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Leadership challenges, mass media and nation building

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Abstract

Leadership challenges entail those constraining factors which inhibit the political leadership in Nigeria from optimum performance and from achieving set goals. While arguing that Nigeria has a plethora of them such as: illiteracy; lack of political awareness, weak institutions, corruption in the society at large and particularly in the police and judiciary. The others include the nature of Nigerian politics, ethnicity, representative bureaucracy or quota system and religious bigotry. The paper maintains that, apart from hindering growth and development these factors militate against nation building. It concludes on the note that, because the mass media could pass information across a broad spectrum of the society instantaneously thereby mobilizing and motivating the people with relative ease, the mass media are veritable instruments of overcoming the leadership challenges and of fostering nation building. Relying on primary and secondary data the paper shows that these goals could be achieved if the media adhere to its tenets of truth, objectivity and fairness. There is the need to train and retrain media practitioners. Furthermore it is important to separate professional practice from media ownership pointing out that Nigeria is a state in search of nationhood.

Keywords: Leadership; Mass Media; Politics; Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Increasingly, scholars in the social sciences and humanities, particularly political science are engaging the issue of political leadership with growing seriousness. This simply points to the fact that leadership at all levels and in all facets of life is very important. If an organization is doing well or otherwise the leadership factor has to be critically examined as a causative element. Thus, good leadership will more often than not lead to success while failure is always the end product of bad leadership. In the same way strong leadership will often times be result oriented, though occasionally and depending on the context, human rights and dignity could be violated just like it happened during the time of Chairman Mao Tse Tung of China. Deriving from this is that weak leadership also will more often than not lead to failure (Kellerman, 2004).

2. Leadership defined

Leadership is one concept that has been defined in many ways, thus precision is difficult. Accordingly, Blondel (1987) and Wildavsky (2006), in separate works view leadership as ... to lead, to show the way, to guide, influence. A leader is a person who is able to modify the course of events. On the other hand, Kellerman (2004) maintains that a leader chooses a particular course of action and then in some ways gets others to go along or more subtly the leader encourages the led to choose the way that the group will follow. In their contributions Heifetz (1994) and Tucker (1995) posit that leadership should be able to:

- (i) Interprets problems
- (ii) Prescribe ends and means to solve them
- (iii) Propagate personal visions as solutions or, at least responses to problems
- (iv) mobilize followers to implement those solutions or responses.

All the above agree with the definition of Northouse (2012), who sees leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Therefore, in this paper, political leadership shall be conceptualized as the process of motivating and mobilizing the people politically to achieve particular ends. This writer has argued elsewhere that in the Nigerian context, political leadership entails all those who occupy political leadership positions, such as President, Vice President, Governors and their Deputies, Ministers, Commissioners, Political Party Executives members, members of the legislature at all levels and a host of others who occupy top political offices. Beyond that, the list also includes not only political office holders but those personalities behind the scene who are very active in politics. They sometimes influence those who get or elected appointed into political positions and attempt to control their (political appointees) activities while in office. It is in this class that you have political "godfathers". At a particular point in time they may or may not be too visible but they sponsor persons to occupy elective or appointive offices with the aim that such people are first and foremost accountable to them (not to the people) and expect that, regularly financial returns will be made to them. Experience has shown that, in most cases, god fathers and sons end up in disagreement. Good examples are Lamidi Adedibu and Rasheed Ladoja in Oyo State, Jim Nwobodo and Chimaraoke Nnamani in Enugu State and Emeka Ofor and Chris Ngige in

Anambra State. Other cases are that of Abubakar Rimi of Kano State and Balarabe Musa of Kaduna State and their godfather Aminu Kano in the second republic.

2.1. Leadership theories

For the foregoing reasons, many theories have developed to explain the nature and type of leadership that achieves the best results for the masses. In his study, Kendra Cherry identifies eight of such theories as:

- (1) Greatman Theory
- (2) Trait Theory
- (3) Contingency Theory
- (4) Situational Theory of Leadership
- (5) Theories of Behavioral leadership
- (6) Participative Theory
- (7) Management Theory
- (8) Relationship Theory

2.2. Nature of Nigeria's political leadership

To understand leadership challenges in Nigeria and how to overcome them the peculiar nature of Nigeria's and to a large extent Africa's political leadership has to be understood. From the onset, it must be understood that, it has its roots deep in its colonial heritage. The political leaders who inherited power from the colonialists failed to redefine leadership in such a way to take their historical and cultural realities into account. Rather, they copied the models and methods of the colonial masters and inherited the political structures which they left behind. The political leaders especially of the first republic were not cognizant of the fact that, erstwhile colonial masters were ruling "conquered" and dominated people. Therefore, their oppressive techniques were easily understandable. Under colonialism there was visible disconnect between leadership and followership which unfortunately the early political leaders who won independence failed to alter. Moreover, in Nigeria, the nature of politics has also influenced the attitude of political leadership. It is a scenario where politics is seen as business and not as service. Indeed, in Nigeria, politics is the shortest course to wealth. This contrasts from the Western World where politics is for people to serve and immortalize their names. Deriving from the above is the obnoxious attitude of the political leadership which believes that politics is a game of winner takes all. This has often times heated the polity and bred political intolerance. Moreover, politically, Nigeria has had to contend with a leadership that has failed to harmonize or build bridges of love and understanding that cuts across ethnic, cultural, religious and political divides. Rather, the differences along these lines are exploited to fan the embers of ethnicity and religious bigotry. Thus, the often touted pronouncements on "Unity in Diversity" or though "tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand" are mere self seeking political statements. Nigeria's political leadership is not accountable to the followership and painfully the followership does not demand accountability from them. Therefore, they operate more as rulers than leaders.

2.3. Leadership challenges

By political leadership challenges, we mean those factors in the state or society that constraint the leaders from performing their expected functions and from attaining their set goals. It is obvious that there are many leadership challenges in Nigeria which militates against development and nation building. The first leadership challenge is one of illiteracy. A literate and educated person is also a mentally liberated person. That is if all things remain equal. He is exposed to things that happen politically in other societies and is able to draw a parallel with his own. He is not easily manipulated for selfish reasons. The illiteracy level in Nigeria is relatively high and the problems associated with this are many. Unfortunately, unscrupulous politicians see these illiterate masses as mere pawns on the political chess board. It is not only that they do not know their rights they could be misdirected to suit the whims and caprices of some politicians. It is also easy to communicate with literate people and sell such things as party programmes and manifestoes.

2.3.1. Poverty

Secondly, part of the leadership challenges in Nigeria is poverty. A large proportion of Nigeria's populations are still living below the poverty line. Therefore, small amounts of pecuniary incentives could impress them. Because poor people are also mostly uneducated, instead of seeing such gestures as part of the unwholesome political activities plaguing the country, they tend to be happy with them. Some even interpret it as philanthropy or large heartedness. Poverty sometimes makes the masses to make demands from the leadership which will not lead to sustainable development. For example, people may demand for immediate financial gains rather than long term infrastructure and by so doing the people aid and abet corruption.

2.3.2. Religion

Another challenge is the issue of religion. While religion unites its adherents, it tends to separate and used sometimes to cause confusion between believers and non believers of a particular sect. Religion in this sense refers mainly to Christianity and Islam. Both religions are not inherently bad but desperate politicians exploit the politics of religion to serve selfish political purposes. Similarly Nigeria's quota system which was formulated to ensure that all segments of society, be it ethnic, religious or political are carried along is well intentioned but not properly implemented. That is why, if a Christian or Moslem is occupying a particular position, effort must be made to ensure that his deputy is from the other religion. This arrangement may appear good at face value because it encourages integration, yet it tends to compromise merit. To promote equal religious balancing has meant that the right and capable people do not get to the right positions and this has very grave and unsalutary consequences for growth, development and particularly for nation building. Equality of religious representation may be good but when it is overstretched it encourages mediocrity. We shall conclude the discussion of religion by stating that, it is religious elites acting in concert with the political elites who are exploiting religious differences to promote selfish purposes. It is in this context that the spectre of religions violence in Nigeria could be analysed and understood.

2.3.3. Ethnicity

Closely related to this is the issue of ethnicity. Indeed, ethnicity like religion has caused divisions and torn Nigeria apart both in the past and currently. It would be recalled that ethnicity was the major contributory factor that delayed Nigeria's independence till 1960. While the South argued for independence in 1956 the north maintained a hard stance that they were not ready. Ethnicity has led to violent clashes, such as Igbo/Hausa, in the north, the Tiv/Junkun in the middle belt, Urhobo/Itsekiri in Warri, the many ethnic crises in Jos and a host of others. It is instructive to note that these are mere elite manipulations. Unfortunately, the masses who are used to cause mayhem are mostly unaware of the selfish motives of so called leaders. Both ethnic and religious crises constitute some of the serious leadership challenges in Nigeria. Ethnic differences have in many instances occasioned community clashes and violence. This writer has also argued elsewhere that the time of violence is distractive and development goals cannot be pursued. Moreover, the funds that would be channeled into rebuilding or replacing damaged facilities would have been invested meaningfully. Equally important, is the loss of man hours that is caused by such ethnic and communal crisis. During crisis, no one can think of investment or to generally plan for the future as time and energy would be channeled towards quelling the crisis on hand. At such times, tourists are discouraged, the same thing goes for direct foreign investment.

2.3.4. Lack of political awareness

Leadership challenges cannot be exhaustively discussed without reference to the fact that most Nigerians are not politically aware. Political awareness on the part of the masses will enable political leaders to do the right things. A politically aware and sophisticated citizenry will not make unwholesome demands from their leaders. They will not accept gifts and pecuniary gratifications from them at election times. Politically mature and aware masses will see themselves as partners in progress with the leadership. They also assist the leadership in the multiplication of development options thereby facilitating and fasttracking peace, progress and nation building. Politically, they know their rights and demand that the leadership must be accountable to them. In a situation where the citizens are unaware and politically naive, the leadership tends to become complacent and operate as if they owe allegiance to themselves, friends and families alone. This situation becomes a challenge because; political naivety on the side of the masses will not inspire the leadership to excellence and achievements.

2.3.5. Corruption

Another leadership challenge worth mentioning is that of corruption. Corruption is the diversion of public resources for self private gain. It could manifests mainly in the form of demand and acceptance of gratification or taking of undue advantage of one's position. Because of corruption, most Nigerians prefer their short term personal benefits (expressed in monetary terms) to the long term benefits of the generality of the masses such as the provision of facilities and infrastructure. Though the leadership is not free from corruption (in fact they, because of their access to funds are more into it) the equally corrupt followers

mount pressures on the leadership by making illegal demands and thereby distracting the leadership from the pursuit of legitimate goals.

2.3.6. Weak institutions

Lastly and fundamentally is the issue of weak institutions. Two quick examples will suffice, the Nigeria Police and the Judiciary. Two factors militate against the Police. The centralized command structure of the Police Force. Nigeria, which is a, or supposed to be a federation is under the control of Federal Government in Abuja. Therefore, dissenting voices from any of the federating units no matter how legitimate are mostly not supported. Sometimes, Police Officers posted to states have refused the instructions from State Governors especially if such Governors belong to parties that are different from the one in the centre. Occasionally, they (Police Commissioners) work against State Governors. Good examples are Bishop Eytene and Jim Nwobodo in Anambra State during the second republic and Chris Ngige who was arrested by the Assistant Inspector General of Police in charge of Anambra State during the fourth republic.

2.3.7. Problems associated with the judiciary

This is another leadership challenge in Nigeria. States, Local Governments and even the Federal Government have had cause to approach the courts for the resolution of constitutional and sundry issues. It is known that cases brought to the law court take a long time to conclude. Some of the cases are so fundamental, like the issues of derivation, revenue allocation and others that for as long as they last, the governmental machinery almost grinds to halt. A corollary to this is corruption in the judiciary. It is a well known fact that some judges compromise their highly exalted positions because of corruption. The James Ibori, former Government of Delta State best illustrates this point. In Nigeria, the judiciary is not seen as the last hope of the common man. This constitutes a severe leadership challenge. Approaching the court and getting justice is more often than not a game of chance.

3. Nation building

To fully understand the meaning of nation building, an important starting point is an understanding of what a nation is. In its ideal form, a nation is a group of people living in the same territory, with a common history, culture, mostly the same language and the same identity. In a nation, the people see themselves as one with a shared destiny. This enhances bonding and sense of belongingness. Similarly, in a nation, the “we” feeling and consciousness of kind are remarkably high. From the above it is very clear that Nigeria is not a nation. Unfortunately, though Lord Lugard forced the different ethnic nationalities to start cohabiting, for one hundred years now, Nigeria has still not attained the status of nationhood. This explains the reason why Nigeria has been variously described as a mere geographical expression by Awolowo (1968) the former premier of western Nigeria and as the mistake of 1914 by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the late of Premier of Northern Nigeria and the Saruana of Sokoto. It is our submission that Nigeria is a state in search of nationhood. Nation building therefore is the process of galvanizing a people within a state to continually see themselves as one who are pursuing the same development goals. Painfully, in Nigeria people see, themselves primarily

as Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv or Urhobo and only secondarily as Nigerians. This state of affairs does not augur well for growth, development and particularly for nation building. It is for this reason that, Nigeria fought a fratricidal civil war which has further divided her, and the scars are still with her till today.

Furthermore, Nigeria's political leadership since independence has failed dismally to pursue nation building agenda. Political and military leaders (because the military dominated the politics of Nigeria for a long time) failed to initiate programmes that will unite the different peoples of Nigeria. That is why a scholar like Adebayo Adedeji described the relationship between the different ethnic groups of Nigeria as a marriage of strange bed fellows who are merely cohabiting without marriage. Nation building in the context of Nigeria entails that the political leadership should be working towards overcoming the challenges caused by our erstwhile colonial leaders. Such challenges include the divide and rule policies, perpetuating the disconnect, between state and society and pursuing developmental politics which seeks to promote the interest of the masses irrespective of ethnicity, religion or place of birth.

4. Conceptualizing the media and its place in nation building

It is the submission in this paper that the mass media have a critical role to play both in the nation building process and in influencing the political leadership. According to Maquail the mass media involves the entire system within which information is generated and transmitted to achieve a certain goal. It includes the print media such as newspapers and magazines and the electronic media such as radio and television. The significance of the mass media is that it can reach a broad spectrum of the masses spread across the nooks and crannies of the society instantaneously. Thus, the media could be used not just to perform its traditional functions of education, entertainment and information it has equally been used successfully to motivate and mobilize the masses to achieve specific purposes. In Nigeria's struggle for independence, the media played key roles to actualize it. It brought information to people, informed them of the dangers of colonial rule and the benefits of self determination. However, when independence was eventually won, the role of the media in the nation building process became ambivalent. The media, especially in the second republic adhered to the truth and upheld objectivity only when it suited them. If it was otherwise, they were influenced by ethnic, religious and other considerations such as pecuniary benefits and media ownership. For instance, some radio stations announced results that were doctored to suit the purposes of the political party in power in such states. Similarly, the print media engaged in news reporting and editorials which fanned the embers of ethnicity and religion. In this respect, examples which, readily come to mind are the National Concord and New Nigerian Newspapers.

5. Toward a new direction

If the media is to make its expected contributions to nation building, it must give itself a new orientation. It must return wholeheartedly to its traditional functions of information, entertainment and education. Beyond that, the media must see truth, objectivity and fairness as important and sacrosanct in the discharge of their duties.

5.1. The media must do the following

Provide Political Education. In some of the preceding paragraphs we pointed out that illiteracy, lack of political awareness and poverty are the bane and part of the leadership challenges in Nigeria. It is also true that most of our leaders have capitalized on these constraints to manipulate the masses. It is in this context that the media is really relevant. The media should be able to organize programmes purposely to provide political education for the masses. The people should be made to realize that political leaders are and meant to serve them and not otherwise. The media should encourage the masses to understand that their vote is their power and therefore should be used wisely in installing the right caliber of persons to political leadership positions. To do otherwise will spell doom for the masses and is inimical to nation building.

5.2. Build bridges of communication

The media should build bridges of communication between the political leadership and the masses. This is of course part of the traditional functions of the media, but the media should now begin to place more emphasis on accuracy, truth and objectivity. The media should be able to bring leadership plans, goals and purposes to the masses. It should also bring the expectations of the common man to the leadership. In this context, it should condemn leadership practices that are not in the interest of the masses when necessary and commend them when desirable. It is therefore important for the media as fourth estate of the realm that while representing the interest of the common man, it should also see itself as partners in progress with the political leadership.

5.3. Agenda setting

The media should set agenda for the political leadership. The truth and reality of the situation is that in Nigeria, political leaders are not ideologically driven. Because of this, they hardly have any agenda or programme to be followed while in office. For instance, currently, in what significant ways is the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) different from the All Progressive Congress (APC)? What are their party programmes that are popularly known and on the basis of which they could be assessed? It is thus important for the media to set agenda for the political leadership. This is not in the sense of dictating things to be done to political parties. There are however certain things that the political leadership owe to the masses and it is the duty of the media to constantly remind them of these. It is also in this context that their role as watch dogs in the society readily becomes relevant.

5.4. Serve as mouth piece of the common man

In an environment of illiteracy, lack of political awareness, coupled with the character of Nigeria's political leadership it is important for the media to be the mouthpiece for the masses. The media should speak for the ordinary people and represent their interests. This should be done irrespective of who owns the media house or religious affiliation.

6. Conclusion

This paper will end on the same premise on which it started. That is by stating that Nigeria has many leadership challenges. She is also not a nation. The thesis is that if the leadership challenges will be surmounted and if Nigeria is to become a nation, it is desirable to have a vibrant, free and fair media. Moreover, the kind of leadership needed must be adaptive, innovative and transformational. We need a radical and visionary leadership that will make a break from the past. That is, the leadership class must be made up of servant leaders whose orientation is service not self. They must be leaders who see themselves as statesmen and not politicians. The point at stake is that Nigeria needs radically purposeful and transformational leadership. Such leadership should be able to harmonize the cultural religious, ethnic and political differences, such that they become veritable sources of strength and platform for nation building.

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