

LEADERSHIP TRANSPARENCY AND NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this research was to critically explore the concept and importance of leadership transparency as it relates to nation building in Nigeria. It is no longer a mirage that the Nigeria state since independence has been grappling with her socio-economic and peaceful co-existence issues. This is indeed more worrisome in view of the abundant human capital and natural resource at the country's disposal; and yet the nation is still struggling with good governance that will take her out of its economic who as into the comity of industrialized and economically viable nations of the world. Based on related scholarly works, transparent leadership is a strategic and political tool that can be used in building a prosperous nation. This is however one of the country's greatest challenges as successive leaders have been perceived of not being completely open in their decisions and activities for public scrutiny. Hence, the research believe Nigeria can attain greatness where people with sound moral and/or ethical principles, leadership charisma, and the requisite knowledge or experience; emerge and manage the affairs of government. The sky will be the country's limit if this achieved.*

KEYWORDS: Leadership Transparency, Corruption, Nation Building, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, the Nigeria entity has witnessed several struggles that encapsulate periods of prosperity; significant decline in socio-economic development and long-held collective value heritage the founding fathers made several effort in building and transferring to current generation. Never can the Nigeria people forget sacrifices of some of the great personalities and heroes that fought for the country's independence in 1960. Whether this historic achievement was timing or not, lies on the corridor of the people's intellectual perception, evaluative criteria of individuals and the assessment of several foreign organizations. In the brake of the country's independence, agriculture was the major contributor to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the emergence of oil & gas production and exploration in the 1970s saw a persistence decline in agricultural exploration (Adegami & Adepoju, 2017). Currently, the oil & gas sector accounts for over 90% of foreign exchange earnings and about 80% of government revenue (Adegbie & Fakila, 2017).

In view of the above; has Nigeria made progress given the enormous revenue from agriculture and oil exploration that were accrued to the nations treasury all these years, coupled with other natural endowment and quality human capital assets? This question has however generated a lot of arguments and controversy with varying explanation in several quarters. Among the responses offered by several individuals, organizations, and even government functionaries; the researcher have come to realize that though the country has made some progress, however one major issue that have slow down the country's developmental prowess is the 'political will' to effectively manage both her resources and her diversity. As a way of justifying the underlying thesis of this paper; a former president of the Republic of Nigeria General Olusegun Obasanjo in one of his open letter to the current administration, stated:

Currently our greatest challenge in this country is the inability of the president to effectively manage the socio-economic, cultural and religious

diversities". Perhaps we are lacking the political leadership that is transparent enough to understand our diversity, which of course is one of our greatest assets (Obasanjo, 2019).

Further commenting on the experience of the Nigerian nation, the renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe, argued 'that the root cause of the Nigerian predicament should be laid squarely at the foot of bad leadership. The problem with Nigeria', Achebe insisted,

Is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigeria land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibilities, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership (Achebe, 1984).

In addition, Michael (2012) also argued, regrettably, since independence a notable surviving legacy of the successive political leadership both military and civilian that have managed the affairs of the country at different times has been the architect of corruption and slow pace of economic development, that have affected all agencies of public service, which like a deadly virus, has subsequently spread to the private sector of the country.

It is instructive to mention that the 'political will' in the context of this paper refers to a transparent leadership that citizens can hold accountable to, in terms of policies and programmes initiated to build a viable nation. Basically this paper attempts to examine leadership transparency at the government level (public office holders) in Nigeria. The paper will further investigate and identify some of the conundrum of leadership transparency and the way out of it. Lastly, the paper will re-assess the possibility of building a unified, peaceful and prosperous nation through the instrumentality of transparent leadership.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Understanding Leadership

The concept of leadership is multi-dimensional and even up till now, scholars have not come in to terms on the definition of the leadership. This has made more evidence when Warren Bennis, a leading authority on leadership once stated in his work on "becoming a leader" (1989), that 'leadership is like a beauty; it's hard to define, but you know it when you see it'. That could not be further from the hard truth. According to Reed (2001) leadership is defined as a body of people who lead, direct and organize a group. The author also describes leadership as a potent combination of strategy and character. Chemers (2002) in his work, defined leadership as an act of persuasion by which a person induces a group of individuals to pursue goals held by or shared by the leader and his or her followers. He further defined leadership as a social influence that involves the influence of a person on other group of persons with a view to accomplishing an objective and inspire or directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. A leader in a much general sense is believed to have or demonstrate qualities such as good character, visionary tactful, will or charisma; and the ability to lead by example.

Basically, the theory of leadership comes across as a method of subtle control or power, but more effective than the naked use of authority. It is important to mention that within the framework of leadership theory, two prominent theories have emerged. The two theories which are charismatic leadership theory (House, 1977) and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) were developed from the context of 'governance' and stressed on the leader's ability to cope with radical change and effectively manage contingencies situation such as crisis. The theory of charismatic leadership has an essential element of being able to motivate subordinates to produce superior performance without

the use of formal authority or power (Kirpartrick & Locke, 1996). The theory explains the idea that subordinates identify with the vision and are prepared to accept the leader's value, personal traits or behaviour. According to Howel & Shamir (2005), charismatic leaders are more likely to be used or suitable to manage crisis situation. An example of a charismatic leader in post-colonial Africa is 'Nelson Mandela' of South Africa.



Nelson Mandela

On the other hand, the transformation leadership theory emphasizes the need for good leaders to be ethical in their relationship. Burns (1978) stressed that transformational leadership theory is an interactive process which transforms the leader and followers to higher levels of motivation and morality which outcomes are usually positive. The author offered key elements of transformation leadership style. They include intellectual situation, which have qualities such as creativity, innovation, and readiness to challenge old norms. Another element of such leadership style is 'idealized influence' and it has qualities such as accountability, ethical standard, and high moral values. In addition, 'inspirational motivation'; with qualities such as strong vision, corporate objectives, enthusiasm, and confidence. And lastly is the 'individualized consideration, which focus more on personal development of followers (Burns, 1978). In general the hallmark of transformational leadership is the degree to which a leader influences, or transforms his or her followers towards higher performance and productivity.

Conceptualizing Leadership Transparency: The Nigeria's Experience

Transparency remains requisite for a nations development, because it provide the basis for good policies formulation and implementation; emphasize the involvement of the people in designing strategies for economic growth and development; and improve efficient management of resources for the nation's sustainability and stability (Adegami & Adepoju, 2017). According to the authors, transparency in public office entails openness in governance, in which the people (citizenry) can trust those that are ruling them and can predict them to large extent. A transparent government is one in which the people have a very clear idea of how decisions are made; how policies are formulated and implemented, and the general state of the nation. Annan (2004) stated that transparent government ensure that decision implementation is as transparent as possible; and allows for a proper understanding of critical elements upon which decision are made. The author further stated that leadership transparency bring about openness in governance and administration, and emphasize on free flow of information on the country's economic matters, such that the people who are govern are briefed from time to time on the state of the economy, security and other essential information with respect to the country' stability. Transparent

government is a political philosophy which implies that the business of government and its functionaries should be open at all levels in such a way that the public can effectively scrutinize their activities or programmes (Ajaji, 2003). In addition, Adegami & Uche (2016) mentioned that a transparent government offers a medium whereby fiscal and monetary operations of the government are reported to the public with great sincerity. Through open fiscal and monetary activities, government can get the needed trust and confidence of the people.

More so, Amundsen (2010); while stressing the importance of transparency to nation building, opined that President Barack Obama (former US. President) in his memorandum to the Heads of Executive Department and Agencies, declared that government should be transparent, and this was one of the key values his administration was known for; as he was committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in government. The author went on to state that transparency entails holding public officials accountable. A transparent administration is when government meetings for instance are open to the press and public, when budget and financial statements can be reviewed by any one; when laws, rules and discussions are open to discussion, and when there is less opportunity for public office holders to abuse the system for their selfish interest or satisfaction. Transparency International (2015) stated that leadership transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members, directors, and business men act visibly and understandably report their activities in such a way that general public can hold them accountable.

In driving leadership transparency in Nigeria; perhaps, an important way to facilitate this process is through the active involvement of the media, especially an independent media (Adegami & Adepoju, 2017). This entails a media that is not only reliable and competent, but also gives accurate report on governments activities and programmes. A media that is completely free from government interference and control is likely to report exactly the truth of the event or story. O'Neill (2002) is of the view that the media can perform effectively well, when its officials or personnel are allowed to carry out their legitimate duties without any form of intimidation, harassment, or hindrances. He went on to say that when media is operating in an unbiased manner under a conducive atmosphere, it may be viewed as a watchdog or check on government, and provide information on any anti-people policies.

Challenges of Leadership Transparency in Nigeria

In spite of the importance of leadership transparency to Nigeria's economic development, it has not been given serious attention by successive administrations. Adegami & Uche (2016) argued that though both past and present leaders of Nigeria have usually claimed to be transparent in piloting the affairs of the nation, however, the onus lies on the citizenry to evaluate, compare, and contrast successive governments' decisions and actions whether they fall within the ambit of transparency. In reality transparent leadership in Nigeria is to emerge because it has the capacity to bring Nigeria out of the corruption menace that has hindered the country's development for decades.

In consolidating our point here, Adeola (2007) comparatively summarized Nigeria's leadership transparency challenges. The author argued:

The history of great nations have been linked to visionary, purposeful, and transparent 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. China, Brazil, Indonesia,

Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Tiny Botswana were once trapped in underdevelopment, and their leaders understood the imperativeness of transparency in governance and massive investment in infrastructure, education, and health programmes; they sorted out leadership and governance problem to meet global standards that attracted the crucial level of local and foreign direct investment that took them to the top.

The vexed question is: Where is Nigeria in the country of emerging economic giants as mentioned above? Thus; this section of the paper attempts to highlight some critical factors that have denied the Nigeria state of transparent leadership since independence.

Lack of Moral Education: According to Samuel (2011), moral is the principle of right and wrong or good or bad behaviour. Morality can be said to mean the science of right or wrong, good or bad, relation to a particular society. However, the concept of moral education as a programme of study teaches the pupils or students accepting what are good, and at the same time rejecting what is perceived as bad. Moral education emphasizes values that is good and worthwhile, and also teaches individuals how to cultivate such values in ways that manifest on people behaviour (Samuel, 2011).

In general, the whole idea of education involves impacting specialized skills and moral knowledge which enable individuals to adapt effectively into the society. The meaningful exposure to education as a process is the attitudinal change that frees the mind from deviant behavior (Soludo, 2013). No wonder, some authorities have stated that the quality of education in any society is an indication of its future developmental potentials. The above argument is no far from the truth because there can hardly been any meaningful development; in terms of transformation in the socio-economic, cultural, and political system without a functional value based educational system. Comparatively a few known developing countries that have recognize education as a veritable tool for transformation and attitudinal change, and as a result invested heavily in the sector, in which they are reaping its benefits are Singapore, Venezuela, Brazil, and even Ghana. These massive investments have thus reflected positively on the country's literacy rate. Venezuela now has for example a record or over 70% literacy rate; Ghana has 67.8%; and Nigeria is only 61.3% (Kyendo, 2015). The poor moral education in Nigeria has therefore impacted negatively in the country's leadership transparency, which many have attributed to a pure attitude problem.

The Level of Corruption: Whenever the word 'corruption' is mentioned in Nigeria, it sadly reminds millions of her citizenry of their unfortunate condition of being at the mercies of their leaders and a precarious future in a country that is endowed with plenty of natural resources, which has instead, brought gross poverty and perennial backwardness, due to bad leadership. Though, corruption is not peculiar to the Nigerian Nation alone, even government officials or some developed nations of the world have been found culprit in corruption cases. However, the magnitude at which public office holders embezzle funds appropriated for the provision of social amenities or service that will improve the standard of living of the people; is quite alarming (Godwin, 2017). It is crucial to state here that this paper will dwell more on political corruption. In other to clarify this, Gyeky (2003) defined political corruption as the illegal, unethical, and unauthorized exploitation of one's political or official position for personal gain or advantage.

The level of corruption in the country as some have suggested as being institutionalized; has hindered the prevalence of leadership transparency. This is because the corrupt elements in the system may not strive in a transparent system of government; hence would frustrate any move that will usher in transparent leaders in to the political

system. Arguable this is thus why the country is yet to conduct a free, fair, and credible election. Perhaps is there any form of corruption that is worse than that perpetrated by the current administration that increased the price of fuel from N86.50 to N145.00 on May 11, 2016 with a promise to cushion the effects of the increment by implementing welfare policies and programmes for the masses (Godwin, 2017).

Lack of Freedom of the Media: One of the major facilitators of transparency and accountability is the media. According to Adegami & Adepoju (2017) lack of an independent media that is free from government interference and control could deny the public from holding government officials accountable to their decisions and actions. Because it is mostly through the media most government activities and programmes are communicated to the citizenry, therefore it is very crucial that media organization act professionally by providing unbiased and accurate reports to viewers and listener.

However in Nigeria despite this pivotal role of the media in bridging the gap between government and the people, and serve as a watch dog of public officials; perhaps, there are instances where reports of government action and activities have been erroneously reported by some media organization due to state pressure (International Monetary Fund, IMF, 2016). More recently is the suspension of African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power, who are both subsidiaries of DAAR Communication from the National Broadcasting Commission for a yet to be verified allegation, which many saw as undue influence and intimidation by the ruling government. The suspension was however lifted arguably due to pressure from individuals, civil society groups and other non-governmental organization.

Lack of Strong Government Institutions: Strong government institution in this regard means how public agencies such as the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), to mention but a few, adhere strictly to the provisions of the constitution under which they were established. Government agency such as INEC for instance is said to be strong where it has absolute independent without any form of interference; in carrying out her constitutional function of conducting, organizing, and supervising election related matters in Nigeria. Some of these agencies in the country are said to have been compromised by state powers due to the general saying that “he who pays the piper dictates the tune”. With respect to this point, Adegbamigbe (2007) argued that the appointment of majority of heads of these agencies is mere political patronage that more often than not, lacks the necessary leadership transparency to drive the dividend of democracy to the people.

Also, the EFCC had at various public forums and discussions been accused of not being transparent in the discharge of its function; thereby being selective in their fight against corruption. According to Utomusen (2010). No meaningful development will come by where corrupt public officials who have track record of not being transparent; occupy or head government agencies. This will make these agencies compromise in some ways to suit personal or selfish interest at the expense of public interest.

Ethnic and Religious Sentiments: It may not be far from the truth to mention that the 1914 Lugardian amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorate that birthed the present Nigerian nation was arguably where the country’s ethnic problems started. Nigeria is a country that has over two hundred ethnic nationalities coalesced into three major tribe (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo), and two major religions which are Christianity and Islam (Chukwuemeka, 2015). Since independence, through to recent democracy dispensation in 1999; the Nigerian state has witnessed ethno-religious politics and leadership tussle between the Northerners which are predominantly Muslims and Southerners who are more of Christians. Due to ethnic and religious lines, Nigerians has become very sensitive on decisions and/or actions of their leaders; and this has resulted to series of ethno-religious

crisis, religious bigotry, born-to-rule orientation, incessant killings, insurgency, terrorism, etc. Leaders or persons having the expertise to occupy strategic positions are sometimes short-changed due to ethnic or religious sentiments.

It is quite worrisome that even those that have requisite skills and the leadership charisma are being frustrated in their quest to handle leadership roles in the country because of where they are coming from. More so, it is pathetic that the place of transparency and accountability has been replaced with ethno-religious patronage (Chukwuemeka, 2015). The current RUGA Settlement scheme by the Federal Government was suspended due to public outcry from specific quarters and the fear of ethno-religious crisis. Whether the project was initiated in good faith or not, explains the extent to which the country has been divided based on ethno-religious lines. This argument however drew the attention of a former President of Nigeria, when he stated that Nigeria's greatest problem is the inability for the current administration to manage the country's diversities; which happens to be one of our greatest assets (Obasanjo, 2019).

Panacea of Building a Prosperous Nigeria: What role does Leadership Transparency has?

The preceding sections of this paper have dealt with leadership concept, particularly the political leadership. The researcher has also conceptualized leadership transparency and its challenges based on Nigeria experience. In this section, the paper explored the instrumentality of leadership transparency in building the Nigerian of our dream.

Extent literature has it that transparent leadership can transform a nation that is dependent on others for growth and survival, in to a dominant force within the comity of nations, in terms of socio-economic and political liberation, and peaceful co-existence of its citizenry (Godwin, 2017; Adegbamigbe, 2007; Chukwuemeka, 2015; Samson & Davin, 2018; Soludo, 2007). In the process of reviewing the above studies to prove the importance of transparent leadership in building a successful nation; Soludo (2007) in his study though retrieved from the Harvard Business Review, highlighted eight key steps that a transparent leader can take to achieve results. They include: establishing a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, communicating the vision, empowering others to act in the vision, planning for and creating short-term wins, consolidating improvements and producing more results, and institutionalizing new approaches. The author argued that these steps are tested procedures for political leaders in building a prosperous nation. Also, Samson & Davin (2018) in their study Nigeria's movement for transparency and accountability stressed the role of Civil Society Organization (CSO) activists in elevating and sustaining transparency reforms on various political and policy agendas. The authors argued that through CSO activities, citizens can participate actively in government decisions and programmes; and also emphasize on transparent leadership as a way of building strong government institutions.

In addition, Ogedi (2012) posited that though, corruption is the bane of Nigeria's socio-economic development, but with the right political leadership with transparency and accountability; Nigeria as a nation can compete favourably at world level and be perceived by others as a nation who has what it takes to be reckoning with. The author however advocated for a new political culture that anchors on moral and ethical principles if Nigeria wants to come out of her socio-economic whoa and assumed its rightful place as giant of Africa. More so, Agwo (2015), while comparing emerging powers in terms socio-economic advancement such as Singapore, Malaysia, Botswana, to Nigeria; argued that these countries has made significant effort in eradicating corruption of their public and private life. One common political tool known have been adopted by these countries is the emancipation of corrupt leaders to a more transparent political leadership that are accountable to the people and respect the rule of law. This has bright future about improved infrastructure, health facilities, and education in these countries.

Lastly, Gaventa & McGee (2013) developed a very important model that conceptualized the effectiveness and impact of leadership transparency to socio-economic growth and development. The model gave a clear point that there are existing evidence that revealed under some condition, leadership transparency contributes to five specific outcomes; which include; better budget utilization, improved public service delivery, greater government responsiveness to citizens' needs, creation of platforms or forums for citizen-engagement, and empowerment of local voices.

Conclusion and Institutional Implications

The battle to save Nigeria lies within Nigerians. It is not a rocket science; we don't even need a messiah from a foreign land; it is within our collective resolve that we can make this country great again. It could not be further from the hard truth that Nigeria has lucrative laws, sound policies, laudable programmes; as confirmed by experts and authorities; however, our greatest problem is how to implement; better said, carry out (execute) these activities within the ambit of the rule of law or constitution. Though, many are advocating for a review of the constitution, particularly those areas that touch on decentralizing key decisions by moving some of the items on the exclusive list to the concurrent list, and going back to regional government so that every region could develop at their own pace.

The important question the writer tried to comprehend is which group of persons will occupy positions of trust when we review our constitution and make it better? How do the right persons emerge for public appointment or elected? Will the same political characters or gladiators not emerge at their various regions if we decide to run a regional government? The answer to these questions goes back to an earlier statement that the way forward is within our collective resolve. Nigeria's as a people must find a way to entrust their collective resources and choose those that will manage the affairs of the state with a great consideration of moral or ethical principles, leadership charisma, and the knowledge expertise to take the nation to the promise land. This is where the importance of a transparent leader comes in to the solution equation to many of the country's problems. If the country can get a transparent leadership that is devoid of ethnic, religious, and personal sentiments; coupled with the political will to do things different from the usual; then the nation can attain greatness. In order to make a robust impact on governance, this strategy must be trickle down to state and local government level.

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