing wrong with African people or the continent while however observing that good people and good land do not necessarily make for successful countries. He observes that it is good leadership – the steadfast pursuit of a vision, the ability to take risks and make difficult choices – and good governance – the management of those risks and implementation of choices made that is lacking. Hence, improving government and governance on the continent requires a good dose of both.

Furthermore, Ake (1996, p. 135) attempts to chronicle leadership and democratization processes in Africa, he notes that a strong movement for democracy is firmly in place in Africa, and it has had considerable success. For about two decades ago, military rule, one-party systems, and personal rule were the standard fare in Africa. Now they are the exception rather than the rule. An impressive number of African countries can boast of electoral competition, constitutionalism, popular participation, and a respectable human rights record notwithstanding the rate of its lopsidedness and how negatively skewed to the strangulation of opposition and minorities. But the pressures for democratization are so strong that for most of Africa, it is no longer a question of whether there will be a democratic transition but when and how. The recent experience in the Gambia defined the resolve of African states (through regional and sub-regional formations enforce democratic ethos) to accept democracy and popular participation. The prediction of Ake (1996: 146) has also manifested in the popular protest in North Africa, dubbed the "Arab Spring," in the form of demonstrations against high rates of unemployment, poverty, rampant government repression and corruption. Chatora (2012: 6) observes that

against the background of the Arab Spring, it has been argued that this new type of political activism and participation will spread across the rest of African Continent.

Sequel to the above background, we will take a cursory look at political leadership in Africa and re-orientation of leadership in order to establish the nexus between political leadership and re-orientation of leaders which serves as a precursor for good governance.

Conceptual Review

African Leadership

Graig (2005:132) defined leadership as a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals. While Robert et al (2004: 22) affirms that leadership involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers, and the situation. With so many definitions of leadership, Hackman (2006) classified these conceptions into four primary definitional themes; these are;

(a) Leadership is about what you are: this definitional theme focuses on leader traits and attributes and is one of the oldest ways of conceptualizing leadership. This emphasis is on identifying the characteristics that define natural or born leaders.

(b) Leadership is about how you act: From this perspective leadership is defined as the exercise of influence or power. To identify leaders, we need to determine who is influencing whom. For instance Hersey (2014:14) defines leadership as “any attempt to influence the behavior of another individual or group”.

(c) Leadership is about what you do: This definitional thread focuses on the role that leaders play.

(d) Leadership is about how you work with others: This definitional theme emphasizes collaboration. Leaders and followers establish mutual purposes and work together as partners to reach their goals (Poulin, 2007:302).

In the views of Aguda (2015:26) a person may attain the position of leadership in one of several ways. The first method is self imposition, which is totally devoid of constitutionality. Secondly, a group of persons may forcefully impose a leader on the generality of people. Nigeria, for instance have of course become aware of this since 1966. A person may come to the position of leadership through a demonstration of leadership qualities over a long period of time. Examples of such are Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Sertse Khama of Botswana, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.

The effective African leader looks for commitment from people, rather than compliance and relates to people in intuitive and empathetic ways. Commitment is necessary if people are to use their initiative, and share responsibility for achieving the vision. This leader depends on persuasion, on conceptualizing the desired future and is at ease with risk as opposed to the concern with predictability. Cooperation, compassion, respect for the dignity of persons and

communality in a virtuous society are important. However, African leaders have frequently come to their position with limited experience. Though most of them have battled on, confronting their awesome problems of development and nation-building essentially not only unprepared but unaided, their efforts have been at best only a qualified success. There are no institutions in Africa devoted to preparing potential leaders with a global outlook, leaders who will be able to cooperate within and across national, regional and institutional boundaries. Furthermore, it is difficult if not impossible, in many African countries to gain access to relevant and timely information on most national, regional and global issues.

Obasanjo (1993: 15) noted that, it need to be realized that the morass of governance in Africa emerged primarily as a result of lack of checks and balances in Africa's system of governance. In effect, for some African leaders, their nation ended up being treated as their individual personal property. In other cases, a decline in moral and discipline caused or combined with bad policies, eroded professional standards and ethics and weakened the system of governance. Poor governance become the major challenge and source of Africa's predicament and socio-economic crises. Only a few African leaders have voluntarily left office; most others were assassinated or were disposed by military coups. In the past, many African leaders would align or threaten to align with the "communist" bloc or "capitalist" bloc in exchange for the support that allowed them to stay in power. It is against these backdrops, the critical appraisals of the African crises often identify the leadership and governance as the major variables to correctly historicize the nature, character and dimensions of the African problem.

Re-Orientation

Re-orientation is the act of figuring out again where you are in relationship to your environment, or changing direction. The re-orientation of values system as stated by Njoku (2015) is conscious development of human resources through ideological appeals, planning, training, productivity and efficiency in achievements through cooperate culture. Africa needs cultural change agents that will leverage both business and non-profit platforms to offer leadership development training to a large proportion of the population. Such agents must have experienced a change in their own mind-sets. Development partners around the globe who genuinely seek Africa's transformation should appreciate that the extractive leadership structures in that part of the world will not allow the intellectual, material and financial resources they distribute to create any meaningful and lasting change on the continent. They should cut down on the volume of financial aid, while partnering with cultural change agents who are democratizing the development of leaders at all levels, enhancing the evolution of inclusive political and economic structures

The Challenges of Leadership and Governance in Africa

The problem which troubles Africans most is the failure of political leadership. There are of course failures in other domains, but these are traceable in the consciousness to political leadership deficiencies. Seteolu (2004:74) summarizes the challenge from Nigerian perspective thus;

The political elites is not a productive class, but rely on the control of state structures to access economic rewards. The over politicization of the Nigerian state is also understood in the context of the unmediated struggle for power, influence and patronage. The nature of political contest ensured the emergence of a local governing class without ideological commitment. Rather than pursue political contests within ideological frameworks, politics became a contested terrain for shallow, self-centered political gains

The de-ideologisation of African politics means that aspirant political leaders do not see a pressing need to state their macro-vision for the continent. There is no explicit formulation of any systems values. The nature of Nigerian state evolved a predatory political class that was concerned with power struggle, consolidation, alignment and realignment in the context of hegemonic control... This is linked to the lack of ideology in the political space, monetization of the political process, expand the basis of political participation and canvass alternative policy agenda (Seteolu, 2004). Obi (2000: 16) also pointed out that;

Political leadership is parochial rather than national; and corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation. Ethnic diversity is manipulated to stay afloat to the detriment of national cohesion. There is an embarrassing lack of national heroes. The failure was usually explained either by the easy manipulability of the cultural pluralist background, or by the “two publics” antagonism.

The personalize nature of rule in so many African countries means not only that public policy making lacks the logic and empirical content that typically characterizes such an activity in order contexts but also that governance structures are largely informal and subject to arbitrary change (Hyden,1992:23). Following the widespread abuses of civil and political rights by such rulers as Idi Amin, Emperor Bokassa, and Macias Nguema in the late 1970's, however, Africans gradually began to recognize their significance. One of the most important messages coming out in literatures is that African government can no longer at will, by invoking the demand for national unity; violate civil and political rights of their citizens.

Nigeria, which is the largest country in the continent of Africa has a dearth of genuine leaders. Also equally relevant and important is the absence of political will. A political will is the compelling force for sound leadership quality, the ability to do what is right, what is relevant and what is attainable within the context of patriotic nationalism. Political will very often means personal or group sacrifices. It implies the ability to implement policies that have a nationalistic important and relevant without allowing pockets of interest to detract from what should naturally be of national benefit. In contemporary Africa, Nelson Mandela represents that model of leadership by personal sacrifice to redeem his people from servitude (Isekhure, 1995:141-142). In light of the above, Eze (2008:96) has this to say about leadership in Nigeria;

In considering the Nigerian situation, there seem to be certain issues in Nigerian leadership which require experimental investigations. For instance, it has been generally asserted that Nigerian management are marked by authoritarian

leadership characteristics and practices. They are said to have maintained a rigid dictatorial approach, as well as master-servant, rider-horse relationship with subordinates. In fact, it is been said that a Nigerian man is by nature and training an autocrat who demands nothing but respect and obedience from his subordinates, and those younger and lower in status than him. Also in public sector, the leadership have been associated with certain undesirable traits such as double- standards, pursuance of selfish goals, lack of seriousness and indiscipline.

Most African leaders assumed their role with limited experience and training in the art and science of directing and effectively managing the affairs of a modern state (Kamuntu,1993:103). The challenge to African leaders is thus to develop the capacity that would enable us to strike a balance between the values of African societies and the governance that our nations must follow. However, the concern must be to blend the two rather than to treat them as if they were mutually exclusive.

The political power in Africa became concentrated in one political party and finally in hand of one leader. Making the rise of the supremacy of the office of the President over all organs of government, most African Presidents enjoyed re-election in perpetuity without any competition. Kamuntu (1993) observes further that consequent resistant to the concentration of power to the hands of one man – the President was brutally suppressed with greater violations of human rights, resulting in massacres and millions of Africans becoming refugees or becoming displaced persons and many qualified African's seeking employment opportunities in foreign countries in search of personal security. Africa's continuing crisis presents a tremendous challenge to the continent and its leadership.

It is most unfortunate that political leadership aspirants in Africa do not see a pressing need to state their macro vision for the continent. There is no explicit formulation of any systematic values. Political leadership in Africa is parochial rather than national; it corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation. Agbaje and Roberts (2002:154), pointed out that:

post independence leaders in Africa not only personalized power but also privatized the state for the purpose of primitive accumulation, clientelism, repression and all forms of opposition. Instead of using the state for initiating development, African leaders utilized it as a vehicle for terrorizing the citizenry, thereby leading to the disengagement of the populace from the public realm.

The above statement shows that leadership and their cohorts in Africa have simply privatized the state for their selfish interest. Leadership in Africa is characterized by primordial parochial, personalized and selfish tendencies, political brigandage, ethnic rivalry and cleavages, clientelism and privatized state apparatuses. Indeed, respected, visionary leaders that are of proven integrity are needed to captain the ship of the nations of Africa, such a leader of the people must have vision and mission. He should incarnate all ideals, for

which his party stands and be able to actualise the promises of the party to the electorate (Adeola, 2007:110-111).

Leadership or lack of it has been said to be a major bane of Africa. Africans have all agree that the fundamental problem militating development in Africa is the poverty of leadership making it the key issue even in the process of democratization. Thus, Adeola (2007:107) argues further that;

The history of great nation have been linked to visionary and purposeful leadership, be it in the advanced industrialized countries or developing nations. Such leaders have played significant roles in the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their countries. Closely linked to leadership is ideology. In the absence of visionary leadership to give a clear-cut ideology, nations continue to lack orientation and commitment. Consequently, leadership has failed to harness the resources and the ingenuity of the people for national development.

The trouble with Africa is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the African character or political system in operation. The character of political leadership became a problem as most of them lost or lacked control of effective leadership. This led to the scramble and partition of state resources to suit their purpose.

Achieving good leadership through re-orientation in Africa

Consciousness in the first place connotes an awareness of phenomena. An awareness which could either be of the self or the other. Transposing this understanding, national consciousness would imply awareness or knowledge of certain elements that constitute a nation such as her cultural values, national history, languages religion, economy and political system(s). In other words, national consciousness entails the summation of a person's knowledge or awareness of all the features of his nation and a commitment to acting in such manner that will attest to the fact that they possess this knowledge.

The proposal as made is simply an attempt to establish a link between the rhetoric of academics and the existential conditions of our being in Africa, a point which the likes of Olusegun Oladipo and Tseneý Serequeberhan had made separately. In Oladipo's view Africa's 'participation in a universal cultural dialogue can be significant only if it is based on a firm foundation of concrete theories and ideas we have developed by ourselves in the attempt to come to term with the African reality in its various interlocking dimension' (Oladipo, 1992: 100). For Serequeberhan, 'the concrete resurrection of Africa beyond the tutelage of Europe requires in all spheres of life- a rethinking of the contemporary state of affairs in terms that are conducive and congenial to the emancipation and growth of Africa and its diverse peoples' (Serequeberhan, 2011: 23). It is in line with these views that our paper emphasizes the reawakening of national consciousness in the practice of altruism as the way out.

It is a known fact that in Africa, the present situation of things favors some people and these categories of persons would do all things to prevent and thwart the desired change. This

thus creates further gap in our recommendation and as such, the question of the possibility of this re-awakening remains paramount. In line with this, a close examination of the role and effort of the human agents as drivers of the socio-economic advancement of Africa is inevitable. The inevitability of the human agents as drivers of the economic and social development comes to the fore when we consider the failure of the many African developmental plans and policies; plans and policies that have often been adjudged theoretically sound and with antecedents of results other places. Thus calls for a comprehensive re-orientation of the lives and values of the human agents in the African nations so as to imbibe the courage to underplay 'greed, self-centeredness, inefficiency and tribal sentiments while inculcating the spirit of honesty, national pride over and above tribal inclinations' (Okolo, 1993: 77). This will entrench responsible moral leadership in Africa and in this way the ills so identified can be overcome.

Re-orientation of national consciousness could be in varied ways. This could be achieved through legitimate national awareness campaigns aimed at making public the negative effects of corruption, bad leadership and instability. Yes in the past, successful administrations and governments have attempted this like the case of 'War Against Indiscipline and Corruption' (WAIC) in Nigeria during the military regime of General M. Buhari. However, government must go beyond brute force in entrenching these values. It is in line with view that we propose the option of inculcating these values through primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

Another way of re-orienting our leaders is when intellectuals in the society become **vanguard of the people**: Poor leadership has its way of fostering poor followership. The case of Africa is worsened by high rate of illiteracy and poverty that climaxed in ignorance. A good number of the citizens in most African countries are yet to appreciate the import of social contract between the state (personified in the leaders) and the people. The intellectuals should inculcate formally (especially the academia at schools) and informally, the expectations of the people from the state and the consequences when the state fails to live up to its expectations. Furthermore, the intellectuals should enlighten those that hold brief, run errand and act as fronts for members of the ruling and governing classes of the consequences of their actions and dishonourable roles in their lives, their families and future generations. They should be taught of the benefits of delayed gratifications, dignity of labour and to hold their leaders to account for their stewardship. When this is done, the leaders will be constrained to doing the needful – good governance.

Conclusion

Appreciating our predicament, we need to be more contextual in our assessment of our continent. Continuous and continual reference to the past and failures or experiences of African states would move the nation nowhere. We must set assail in the task of rebuilding, re-investing or re-orienting in African anew. In this light we propose a conscious programme of re-orientation of the psyche and a new commitment to growth of the continent. The task of re-orientation is premised on the development of a spirit of national consciousness inculcation of

good governance to the ruling class and future leaders the educational system and campaign programmes.

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