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## Leadership (Transformational) and Development in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*Nigeria has been grappling with development challenges since independence in spite of abundant human and material resources. These challenges, some scholars argue, are results of poor leadership. The paper attempts to identify the quality of leadership that is required to bring about the needed development. In doing so, the paper surveys the various leadership styles and the impacts they have had on development as conceived by both liberal and Neo Marxist scholarship. The paper concludes that a transformational leadership is the one that is capable of bringing development to Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Leadership, transformational, development

### **1. Introduction**

A close relationship exists between the nature and quality of leadership in a society and the speed and dimensions of the transformations that society experiences. If the leadership is unfocussed, visionless, and lackluster, the state stagnates, or like a ship without a captain, begins sooner than later, to drift. Historically the level and pace of transformations, modern nation states, especially those in the Third World, have experienced have been a corollary of the vision and dynamism their individual leaders or governing elites have shown in the management of the affairs and public policies of such states.

A number of analysts (Legum and Zartman 1979. Kukah 2003, Nnoli 2004, Edoh and Wuam, 2009), have argued that the stunted and highly dwarfed pace of socioeconomic transformations witnessed in most Africa states in the last five or so decades can be attributed, at least in part, to the failure and incompetence of leaderships in these states.

This paper explores the interface between effective, focused and purposeful leadership and the engineering of fundamental alterations and positive changes in the lives of citizens of nations that have these kinds of leadership and the Nigeria situation. Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and natural resources yet development has continued to elude her. What could be responsible? Is Nigeria a case of leadership failure or is it the citizens that have failed themselves? The paper attempts to seek answers to these questions by analyzing the concept of leadership and its appraisal in the context of development issues in Nigeria.

### **2. Leadership Conceptual Clarifications**

The term “Leadership” (transformational or otherwise) has in recent times been bandied around rather ubiquitously. Paraded as both a curse and a cure for the development debacle of third world societies, it has become something of a buzz word that dominates intellectual discourses, policy analyses, conferences as well as the information super highway – the internet. A galaxy of its definitions, attributes, typologies and qualities, among others, congest text books, mimeographs, diplomatic notes and, of course, the now omnipresent web. But as is typical of most buzz words, there is an agonizing absence of coincidence between popularity and precision in definitional parameters. Not unexpectedly therefore, the term “Leadership” has been defined by different people to mean different things in different ideological climate.

What then is Leadership? The concept of leadership has been of interest since the Greco-Roman era where philosophers like Plato in his classic work “The Republic” specified the qualities of leadership via education. And Aristotle and Nicolo Machiavelli in their respective works “politics” and “The Prince” outlined the essence of which the leader, requires to qualify to lead (Bolden, 2004). Leadership has become a topical issue in recent years as our country and indeed the world cries out for better and more purposeful and effective leadership, in business, in government and in public life. (Ajumogobia, 2011).

According to Elaigwu, (2010), citing Eisenhower, it is the ability to decide what is to be done and then to get others to want to do it. In the words of Fayemi, (2009:105), “Leadership is the ability to take an initiative, motivate, to influence, to direct and control the thoughts, opinions and actions of the followers in any given society towards the achievements of purposeful desired ends.” Elsewhere (Edoh 2009) has defined a leader as an individual imbued or empowered with authority, ability and or drive to take decisions on, and supervise, what needs to be done to realize goals he or the society has set.

A common dominator that runs through these definitions and the legion of others in the voluminous literature the phenomenon has generated, is the view that leadership presupposes the gift of ability to harness one’s own potentials and as well as those of the organization or society towards the achievement of certain goals set either by the individual, the organization or the society.

This wise Leadership exists in all societies. Indeed, the very idea of a society, ab initio, connotes the inevitability of leadership. In all human societies from the simplest hunting and gathering to the most complex industrial ones somebody or group of people must take

charge to provide and or implement the rules that prevent the society from degenerating into a state of suicidal anarchy where, as argued by John Locke and Jean Jaque Rosseau, in their contract theory “Might is Right”.

In general, and popular perception, Leadership is therefore associated with an individual being at the helm of political power directing and taking full charge and responsibility for management of its affairs. While it is appreciated that the concept does not necessarily assume a meaning only in this regards, it is the context in which the term is applied in this paper.

The second concept of interest and relevance to the task in this paper is “Transformational”. This term is crafted from the verb “Transform” which according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary means “to completely change the appearance or character of something especially so that it is better” Transformational accordingly has reference to the process of making that “complete change” happen through a series of coordinated but closely interconnected actions. The individual who initiates and manages that process of “complete change” is a Transformational Leader. Fayemi’s insights on this are quite elucidating and worth quoting at some length.

According to him (2009:105) Transformational Leadership entails

The process of expanding and adapting the capacity of the society in satisfying the materials and cultural needs designed to achieve among others increased productivity within a balanced economic system ..... the eradication of poverty and disease and the liberation of the individual from their constraints... such a process necessarily involves individual freedom and social security, cultural buoyancy, educational and economic liberation, self-reliance and a sustainable sociopolitical order.

Clearly then Transformational Leadership is only one of the many classifiable categories scholars have identified for our subject matter. The first spade work in the enterprise was done by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). His scheme identified three broad types of leaderships and authority.

- a) Traditional Leadership based on cultural beliefs and values;
- b) Charismatic Leadership anchored on an individual’s exceptional endowments and personality traits; and
- c) Rational Legal Authority/Leadership based on constitutional and legal provisions in the society.

More recent scholarship has gone beyond Weber’s classical categorization. Elaigwu (2010) for example talked about six closely related but nonetheless separate leadership groupings in any modern political setting. These, according to him, include the Political, Economic, Intellectual, Bureaucratic, Military and the Traditional cum Religious. Other classifications that adorn the literature talk about Autocratic versus Participative style of leadership, Laissez Fair or Free reign approach versus Narcissistic leadership, Toxic versus Benign Leadership and of course Transactional versus

Transformational Leadership. Since the least distinction is of direct relevance to this presentation, let us look at it some detail.

Baas (1985) has argued that the transactional type is a status quo type leader whose main approach is focused on the maintenance and sustenance of the situation he has met on the grounds. Changes may, and sometimes do, occur but usually these are incidental, accidental or at best incremental. A transactional leader is diametrically averse to planned, wholistic and comprehensive changes aimed at fundamentally altering or redirecting the path to be taken or the goals to be pursued by the society.

Transformational leadership in contradistinction is committed, rather implacably, to rapid changes and to the alteration of the existing reality in a revolutionary manner. It is quick to perceive or identify both the obvious and not so obvious potentials of the society harnessable for the acceleration of the change agenda in that society. Additionally, and relatedly, this particular species is often driven by an inexhaustible and, perhaps, inexplicable energy to transform the environment in which they find themselves through carefully crafted and meticulously implemented blue prints or programmes. This more often than not is at great perils to their lives from all sorts of anti-change groupings who feed fat on the existing order and feel mortality threatened materially and psychologically, by the new dynamics.

In style and contents transformational leaders go beyond jingoism, rhetorics and sloganeering and focus on real problems that touch on the lives of real people particularly those at the rungs of the societal ladders. For example, in a country like Nigeria this should involve policies that emancipate the people from the vicious grip of poverty, the debilitatingness of malaria and HIV-AIDS and the incapacitating blizzard of illiteracy and ignorance among others.

In summary, Transformational Leadership exudes Honesty, Responsibility Confidence, Enthusiasm, Reliability, Patience, Decisiveness, Determination, Courage and Empathy. We concede that it may indeed be difficult for all these traits to converge at one individual. Yet it is the possibility of such convergence that sets transformational leadership as a special breed; that makes it stand tall, head and shoulders above the ordinary run of the mill.

### **3. Leadership and the Development Process in Nigeria: Some Comments**

The view that Nigeria’s protracted inability to experience rapid transformations in the lives of its citizens can be traced largely, to the poor quality of leadership at the national level is one on which a wide consensus is available. In the words of one analyst “the greatest problems Nigeria has had to face since independence are those of leadership and development (Inayatullah, 1998:16). Fayemi (2009:106) was more caustic in his own assessments. According to him:

Nigeria’s experience of leadership and development has been horrendously traumatic. The problem is that there is no pointer as at present to assure the emergence of pools of leaders that the nation needs for its development.

He continued that:

It is indeed worrisome to note that political independence has brought no substantive change in economic conditions and the people’s general development. The standards of living are deteriorating on daily basis as high unemployment, inflation, civil strife, poverty, corruption diseases, malnutrition, illiteracy (the list is endless) appears to be the only legacy the state is capable of passing from one generation to another.

Though over quoted and, perhaps, hackneyed, Chinua Achebe's equally acidic remarks on the issue are also relevant here. Achebe (1983:1) declared that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness, or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility of the challenges of personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

What most watchers of the Nigerian scene find enigmatic and fundamentally contradictory is how a country so richly endowed with human and mineral resources should find itself almost irredeemably in the doldrums of backwardness and the deep and dark abyss of extreme poverty on the part of most of its citizens. On the surface, it appears inexplicable that Nigeria which for the past four decades has been one of the world's ten leading exporters of crude petroleum from which it has earned trillions of dollars today ranks among the twenty least developed states on the globe on almost every Human Development Index (HDI). These include literacy level, access to health facilities, potable water, electricity and the rate of infant mortality among others. With over 60% of its citizens surviving on less than two dollars a day, Nigeria is in the same group (a group she has no business being in given her resources) as Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Niger and Haiti

It is believed that the quality of leadership and the socio-political environment often determine the nature of national development. The value of leadership in nation building cannot be underestimated. Leadership is the prime cause of development because of its indispensable role in the national context. Leadership provides direction, national mission, vision and targets. For instance, the contribution of leadership to the emergence of the South East Asian nations of Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan, referred to as the Asian Tigers cannot be over emphasized. It was leadership that moved these countries from where they were once grouped with Nigeria as third world nations to amongst the developed ones. It took focused leadership that was committed to transformation for them to arrive at where they are today. These transformational leaders provided the needed direction, set the necessary agenda and executed needed transformation. To drive this point home, the Singaporean president, Lee Kuan Yew asserted, we learned from the failed policies of countries such as India, Pakistan, Ghana and Nigeria. Many new nations believed that the way to prosperity was state planning of the economy with socialist states being seen as models, so my strategy was turn Singapore, a third world island, into a first-world oasis, by entrenching the concept of the rule of law and establishing up-to-date facilities in communications and transportation as the necessary artery for connecting people and property to the economy" (Fornauf, 2005)

Interestingly, as noted earlier, other countries like Malaysia, South Korea and Singapore with which Nigeria was ranked at par on her independence in 1960 have all outdistanced her in the realm of economic development and transformation. Ironically while the country has sunk deeper and deeper into the quagmire of poverty, it has consistently maintained top position in other international ranking viz the one by the highly respect transparency international. Since the 1980s Nigeria has, without fail, featured among the ten most corrupt states in the world. In the three years, penultimate to the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria's rating as the single most corrupt country in the world appeared assailable. Gains associated with the activities of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have brought some marginal relief and amelioration to the infamy.

As the quotations above indicate the continued deadlock in Nigeria's development administration manifesting in a visible failure to effectively transform the national socio-economic environment is, more than anything else a result of the massive corruption and the perfidy hitherto associated with leadership. Transformatory leadership and massive corruption involving the looting and stealing of public funds that could have gone a long way to radically transform the lives of members of that public make strange bedfellows. Like two lines that go in opposite direction they can only converge at infinity.

Other factors that have been contributory to this melancholic state of affairs include sheer incompetence the leaders' inability to rise above narrow primordial interests as well as the subterranean machinations of foreign forces and external interest for whom Nigeria's continued underdeveloped status is good news for further exploitation.

As stated before, the decadent state of the economy and the mass poverty in Nigeria in the face of abundant human and natural resources is a sad irony. A collection of factors has combined to impoverish Nigeria despite her enormous wealth. But none is as powerful as the failure of leadership in the country. Indeed, the story of Nigeria's development, or underdevelopment, is the story of failed leadership.

#### 4. Conclusion

The problem of Nigeria's development is largely that of leadership. Nigeria is in dire need of the kind of leadership with the ability to translate and transform the enormous potentials of the country to manifest development realities. A leadership that will be totally determined to bring about the required transformational skills that will launch the country in to the development path is what is now needed in Nigeria. For that to happen, citizens must leave their comfort zones and be active in insisting for the best leadership for Nigeria as a minimum requirement for the development of the country. Anything short must not be accepted.

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