

Religion and patriotic leadership in Nigeria: an illustration of Nehemiah's leadership feat in Judah

Ebbhomienlen, T. O.

Religious Management and Cultural Studies,
Ambrose Alli University
Ekpoma,
Edo State, Nigeria

Abstract

It is a truism that the quality of leadership and overall governance in a country directly affect the level of political permanence and development that such a country enjoys. Awful governance and poor leadership only result in underdevelopment and political instability. This paper assesses political leadership in Nigeria within the context of the reign of Nehemiah in Judah. The study specifically assesses political leadership and good governance in Nigeria; the challenges of political leadership to nation building in Nigeria; causes of leadership failure to nation building in Nigeria; the implication of governance and leadership failure in Nigeria; Strategies for nation building and leadership traits required for nation building in Nigeria using Nehemiah's strategies. The study reveals that Nigeria has been faced with the challenges of political leadership and bad governance since independence. The study also reveals that Governance and leadership have been identified as requisite for social change, economic growth and human development of a country. And Nehemiah's exemplary leadership provides a great illustration of how prayer and hard work could accomplish seemingly impossible things when a person determines to trust and obey God. To achieve the aim of this study the researcher adopts historical, descriptive, narrative and evaluative method. The study concluded that Nation building is not something that happens by accident; rather, it is a result of concerted efforts of the people. The study recommended that for any nation to experience development and political stability, the leadership must be patriotic and transparent.

Keywords: Patriotism; Leadership; Nigeria; Nehemiah; Judah.

Introduction

It is fact that the quality of leadership and overall governance in a country directly affect the level of political stability and development that such a country enjoys. Bad governance and poor leadership only result in underdevelopment and political instability (F.C. Fensham, 1982,1).¹ It is on the recognition of the imperative of leadership and governance to a country that Nnablife avers that the survival of a system rest with leadership (Cartledge, Garnsey, Erich 1997,94). All things rise and fall on leadership because leadership effectiveness is a steering that drives a nation or any organization to



height of development and productivity by the application of good governance (Cartledge, Garnsey, Erich 1997,94)

The post – independence Nigeria continues to grapple with the monster of bad leadership and governance which have been the bane of political instability and poor state of development in the country. With the diverse mineral and human resources, it is not far – fetched to expect Nigeria to soar high in consonance with the economic giants of the world.

Paradoxically, Nigeria – the giant of Africa (as it is called) wallows in socio – economic, political and infrastructural decadence in all her crevices. The inability of Nigeria's leadership to harness the nation's vast resources and servers towards socio – economic development continuously calls to question the composition of the fabric of the nation's leadership and governance. There seems to be a total collapse of ethical governance with the abuse of ever moral norm of administration and a loss of conscience towards 'rightness' and objectivism in polity. To this end, it becomes a wonder if Nigeria can ever rise out of their decadence and her impoverished state if those that are meant to drive the steering towards the nation's anticipation lack the morality and sanity to do so (Cartledge, Garnsey, Erich 1997,94).¹

It is an incontrovertible fact corruption has been the bane of Nigeria's development. Thus, without mincing words the phenomenon has ravaged the country and destroyed most of what is held as cherished national values. Unfortunately the political class saddled with the responsibility of directing the affairs of country has been the major culprit in perpetrating this act. Regrettably, since independence a notable surviving legacy of the successive political leadership both civilian and military that have managed the affairs of the different times has been the institutionalization of corruption in all agencies of public services, which live a deadly virus, has subsequently spread to the private sector of the country. (Clement 1989, 38)²

Indeed, it is a paradox that Nigeria, the world's eight largest exporter of crude oil a country endowed with many resources, still has more than 70 percent of its population living below the poverty line as a result of corruption and economic mismanagement. Pathetically, the logic of the Nigerian political leadership class has been that of self – service as some of the leaders are mired in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals at the expense of broader national interests. Consequently emphasis has been on personal aggrandizement and self – glorification with the result that corruption management of national wealth (Raymond 1994, 180)³

History has shown that no nation can grow enjoy steady development in virtually all spheres of its national life without experiencing good and selfless

¹Cartledge, Garnsey, Erich, 1997, 94

² Clement Ronald, (ed), " The world of the Ancient Israel" (Cambridge University Press .1989), 38

³David Raymond; Longman, Tremper : Introduction to the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan January 1994, 180)

political leadership. This is largely because qualitative growth and development has always been an outcome of good governance. Commenting on the experience of the Nigerian nation, the renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe, insisted that the root cause of the Nigerian predicament should be laid squarely at the foot of bad leadership. (Joseph 2009, 86)⁴

The trouble with Nigeria, Achebe argued, “ is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air or anything else”. The Nigeria problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership (Lasor, Hubbard, Bush 1996, 86)⁵

On many occasions, the challenges to national development can be traced to bad leadership or what Ibrahim Gambrari calls “ leadership qualities such as sincerity, honesty, transparency, accountability etc. that are required and germane to nation building and to maintain a good and sustainable leadership. The initiative of the few ones that posses these qualities are being strangled by enormous number of the bad and corrupt leaders this is coupled with the unpatriotic nature of the followers or citizenry (Graham 1998, 205).⁶

A large portion of the population has been affected by the corrupt practices of the leaders at the top. This attitude corroborates the saying that “when the head is sick, it affects the whole body also”. It is against this backdrop that this study will go into deep examination of a biblical character (leader) named Nehemiah, who arose to the challenge of falling security among his people in a turbulent period. Looking vividly at some of the leadership traits demonstrated by Nehemiah in the course of his reform which, if majority of Nigerian leaders can imbibe, will go a long way in solving the developmental challenges facing the country (Graham, and Steven 1998, 213)⁷

In any nation of the worlds the mantle of leadership goes along with several challenges and oppositions from internal and external factors which mark a good political leadership in a state. In the case of the man Nehemiah, we look at the response of the Jews to Nehemiah’s vision and community project initiated by him. This is with the view to challenging ordinary Nigerians to rise up to their responsibility if they are actually desirous to see Nigeria achieving the re – branding slogan “Good people, Great Nation”.

The above statement can be achieved with the use of intercultural hermeneutical method. But what is intercultural hermeneutics? Intercultural hermeneutics has been described as one way of describing the process of doing

⁴ B. Joseph, “Judaism, the first phase” (Eerdmans, 2009) 8**

⁵W. S. La Sor, D. A. Hubbard, F. W. Bush, “Old Testament survey: the message, form, and background of

the Old Testament” (Eerdmans, 199*) p.***1

⁶M.P. Graham, M. L. Steven, “The Hebrew Bible today: an introduction to critical issues” (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) 20**

⁷Perrett Graham, and Steven Mckenzie, : The Hebrew Bible: An introduction to Critical issues” {Westminster John Know Press, 1998) 202.

contextual exegesis and theology for contemporary nascent persons, such as those in Africa today. It is a method in biblical criticism, which is applicable to biblical texts in order to facilitate interpretation and appropriation of the meanings of God's self – disclosure in creation into another culture. It is a method that seeks to understand the message of God in a particular biblical text by comparing and contrasting the culture of biblical author with that of the African of the Bible Blenkinsopp, and Joseph 1988 17-18)⁸. This methodology is chosen because it recognizes the facts that although the Bible reveals God's dealing with humankind, the message has been transmitted in Jewish, Near Eastern and Graeco – Roman cultures set in different time and place quite foreign to African cultures and environment. This reality demands that the Bible be interpreted inter-culturally, that is, with aid of other cultures so that non-western readers may not find its meaning obscure in their own life – worlds.

Thus, intercultural hermeneutics allows for the interaction of biblical text with that of the recipient culture or situation with the intervention of drawing out possible lessons from the Bible could assist in solving a devastating or negative situation in the recipient immediate milieu.

Historical Background of Nehemiah

Nehemiah means "Comforted of Yahweh". He was a cupbearer (1: 12) under the Persian king Artaxerxes I which meant he not only selected the wine and tasted it to make sure that there was no poison in it, but he was also a personal advisor to the king. Nehemiah was the cupbearer of king Artaxerxes (Coggins, 1976, 62)⁹. He was an ordinary person in the sense that he was not royalty or a religious leader. However he must have been a man of great character who proved himself trustworthy to be placed in a position such as this, although we are sure it was providential as well. The cupbearer tasted the king's wine to make sure it was not poisoned and assassinations were common in the Persian Empire. Therefore, he was risking his life, but apart from that, he would have enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle in the king's palace. The cupbearers often became confidant and advisor to the kings because they were so trusted. God obviously used this when he gave Nehemiah the burden to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem, which was a 140 year old problem, which God supernaturally accomplished through his leadership in 52 days Nehemiah displayed incredible leadership skills in completing this project.(Ronald 2007, 112-114)¹⁰

Nehemiah was in the king's palace at Susa in the month of Chislev (which is roughly November or December on our calendar) when Hanani came with men from Judah, and Nehemiah asked him about Jerusalem and the remnant of people who had returned there. Hanani told him that the walls were "broken down and its gates are burned with fire". This was both a dangerous and embarrassing situation. They were in this predicament because of their unfaithfulness to God so they were failing to be a light to the Gentiles and instead bringing reproach on the name of God. In regard to the historical background, the study notes in the Believer's Study Bible say, "Just as the

⁸ Blenkinsopp, Joseph, Ezra – Nehemiah": A Commentary" Eerdmans 1988, 17-18)

⁹ R.L. Coggins, "The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah" Cambridge University Press, 1976, 62)

¹⁰ E.L. Ronald, "Ezra and Nehemiah" Ecker's Biblical Web Pages, 2007, 112-114)

Israelites were taken into exile in three successive stages (605, 597, 586.BB)), they returned in three stages. The first stage occurred under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (538B.C.). After a long delay, this return resulted in the rebuilding of the temple (520 - 516B.C.), encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Ezra led the second return in the seventh year of Artaxerxes 1 (458 B.C., cf. Ezra 7:1, 8). Nehemiah led the final return in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes 1".

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 44* B. C. as the provincial governor of Judah. He immediately surveyed the damage to the entire city on his well – known night journey around the walls (Nehemiah 2: 12 – 15). He enlisted the help of the people to quickly repair the breaches in the wall. He also urged them to set up guards to defend against the constant threat of those who opposed their efforts, including the armies of Samaria, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites (Ronalds, 2007, 116).¹¹

As governor, Nehemiah says that he didn't take advantage of food and land allotments that were allowed him due to his office, because there was already such a great burden on the people of his province (Nehemiah 5:14 – 19). He also made the other nobles and officials forgive all outstanding debts and ordered them to return all land and money that had been taken as taxes so the people would be able to feed themselves and their families. The hurried work of repairing and rebuilding Jerusalem's walls and gates was completed in just 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Another of Nehemiah's accomplishments was to make a record and genealogy of all the nobles, officials and people who were then living in Judah (Mark 1992,73-74)¹²

Overview of Nehemiah Reformation

The book of Nehemiah reformation opened with:

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital,(Albright, 1963,59-61)¹³ one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem.(Albright 1963,63)¹⁴ They replied, ' The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire'. When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. (Albright,

¹¹ E.L. Ronald, "Ezra and Nehemiah"(Ecker's Biblical Web Pages, 2007), 112-114

¹² T.A. Mark, " Ezra – Nehemiah" (John Knox press. 1992), 73-74.

¹³ W. Albright, the Biblical period from Abraham to Ezra: An Historical survey (Harpercollins College div, new York 1963) 59-61

¹⁴ Albright 63

1963, 65)¹⁵ we have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name". They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!' (Neh. 1: 11) (Garbini, G. 2003,27)¹⁶

The reform of Nehemiah is situated after the return of the Jews from exiles. It is to be noted that the two Kingdoms of Israel were taken into captivity – Northern kingdom in 722 B. C. by the Assyrians and the Southern kingdom in **98 B.C. by the Babylonians. This was total submission to Yahweh. However, unlike the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom was able to maintain its identity because of the religious toleration granted by Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor, Amel – Marduk. Nicknamed Evil Merodach, to all the foreigners in his empire.

However, in *39 B.C.E., Cyrus II (the Great) King of Ashan, and founder of Persian Empire, captured Babylon in his expansion efforts. This automatically brought the southern kingdom of Israel under Persian rule. It was Cyrus the Great that granted both the citizens and exiles amnesty and religious toleration for hailing him as the liberator and deliverer. Thus, in *38 B.C. Cyrus granted the Jews, like other nations who had been deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, to return to their lands. Cyrus further demonstrated his religious liberality by allowing the Jews to take with them the captured gold and silver utensils of Solomon's temple. He made further arrangements for the rebuilding of Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. (Garbini 2003, 28)¹⁷

Context of Nehemiah's Reconstruction

There are four issues to consider in the reforms instituted by Nehemiah. Batten supplies the first issue. Robinson and Mays offer the third issue. Rogerson and Davies give the second issue, while Schmitdt describes the fourth issue. The first issue deals with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem after the exile returned to the promised land. In Haggai 1: 4, there is a record that the returned exiles built for themselves some ceiled houses and had restored the temple. However, the city was at the mercy of every marauding band from her hostile neighbours without a wall of defence. The people were insecure because a wallless city makes its people an easy prey for the enemies. Even in a walled city, the first thing that the enemy has to do is to find a way of beating the security mounted by the wall so as to have easy access to the people. Nehemiah was grieved over the condition of Jerusalem and community of the remnants who returned to

¹⁵ Albright : 65

¹⁶Gabini, G., "Myth and history in the Bible" (Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 27.

¹⁷Gabini, G., "Myth and history in the Bible" (Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 27.

Jerusalem from exile. He acknowledged the faithfulness of Yahweh to the agreement He made with the nation in the consequent restoration of the exiles to the land promised to their fathers. So, the work of Nehemiah was the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem knew of the expedition and was awaiting news of its supreme accomplishment but learnt of its disastrous failure (Abe, 2005, 15-16)¹⁸

The second issue is the demand of the Persian policy requiring her colonies to be built around a creation of religious communities instead of political ones. So, the initiative of Nehemiah for the reconstruction of the Judean community as a colony of Persian religious law and ancestral cult. In view of this policy, Judean territory was divided into six administrative districts of categorization in Nehemiah chapter three. This was a design to increase the population of Judea. Rogerson and Davies believe that the administrative districts serve ... as a means of consolidating around the temple and around the "leaders of the people" a " Temple Community," and enclave within the wider province ... Nehemiah returned with further reforms ... Tobiah, the Amonites was removed from residence in the temple and those Levites who had no temple status or income were given a role and provided with a tithe (more taxes). A curfew on Sabbath trading in Jerusalem was imposed and mixed marriage banned ... His measures all had the effect of consolidating a racially and religiously exclusive Temple – City – State ... Actual ownership of land was based on the household (extended family, "fathers houses"). (Bright 1981, 6)¹⁹

The third issue is a description of the history of Judah as a community built around the civic – temple but based on the idea of exodus pattern. The objective of the book of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah is to provide " a continuous history of Judah from the beginning of the world down to the establishment of Judaism through Ezra and Nehemiah". This was necessitated by occurrence of diversity of views among the inhabitants of Judea concerning the identity of those who represented the faithful and true Jews. It was the time when the place of several indigenous groups worshipping Yahweh in the land remained unclear. In addition, the idea of worship of Yahweh in a foreign land also threatened the very foundation of the various Jewish communities. The competing factions of the Jewish residents of Judea also found any separation of religion and politics foreign to their belief (Batten, 1913,184-188)²⁰

In such a situation, the account of Ezra – Nehemiah made use of exodus motifs in explaining how the new community of returning exiles built around the temple, later known as the civic – temple community co – habited. It was a community which could be regarded as more than a religious body, gathering for the Torah in the public. It was, according to Mays a socio – political organization Made up of privileged, self – managing elite who controlled agriculture, ran the bank that was housed in the temple, collected voluntary and mandated contributions, had a workforce, and were grouped by ancestral

¹⁸ Abe G.O. The Religion of the Exile. (Lagos: New Dawn International, 2005), 15-16.

¹⁹ J. Bright, A History of Israel. Third Edition. London: SCM. Constable, T.L. : Notes on Nehemiah". <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/Nehemiah.pdf>.(1981), 6.

²⁰ L.W. Batten, " The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah". In The International Critical Commentary, 184-187. New York: Charles Scribners. (1913) 184-188

houses headed by an elder. The priest was an administrator for the distant Persian rulers, as much as a religious figure. The returnees used the city – temple for identifying religious space and place, but also for reclaiming a political and economic place and space (Schmidt 1984, 78.)²¹

The fourth issue is the explanation of the conflicts which confronted the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem and the maintenance of its untainted administrative life. The writer of Ezra and Nehemiah narrated the return of the people from exile, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and its wall and the establishment of the returning community in Jerusalem. The narration reveals how Nehemiah had to carry out the building of the wall amidst difficult conflicts with neighbours of the Jews in Jerusalem (Neh. 2: 10, 19) and the support of Shemaiah for Tobiah and Sanballat (Neh. 6:10ff). The account was written to supplement the view that only the returning exiles form the true community around the civic temple, against any misconception which included Prophetess Noadiah, other prophets and Samaritans who intimidated the reform project as part of the community (Neh. 6:14). This idea is corroborated by Schmidt when he says that Nehemiah, cupbearer at the Persian court in Susa, ask for, and receives in 44* B.C. (Nehemiah 1: 1 ; 2:1), authorization to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The work succeeds, though the Samaritans must be excluded. Later Nehemiah becomes “governor” (15: 14; cf 8:9; 10 :1) of the province of Judah, which is thus separated from Samaria and becomes independent (Robinson, 1989, 65)²²

However, the contribution of Nehemiah to the building of the fence for Jerusalem and the reform of the pattern of the living in Judea have been hinged on two major factors that assisted the feat or exploit of Nehemiah. The first factor is the influence of Persian law mandating her colonies to exist as religious communities and not as political entities. Such a provision enabled Nehemiah to apply for authorization to rebuild the walls and to govern the land. The second factor is the timely inculturation of Persian law of establishment of religious communities in the utilization of the laws of Moses on social management and communal administration for national reform as a civic- temple community. In other words, ... Nehemiah enjoyed the confidence and respect of the Persian King, as may be seen from the latter’s response to the several requests for assistance in the rehabilitation of Jerusalem ... His superb leadership qualities are clear from the way he organized the community for the work he came to do ... It took tremendous courage for a layman to withstand the compromising tendencies of the high priest Eliashib (Xiii 4 – 9) and to hold in check the commercial interests that threatened to undermine the religious obligations of the new communities (Xiii 15 - 22) (Mays, 1995, 211-222)²³

²¹ W. H. Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. (London: SCM Press, 1984), 78

²² H. N. Robinson, *The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 65.

²³ J. L. Mays. *The Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present and Future*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 211 – 222

Historical overview of political leadership in Nigeria 1999 to 2017*A Brief History of Political Leadership in Nigeria*

The history of political leadership in Nigeria is dated back to 1960 when Nigeria gained independence. Many political leaders have assumed office since 1960. But this study examines the history of political leadership in Nigeria since 1999 till date. General Abdusalam Abubakar immediately succeeded Abacha as the new head of state on June 9, 1998. Since general political atmosphere had improved as the self – succession saga was terminated until June, 1998, Nigeria had been a pariah state by the international community owing to human right abuses by government and the inordinate ambition of Abacha to succeed himself. The first step taken by Abubakar government which received international applause, was the release of political detainees, including general Olusegun Obasanjo, former Head of state, who was serving a 1** year jail term for his alleged complicity in the 199** coup plot, Boko Ransome Kuti, human activities. Chris Anyanwu, publisher of the I magazine, Ibrahim Dasuki, the deposed Sultan of Sokoto unionist, Chief Frank Kokori (Ademolekun, 1985, 43-45)²⁴

However, the first major crisis arose in connection with Chief Moshood Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the annulled June election, who died in detention on July 7, his death, especially in the southwest of Nigeria, paralysed economic for some days. General Abdusalam Abubakar conducted general election and handed over power to the president elect, General Olusegun Obasanjo, at the Eagle square, Abuja on May 29, 1999 for the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria (Oluleye, 1985, 18-19)²⁵

Olusegun Obasanjo the former military head of state was elect as the democratic leader in 1999. During his regime as the executive president some development emerged in the country, salary of staff was increased, Nigerian experience increment in the price of fuel subsequently. In order to prevent corruption in the country Obasanjo introduce Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practice (ICPC) in order to see to corrupt practice in the country and to curb corruption. He was re -elected into power in 2003 and Shehu Musa Yar'adua won the presidential sit through peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

AlhajiYar'adua won the 2007 election and became the succeeding president after Obasanjo. During his regime Nigeria experience peace and he also concentrate most on rule of law he is of the notion that every humans are equally and should be treated equally. Nigeria could have experience great

²⁴L. Ademolekun; *The Fall of the Second Republic*, (Spectrum Books Ltd, Ibadan, 198*), 43 – 4*

²⁵Oluleye, James J; *Military Leadership in Nigeria*. (University Press Ltd, Ibadan, 1985), 18-19.

development in his regime if not that president Yar'adua was a sickler. He died in year 2010 due to his frequent sickness (Ademoyega,1981'38)²⁶

Vice President Goodluck Jonathan became the president in 2010 after the death of his boss president Musa Yar'adua and he conducted election in 2011 which he won and he became the president. During his tenure Nigeria experienced one hundred percent (100**) increment of fuel prices due to his subsidized programme with the promise that he will use the money to build refineries across the country (the promise which he has not fulfill till the publication of this work). Nigeria experienced mass killing by Boko Haram group, a group which is considered to be a Muslim organization. This group of people push the country into danger by bombing here and there thousands of Nigerians lose their live daily by Boko Haram was one of the major problems of President Jonathan's administration.(Ikeme 1980,59)²⁷

Former military Head of State, General Muhammadu Buhari became Nigerian's president in 2015 after the 2015 general election. During his tenure, He reduced fuel price from 87 naira to 83 naira and later to 140 naira per litre, and also promised that he will build refineries across the country. He set target that by December 2016 mass killing by Boko Haram group will stop. He organized presidential chat in which he gave masses opportunity to communicate freely with him for the first time since his inauguration. (Ojigo 1970, 18)²⁸ Since then Nigeria has faced a lot of challenges without government effective intervention

Challenges of Political Leadership to Nation Building in Nigeria

It is worrisome to note that Nigeria's political independence had not brought substantial change in the economic conditions and people's general development. The standard of living in Nigeria is deteriorating on a daily basis as high unemployment, inflation, civil strife, poverty, corruption, disease, malnutrition, illiteracy, insecurity of lives and property, among others appeared to be the only legacy the state is capable of passing from one generation to the other. The most critical question that any patriotic Nigerian might be asking today is why has the country not developed or is not developing as fast as it should? The problem of leadership is a good example. The emergent political leadership of the post – independence Nigeria has shown a disappointing incapacity to manage the affairs of the country.(Salisu 1999,17)²⁹ The citizens are feeling thoroughly embarrassed and disappointed by the turn of events because of unfulfilled expectations and dashed hopes. The people are facing economic hardship of the highest order despite the enormous national resources with which the country has been endowed. Nigeria's celebrated economic growth has not translated into better economic and social welfare for Nigeria. Thus, poverty reduction and job creation have not kept pace with the population growth, which implies social distress for an increasing number of

²⁶ A. Adwomoyega, *Why we Struck*, (Evans Brothers Ltd, Ibadan 1981), 38

²⁷ O. Ikeme; *Groundwork of Nigeria History*, (Heinemann, Ibadan 1981),59

²⁸ O. Ojigo; *200 Days to Eternity; The Administration of General Murtala Muhammed*, (MladinskaKnijiga, Yugoslavia, (1979), 18.

²⁹ A.H. Salisu, (ed); *issues in Contemporary Political Economy of Nigeria*, (Haytee Books, Ilorin, (1999), 17

the people. Poor leadership has succeeded in putting Nigeria and its over 1***0 million people into political and economic impasse. It is rather unbelievable that since the return of democracy in 1999, the country could not consolidate the democratization process to achieve good governance and usher Nigerians into the land of goodies. In most parts of the country today, millions of human inhabitants share water from the same source with animals; water infested with bacteria and viruses. Nigeria is poorly governed, hence her failure to rise to the height of its potentials.

According to Achebe, the country's embarrassing stunted growth despite its enormous human and material resources is the product of the failure of leadership. The thesis that determined and focused leaders, elected or non – elected, make their society is well grounded with the facts of history. The people or followers feed on the energy of their leaders to rise to their individual potentials; the full flowering of which fuel national development. Leaders are the engines of national development.(Achebe 2010, 53)³⁰

Nigeria began as British colony with the adoption of indirect rule system of governance in the northern region and direct rule in the western and eastern regions. These British colonial approaches gave root to individualism which undermines communal living and interdependence. The individualistic sense increased ethnicity and religious discrimination or denominationalism during the pursuit of independence and nationalism, breeding a democratic system of using Nigeria as a factor for private enrichment or individual prosperity rather than corporate benefit. It manifest in different brands of political parties. In 1963 the National Democratic Party (NNDP) became the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in 1979. In 1993, it became the National Republican Party (NRP) and in 1999, it became the People Democratic Party (PDP) Action Group (AG) became Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), later transformed to Social Democratic Party (SDP). It afterwards metamorphosed to Alliance for Democracy (AD) and recently christened Action Congress (AC). Amidst proliferation of political parties which lack corporate philosophy of alleviation of poverty and development of masses and villages, the military aberration in politics and governance struck, based on invitation and sponsorship from business men. The twenty – nine years of military rule (1966- 1979 and 1983 – 1999) out of forty – nine years of existence of Nigeria as an independent state (1960 – 2009) entrenched authoritarian rule, structure of social injustice and increasing rate of poverty. (Azeez, 2006,24)³¹

Urbanization with city industries and city housing estates meant to develop the nation has been hijacked by few rich classes. It has turned mass number of landlords in villages to poor masses, destitute and tenants in and around high cost of city housing estates. Youths in the villages and towns have been seduced by urban life and infrastructural facilities to villages and communities of empty and lock – up buildings. Salaries earned by the poor youth from city industries went back to the few rich people in the form of house rent in city housing

³⁰ C. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Eungu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 2006), 52.

³¹ A. Azeez, "Democracy and Legitimacy Crisis" (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2006). 24

estates. This has created identity problem and alienation from cultural elements of the natives of the youths. It turns them to use their skill and youthful age reared from the sponsorship from poor families in the villages to serve the affluent class at meager wage in the city and below the earning rate of their colleague in the affluent group. So the youth sent to the schools through the sponsorship of the villages and towns are pressured into developing the cities that did not contribute meaningfully to their academic pursuit and technological training. This oppression continues as children of affluent politicians of 1963 and 1979 republics are reinitiated by their parents into a political structure which treats Nigeria as a factory of economic acquisition for few rich through political manipulation of electoral proceedings in 1999 to date. So, professionals, researchers and technocrats from Nigerian Universities become ineligible to be sponsored into National Assembly, the Senate and State house of representatives. They are not nominated for national projects in their area of discipline or professionalism. It is processed by unjust distribution of lands and inaccessibility to resources and instruments of survival by the rapacious assaults of the powerful over the poor.(Chaturvedi 2006,16-17)³²

Power to enforce a respect of human rights and supply of necessities of life entrusted to the law enforcement agents and the Police Force is twisted to oppress and marginalize the citizens who were to be defended. There are allegations of extortion, fraud, forgery, abuse of public trust, conspiracy and gross abuse and misuse of national office leveled against the Police Force Criminal Investigation Department and Federal Special Anti – Robbery Squad. They are reported to be involved in false accusation of citizens and incarceration of innocents.(Dike, 2009,23)³³

There is also unemployment of intelligent graduates. Some of them resort to armed robbery because they are not empowered. They turned the intelligence, creativity and skill acquired from education as resources for social ills. It is seen as redistribution of wealth and making of endowment fund by robbery. Coupled to the above is the fact that the erratic supply of power has stymied opportunity to create more employment. Manufacturers association of Nigeria (MAN) consisting of one thousand and five hundred requested for 8*4 megawatts of electricity to increase its productions and job creation in July 2007. Though Yar'adua regime inherited 3,000 megawatts from Obasanjo administration, the electric power output has currently reduced below 1,000 megawatts. Two tyre manufacturing companies (Michelin and Dunlop) had folded up because of the challenge in the area of electric power supply in the country. Since the cost of providing electric power has become the greatest impediment to effective production, cutting – edge competitiveness and qualitative profitability. Nigerians now depend on “ . . . their petrol or diesel – fired generators as the main source of power, creating another environmental hazards, while the national grid is treated as a back – up 11. Analysis of stock exchange for 2008 shows a threatening decline in percentage of value. As of January 2008, All Share Index (ASI) had 58,593.43 points with Market Capitalization (MC) at

³²A.K.Chaturvedi, Academics Dictionary of Political science (New Delhi: Academics (India) Publishers 2006). 16-17

³³ V.E. Dike, Leadership without a moral purpose, (South Carolina: Booksurge Publishing, 2009),23

N10.6trillion. By the close of the market year, All Share Index declined as low as 28,500 points while Market Capitalization was N 6.1 trillion. The result reveals about 50 percent stock value decline due to falling crude oil prices.

Many companies are down – sizing due to cash crunch which has been linked with falling crude oil price in the international market and restiveness of militant youths in the Niger Delta. There was a shut – in the oil exploration and production as Chevron shut down her 90,000 barrel per day Escravos export terminal due to attacks from the militants on its major crude oil supply pipeline. The 2009 budget was planned in 2008 on the assumption that New York Oil Mercantile exchange would not fall below \$45 per barrel. The United States experienced a decline on consumption and price of oil from \$147. 27 per barrel to \$38.20 in New York as Brent crude oil settle for \$39.15 a barrel in London. The proposed budget has recorded a fiscal deficit of N1. 09 trillion. This happens when 95 percent foreign exchange earnings of Nigeria and sustenance of national economy are based on crude oil product, which the nation has no control over its price. (Dukor,2003,52)³⁴

On education for All (EFA) by year 2015, the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) listed countries like Finland, Norway, United Kingdom, Italy, Slovenia, Argentina, Tanzania, Mexico, Brunei, etc. among those who have achieved the standard point. Nigeria is named along with Liberia, Sierra Leone etc. as lagging behind. Though Finland did not have crude oil, the Finnish exalt education (science and technology, electronics and telecommunications) by providing structures for increasing pupil enrolment in classrooms. Teaching is revered as top list of favorite professions. Olusegun Obasanjo's administration launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) with N 85 billion take off grant on 30th September 1999. It targeted making 40 million Nigerians literate by 2007, trained 30,000 teachers and building 28,000 classrooms nationwide. Rather than upgrading science and technology in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of the nation, there is a turnout of none pragmatic and outdated syllabus, dilapidated classrooms and frustrated teachers who now concentrate more on publishing articles than on classroom teaching amidst overpopulated students attendance (Dukor, 2003, 54)³⁵

Due to unemployment, retrenchment and derivative system of casual labor or report or part – time jobs which require qualitative service within short time but remunerated based on quantity of hours spent rather than quality of service and skill invested, many Nigerians now turn begging as way of earning a living. Insufficient fund from casual jobs force them to live and sleep under flyover bridges, which exposed them to smoke from marijuana and rape. Destitution or homelessness becomes a practice for those whose houses and lands were confiscated and demolished by governing authority in exchange for building highbrow city housing estates for the few rich. The same applies to those victims of forced evictions. Young women in her thirties with their toddlers are common sight turning eatery buildings, fast food joints and restaurants and

³⁴ M. Dukor., *Ethnic nationalism and a theory of nation Building* (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2003), 52

³⁵

their frontage to sleeping homes at night. Some do not have access to portable water, opportunity to train children in school and electricity supply for house chores and small – scale self – employed jobs. Others are pensioners without entitlements from the pensions Board. Towns with a campus of a tertiary institution and proliferation of banks experience high – rise in rent payment. Inter – tribal and religious riots have ended with mass demolition of houses and slaughtering of their human inhabitants (Mbaegbu, 2008,19).³⁶

Sequel to a lifestyle of destitution, alms begging, and petty trading which could not pay for food, clothing and shelter, these Nigerians make do with theft, touting pimping, sex – trafficking and prostitution with child labor in the sale of satchet water and akara balls or roasted plantain, to survive. Engagement in half – a – day, till – day – breaks or overnight and hourly or short term sex workings in any popular hotel is very common. Professional prostitution in form of home service delivery by town or campus sweepers and photocopy machine operators in various corners is rampant. There is also the pronounced brothel service. This is sexual slavery of young women and girls whose virginity is on sale to highest bidders. Burst breast and buttocks are issues of consideration in choice of young ladies patronized by men who may be as old as their father but refused to use condoms in the age of HIV/AIDS. The operators. . . sell young girls at higher prices. For children, brothel owners can demand up to twice the usual fee from clients who prefer virgins, who are presumed to be disease – free (Ekanem. 2010, 39)³⁷

Causes of Leadership Failure to Nation Building in Nigeria.

Lack of rule of law: The leaders in Nigeria do not show respect to the rule of law, especially, judicial decisions. This hampers the judiciary to effectively discharge its duties. The predictability is not yet a reality in Nigeria, the political executives still undermine the independence of the judiciary through patronage appointments, and judicial administration is characterized by weak enforcement capacity. (Ekanem 2010,42)³⁸

Absence of development oriented leadership: Many observers of the development and governance crisis in Nigeria since independence agree that poor leadership has been a major factor. Most of the Nigerian leaders were not committed to development of their society. Available evidence in the development literature on transformational leaders who have significantly reduced poverty in their respective countries during the past quarter century does not generate any consistent conclusion regarding the factors that contributed to the successes. The leaders of the success stories in Chile, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan; all demonstrated

³⁶E.Mbaegbu, Nigeria Democracy in ikeOdimegwu (ed) Nigeria Democracy and Global democracy, Akwa: Fab Educational Books, (2008) 19.

³⁷ S.A. Ekanem, How the Military underdeveloped Nigeria, (Calabar : University of Calabar Press, 2010),39.

³⁸

strong commitment to development, with clarity of vision and of goal. (Gyekye,2003 ,11)³⁹

Absence of Accountability and Transparency: In Nigeria, there is complete absence of transparent and accountable leadership. A government is accountable when its leaders (both elected and appointed) are responsive to the demands of the governed. Respect for the rule of law and the governed. Respect for the rule of law and an independent judiciary constitute key mechanisms for enforcing accountability. Citizen can seek redress in the courts for acts of omission or commission by a government and its officials. However, Nigeria has not done well in this aspect; it has been corruption everywhere both at the federal, state and local levels. And this corruption is not unconnected with profuse index of weak accountability and lack of transparency. The leaders abuse public office for private gain. (Jimada, 2010, 61)⁴⁰

Corruption challenges: Although corruption is a global scourge, Nigeria appears to suffer tremendously from this malaise. Every one appears to believe that the nation has a culture of corruption; Nigeria is a rich nation floating on oil wealth, but almost none of it flows to the people. The countless reforms and lack of genuineness and integrity of our leaders have left Nigeria corrupt as ever. Politicians are expunged and later re – admitted into their parties parties, then, what hope for good governance, when the leadership is deeply entrenched in corrupt practices.(Mohammed, 2004,34)⁴¹

Electoral malpractices challenges: This problem has become a popular phenomenon in Nigerian politics. As a matter of fact, an average Nigerian believes that elections cannot be won except it is rigged. Yes, this is an extent at which our electoral system has deteriorated. Electoral malpractice is not a recent phenomenon, in fact, it has been existing since independence and has continued to exist, even, in a modernized fashion. Our leaders are the architect of electoral fraud, for instance, in the first republic, the leadership of various political parties were accused and alleged of election rigging. The same happened in the second republic. And forth republic was also not different. If by now, our leaders, the so called politicians are not ready to face free and fair election I doubt if good governance can be entrenched by these same set of people who are so desperate in their bid to clinch to power at all cost. (Seteolu 2004, 18-19)⁴²

Political Leadership and Good Governance in Nigeria

Good governance has much to do with the ethnical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to specific norms and objectives as may

³⁹ K. Gyekye, Political Corruption: A Philosophical inquiry into a moral problem (Lagos: Malthousa Press Limited, 2003). 11

⁴⁰ J.S. Jimada, The Challenges of Nation Building and the Experience of post- colonial governance in Nigeria (MakuradiAboki Publishers, (2010), 61.

⁴¹ S. Muhammed, The Military and Governance in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges of Democratic consolidation (MakuradiAboki Publishers, 2010)34

⁴² D. Seteolu, The Challenges of leadership and Governance in Nigeria, (Lagos: panaf press, 2004) 18-19.

be laid down. It looks at the functioning of the segment of the society from the point of view of its acknowledged stakeholders, beneficiaries and customers. It must have firm moorings to certain moral values and principles. The question dealing with governance, though significantly related to democracy, is culture specific and system bound. It depends to a large extent on the historical experiences of a nation, its cultural mores, aspiration of the people and the stated political and economic objectives of the state, including individual and group preferences, current issues, the expectations of the governed, the nature and type of the political system, the ideological and religious predisposition of the state and a host of others. (Seteolu 2004, 20) ⁴³ For instance, the fundamental objective principle entrenched in the Nigerian Constitution provides the yardstick for measuring good governance. Section 14 (1) states that, "the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice". This is further strengthened in Section 16(1 and 2) of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution. Section 16 (1) a, b, c and d, says that, "The state shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made this constitution – Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self – reliant economy; Control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity; without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in area of the economy; Without prejudice to the right of any person to participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy. Section 16 (2) states that, " the state shall direct its policy towards – The promotion of a planned and balanced economic development: That the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good; That the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or a group; and that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens (Omoregbe, 2007,42)⁴⁴

Fundamentally therefore, to describe governance as a good one and to determine whether it is a bad one requires the understanding of the essence of the state which are not only embedded in the constitution but also a function of the religious ideas and the nature of current problems confronting the state. The question about the essence of the state formed the major preoccupation of the earlier philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau and others. The essence of the state to these early thinkers is to promote the common good as acknowledged in section 16 (2 'b') of the Nigerian constitution. Thus, public authorities have the common good of the state as their prime responsibilities. The common good stands in opposition to the good of rulers or of a ruling group. It implies that every individual, no matter how high or low, has a duty to

⁴³ D. Seteolu, *The Challenges of leadership and Governance in Nigeria*, (Lagos: panaf press, 2004) 18-19

⁴⁴ V.A. Omoregbe, *Social- Political Philosophy and international Relations*, (Lagos : Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 2007), 37

share in promoting the welfare of the community as well as a right to benefit from that welfare. Common implies that the “good” is all inclusive. In essence, the common good cannot exclude or exempt any section of the population.(Omoregbe, 2007,44)⁴⁵

Good governance, as a concept, is applicable to all sections of society such as the government, legislature judiciary, media, private sector, corporate sector, trade unions and lastly non – government organization (NGOs). Public accountability and transparency are as relevant for the one as for the other. It is only when all these and various other sections of society conduct their affairs in a socially responsible manner that the objective achieving larger good of the largest number of people in society can be achieved. The African Development Bank views good governance as one that embodies and promotes effective states, mobilized civil societies and productive private sectors. While the United Nations development programme (UNDP, 1996: 87) sees good governance as a commitment and the capability to effectively address the allocation and management of resources to respond to collective problems. According to organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable society are heard in decision – making. Within this purview, Nigeria’s Vision 2010 document defined good governance thus; Good governance means accountability in all its ramifications. It also means the rule of law and an unfettered judiciary: that is freedom of expression and choice in political association. Good governance means transparency, equity and honesty in public office. In the Nigerian context, good governance calls for constitutional rule and a true federal system (Adamolekun, 2002, 37).⁴⁶

According to World Bank study of sub Sahara Africa (SSA), “The problem of Africa’s Development is a crisis of governance; the study affirms that because of the countervailing power that has been lacking, state officials in many countries including Nigeria have served their own interests without fear of being called to account. Politics becomes personalized, and patronage becomes essential to maintain power. The leadership assumes broad discretionary authority and loses its legitimacy. Information is controlled, voluntary associations are co – opted or disbanded. This environment cannot readily support a dynamic economy”. Basically, fifty one year independence is worth celebrating. But candid introspection shows that Nigeria has lagged behind other countries in the march to development, whether defined by measures of quality of life, provision of basic needs, productive capacity, or degree of technological advancement. This development lag was at independence, attributed to number of factors, such as lack of qualified manpower to direct the ship of development, absence of finance and technological capitals, a post-colonial state and marginal

⁴⁵ V.A. Omoregbe, Social- Political Philosophy and international Relations, (Lagos : Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited, 2007), 37

⁴⁶L. Adamolekun, “Governance Context and Reorientation of Government (Ibadan, Spectrum Books Limited, 2002). 37.

participation in a world economy dominated by the great powers. But should these factors still be blamed for Nigeria's lacklustre performance in the march to development half a century after independence? Of course No, the major constraint to Nigeria's development is lack of transformational leadership (World Bank Sub, 2002,37)⁴⁷.

According to Onigbude, "regrettably poor leadership performance has remained with us despite years of complaints and grumbling. We have acquiesced in our own progressive destruction by submitting ourselves to the leadership of political misfits". It is surprising that the so much expected dividends of democracy eluded the mass of the people, while the leadership has remained unaccountable to them. (Onigbinde, 2007, 63).⁴⁸ Azeez asserts, "faulty as the system may be, our elites significantly contribute to its low productivity in development output by distorting, exploiting and abusing the system and its inherent loopholes". In terms of accountability, transparency and service delivery, despite the abundance of human natural resources that make the country the toast of many nations, our leaders have not been at their best as people's expectations of a better hope and opportunities have long been dashed, with governance ingredients still at its elusive stage to Nigerians. The leadership problem that has confronted Nigeria since independence is making the polity deteriorating. Few of the leaders if any, work for the development of the country more often than not, their policies are hastily put together and poorly executed. (Azeez, 2006,29)⁴⁹

As a matter of fact, going by all the development parameters and performance indices, Nigerians leaders have failed, economically, macroeconomic stability, fiscal discipline, economic reforms, due process and process and relatively low inflation rates that the state could claim to have achieved sit alongside weak business confidence, low growth, massive unemployment, and rising inequality between the rich and the poor. Nigerians per capital GDP is nothing to reckon with, poverty is widespread and about 64 percent of the population is living on less than One US dollar Per Day. Nigeria ranks low on Human Development indices (HDI), ranked by the United Nations in 2007 as 157th out of 177 countries, down from 148th out of a total of 173 in 2003. The country's human development index of 0.463 in 2005 was lower than the average index for sub-Saharan Africa (0. ***1*) and thereafter was rated as 13th least viable countries of the World. While corruption, which every government has always promised to eradicate at its inauguration continued unabated. (Azeez, 2006,31)⁵⁰

The current republics are a semblance of the previous republics in terms of leadership and governance. It becomes difficult for one to distinguish military leadership from civilian leadership in Nigeria. Though, Nigeria has been ruled

⁴⁷World Bank Sub – Saharan Africa: From Crisis to sustainable Growth. (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2002) 137

⁴⁸A. Onigbinde, Governance and Leadership in Nigeria. (Ibadan, Hope Publications Ltd, 2007). 53

⁴⁹A. Azeez, "Democracy and Legitimacy Crisis" (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2006) 24

⁵⁰A. Azeez, "Democracy and Legitimacy Crisis" (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2006) 24

by the military for a longer period since independence than by civilians. But yet, there is no evidence of leadership performance to differentiate civilian leaders from military rulers(Omolayo 2006,30-32).⁵¹

⁵¹B. Omolayo, "Leadership and Citizenship Development in Nigeria (University of Ado - Ekiti, 200*). 30 - 32.