

Review

Africa's leadership challenges in the 21st century: A Nigerian perspective

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Leadership crisis in Africa is often seen from the point of view of the misdemeanor of various political rulers dotting the continental landscape. This paper sees it differently. It explores the fundamental cause of the misleadership parody, ranging from the personal capacity underdevelopment, to social-psychological and value deficiencies and misunderstandings that need to be addressed for Africa to be repositioned politically.

Key words: Leadership, role model, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Interactions with the journals, radio and television media, and of course colleagues and students before now, has thrown more light on the declining quality of leadership on the continent, and indeed the spatial culture of nonexistent exemplary leadership, which David Oyedepo calls "Role Model". We shall come to that shortly. There is lack of "leadership in Africa." In our context, we will be looking at leadership in general and within the perspective of the environment as it relates to Africa. In terms of the ecological situation of leadership, it has to do with the socio-political environment, in which we have three key players namely, the leader, the follower and then the environment. Leadership responds to the environment, the same way followership works with leadership. In other words, there is a quintessential interface between leadership and followership, and the social space or environment.

In Africa, all we have seen is rulership or at best "managership". Such rulership or misleadership often carries along with it the excess baggage of more innocuous problems for the continent-from Abidjan to Djibouti, Lagos to Johannesburg, Freetown to Kinshasa, Darfur to Kampala, and Cape to Cairo. Any impassioned person about the continent, capable of reading the context of the African dilemma and analyzing it, it is same

story of one leadership ineptitude or the other. This does not however, mean the expression of afro-pessimism as some scholars have done (Ayodele, et al., 2005), but rather an afro-optimistic approach to developments as they unfold.

THE PROBLEM

Leadership has not been oversubscribed to as the problem of Africa, contrary to how some scholars have argued in recent times. It is contended in that line of thought that there are other dire straits in 21st century Africa that tend to render leadership to a secondary matter as they defy leadership (Anan, 2003). However, it is pertinent to note, leadership is an intervening variable in modern governable society as it increases or decreases the rate of the crisis, depending on policy choices, decisions and implementation (Samuel, 2006). There are three types of leadership challenges at the generic level in the 21st century, namely, the contextual, the personal and the changing paradigms. At the contextual level in the case of Africa, the historical, environmental, diseases, poverty, wars and political instability, infrastructural and general underdevelopment

are the turbulent issues. For instance, in Congo, there is the poverty of infrastructural development from independence to date. At the personal level, observation has shown that there is low drive or motivation towards self development on the part of Africans (leaders or followers), absence of leadership and general performance skills and a warped educational system, which started dying with the advent of unfocused military rule and political instability. For instance, it is largely evident that one can count the number of African rulers that is schooled up to the university level, or how many go back to school after one level of service. In Congo-Leopoldville (later Congo-Kinshasa, Zaire and now DR Congo) at independence for instance, only Patrice Lumumba had any significant tertiary education. The third is the challenge of whether Africa is responding well to changing paradigms such as globalization, world perspectives, technology, international speed of events and democratization.

Indeed there are other problems of Africa in the 21st century that is natural, as they are phenomenal. The pandemic HIV-AIDS, like malaria is pivotal to development, but is closely tied to leadership. The way this is done is by the effective or ineffective control and management of such natural/health maladies by governments. It will be proper to quickly remind you of many other challenges of the 21st century that you already know, which are either engendered or got, that have exacerbated by failures of leadership. They include:

Economic

poverty; infrastructural underdevelopment; urban decay; economic dependency upon western nations for financial aid, loans, technical assistance, and technical expertise; external indebtedness; misappropriation of public funds; embezzlement and financial mismanagement; prebendalism; money laundering; contractocracy; cyber fraud; poor economic, including agricultural policies and poorly implemented engineering programmes like SAP.

Social

These include ethnicity, irredentism, ethnic violence and genocide and civil wars like in Rwanda and Burundi between the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, Darfur in Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Niger Delta in Nigeria; sectarian or religious violence; sectionalism and communal violence; widening social disequilibrium and injustices arising from escalating economic misfortunes; unemployment and underemployment crises; anti-social activities, including rape, prostitution, robbery and a creeping culture of violence among the idle or unemployed youths; declining educational quality and collapsed university system; food insecurity and general social insecurity therefrom.

Health and climatic challenges

In the 21st century include HIV-AIDS, malaria, cataract blindness, bird flu, environmental crisis, water resource and soil crises, and many more.

Political

By far, the political challenges are more perennial and indeed central to the causation or escalation of the other challenges. These are political instability, sit-tightism that manifests in the Machiavellian arrogance of power consciousness or civilian dictatorship or even in third term bids of septuagenarian leaders; construction of a pseudo-democratic subsystem or otherwise militarization of the ostensibly democratic institutions; praetorianism (Amuwo et al., 1997) excessive politicization of issues and policy-making; political corruption, manipulations of electoral processes; political assassinations; rulers compromised to western dictates; maladministration; ideological differences; disunity; failed policies; failed unions, etc.

The Nigerian situation is more critical. Thus, its response in the 21st century to leadership challenges is not far from prognosis. First, as the most populous nation in the continent, it stands the greatest risk in the event of one act of ill-governance or the other such as collapse of inter group relations, outbreak or mismanagement of diseases, etc. Second, Nigeria's acclaimed "giant" of Africa status, its afrocentric approach to continental issues, and unsavory political experience of the past-distant and recent- do not only make it concerned, on democratizing, about the future of modern democracy and good governance in Africa; but have stimulated its repositioning for favourable leadership turn over in the present century (Fawole, 1999). This paper therefore, addresses the multidimensional or multifaceted crises of leadership in Africa, making more references to Nigeria, and looking at the issues in a characteristically concerned afrocentric Nigerian way, and suggesting profound solutions to the tragic rulership crisis.

WHERE DID WE GO WRONG?

In a lecture by a radical Nigerian historian, Yusufu (1999) tilted, "History and the challenge to the peoples and politics of Africa in the 21st century" delivered to honour the memory of Kenneth (1917 - 1983), an iconoclast of Nigerian History, he noted:

"liberation of feelings, and of the mind, with regards to humanity's conception of what constitutes the humankind and the variety of the nature of the historical processes that produce this humanity, over the millennia and over the centuries, was achieved with particular reference to African history. But, given the position of Africa, and Africans, in world history, it has world-wide significance. Its universality was derived from its

particularity. This is because of what Africa and Africans had come to stand for in the world, before and after the fifteenth century. For, as that philosopher, and revolutionary with a long-range encyclopedic vision of mankind, Mao Tse-Tung, pointed out, during the height of the civil rights struggle of the African-Americans in 1963, the evil system of colonialism and imperialism was built on the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes. It will only come to an end with the complete emancipation of the Black People”.

The fundamental message here is that, the roots of present or 21st century African problem lie in pre-colonial slavery and succeeding colonial misadventures, and that it can only be overcome when there is a complete deliverance from the vestiges of colonial or neocolonial manipulations and an exorcising of the ghost of western imperialism, which haunts the continent by the perpetuation or recycling of the compradors in post colonial African leadership. How is colonial power or political arrangements carried into the post-colonial state? Power configurations and politicking after independence were deliberately arranged-as they were encouraged-along ethnic lines, with excessive power and privileges bequeathed to ethnic groups that were unrepentantly loyal to the ex-metropolises. As the favored group rules to favor itself and the colonial master that gave power to it, a kind of interregnum erupts in which there is endless struggle for power and ethnic balancing among the groups, which most times results in extreme acts of violence and civil wars (Ikime, 1985).

Again, this struggle for power, according to Morgenthau (1992) is the main essence of inter-group relations, is exemplified by the coups and counter coups staged by different ethnic groups within an ethicized and deprofessionalized military institution in Nigeria and elsewhere. In Nigeria for instance, Generals Mohammed, Buhari, Babangida, Abacha and Abubakar, staged separate coups at different points in time to become heads of state of Nigeria between 1975 and 1999 to fulfill the leadership destinies of either the Hausas, the Fulanis or the Kanuris; while others also made their attempts to occupy this exalted position, but by the virtue of the firm placement of the instruments of coercion in the hands of the north long ago, and which they have consolidated over the years, these aggrieved groups in the army have ended up failing. The institutional machinery for the exercise of power and its basis in occupational groups, social strata and social classes and their concrete economic and political interests are not perceived with this shallow outlook. This perception of politics is, itself, derived from certain false assumptions about what constitutes nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and polities.

It may be of some use if this lecture draws your attention to some issues raised by the study of our history with regards to the very nature of the polities whose democracy is soon going to face the challenges of the

21st century. The degree to which this democracy is realized, sustained and grown, is going to depend, very much, on how the question of the nature, and relationships, between the nationalities of these democratic polities are grasped and used in political practice. Already, the national question has become very explosive, involving violent ethnic conflicts, stresses and tension all over this country. A discussion of the future direction of this country and its options in the 21st century has to squarely face this question, at a deeper level than has hitherto largely been done.

According to Usman (1999) echoing Dike (1980), mankind has always been made up of distinct races, which are distinct biological entities, with distinctive physiological, mental and emotional attributes. Each race is said to be composed of distinct nations, made up of populations of largely the same racial stock, existing as distinct entities on their-own territory, with their language, cultures and identities, going back to the beginning of time. This is the racio-ethnic conception of the nation. The terms, "tribe", "ethnic group" and "nationality" are applied to smaller, or more dispersed, racio-ethnic groups, which are yet to attain proper nationhood, as they are seen to be economically, culturally and politically backward, in comparison with the nations of Western Europe, which are presented as representing the standard model of the nation.

This conception of the nation which European imperialism has imposed on the world, since the nineteenth century, is racio-ethnic, because it views the nation as essentially a biological community produced by biological processes and linked together by "blood ties", irrespective of language, culture, religion, territorial location and political loyalty and identity.

The present nationality law of Germany is one of the best examples of the contemporary legal manifestation of this racio-ethnic conception of nation and of nationality. Under this law, you cannot be a German citizen, unless you have what is called "German blood" in your veins. Once you can prove that you are of German ancestry, and you have "German blood", through the male, or, the female line, you automatically get German citizenship, even if you do not speak the German Language, have never been an inhabitant of the territory of Germany and hardly know anything about Germany, or German culture.

Several millions of migrants into Germany, from central and eastern Europe, who are supposed to have "German blood" have on this basis, been given German citizenship. But, the 7.4 million Poles, Turks, Serbs, Kurds, Asians West and North Africans working in Germany, for decades, many of whom were born there, and work there, have no other home and can only speak German and know no other country can deny German citizenship, because they have no "German blood" in their veins.

Other European countries, like the United Kingdom, have provisions along these lines, in their nationality and citizenship laws, but they are not as brazen as those of

"nationalists to ethnic or even tribal leaders at independence because they had no vision, but dreams of independence, thereby knowing not what else to do after achieving this great feat. Without vision, rulership reaches a bus stop of ideas, running out of ideas and destroying great legacies that had been built. There are instances in the bible; just as the likes of Arap Moi, Sese Seko, Laurent Kabila and Eyadema have demonstrated in Africa.

Yet, there were some other Africans that had a vision and pursued it vigorously and conclusively such as Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Jomo Kenyatta and Sekou Toure. You will notice that their ideas have outlived them, despite their death many years ago. This is because visions do not die as dreams. Obafemi Awolowo is today celebrated because he did not merely have a dream of just becoming the Premier of Western Nigeria or President of the nation; rather, his vision which transcended colonial and post colonial Nigeria berthed the first and perhaps only national and best television station in Nigeria, the most celebrated and politically educative newspaper, *Nigerian Tribune* and the free education legacy that has put the west in front educationally ahead of other parts of the country. Vision is thus pivotal to national and continental preservation and prosperity. Even the bible recognizes vision as a manifestation of wisdom. Vision is seeing it, understanding and doing it; the people perish for lack of vision. Leadership is visionary and such is what Africa needs in the 21st century to catch up with the pace of global development, which has since taken a fast flight in the Industrialized North and Second World South. To close this point, it is pertinent to see what Pastor Femi Emmanuel says again about vision: "vision plus revelation equals distinction" (27); in other words, vision must be clearly understood. Put differently, it is a clear mapping of how to carry out the assignment in your vision.

Another problem of leadership in 21st century Africa is the perspective of leadership itself. It will be proper to quickly submit before identifying the locators of leadership, that the environment of leadership including followers and leaders in Africa has a consumer perspective, rather than a producer perspective that has changed the fortunes of the west. We merely consume, we do not produce finished exotic goods that is transferable for acquisition of wealth or capital. In the same vein, we sell raw materials because we do not and have not developed capacity to turn it to finished product. Mensah Otabil, Chancellor of Central University, Accra at a Shiloh Program in Canaanland, Ota in 2004, in a message titled, "Buying the Future" identified this feature as an Esau mentality whereby we sell our birthright because of our shortsightedness. Now, among the locators of leadership identified by Obayan (2006), the most fascinatingly dangerous for Africa is positional leadership perspective. This represents the get-there-by-all-means syndrome but with infinitesimal, insignificant or

no achievements at all. What constitutes achievements are rewarding efforts to the aspirant for getting there, the titular recognition, addition to or richness of his curriculum vitae, and of course, the spoils of office. The "position" therefore is the focus of attention, not the results, neither the policies, nor the actions and inactions. The inactions are more likely to find space and speed.

In Africa, titles have driven our men-politicians, soldiers, and even area boys crazy. Hence, big sounding titles like „President, General, Chief Doctor, Honorable Minister, Senator, Governor, Alhaji Chief Dr., Rev. Colonel, Prophet Architect“, etc have tended to make us lose a sense of our calling and responsibility for mundane title contest and irrelevances. The culture of seeking and taking titles extends to the area boys who also bear „Professor, Chief, Alaye baba“. It is this same positional perception that has driven politicians in Nigeria to begin assassinations of perceived and real political threats or enemies, to get to power position at all costs by 2007. This explains the murders of Funsho Williams in Lagos, and Dr. Ayo Daramola in Ekiti. Who knows who and who are next! The cycle goes on.

The opposite of positional leadership is responsible leadership. This is what Africa needs in the 21st century. Let us query, for instance, the ambitions of General Ibrahim Babangida in Nigeria, to return to power. Why does he want power again? In whose interest? What has he got to offer? What did he do in his eight years the first time to merit a return? The rhetorical questions are answerable when we place Babangida's ambition within the purview of the positional leadership perspective that is ruining Africa.

Babangida just wants to return to power, that is all! He should have accomplished his vision for the country when he spent eight years in power (1985 - 1993). Could returning mean he had failed in leadership when he had the first opportunity? Like many other African heads of states, retired generals, Babangida may have become a spentforce who probably wishes to return for the sake of covering up his first loopholes. As a matter of fact, he has precedence to refer to- Milton Obote came back in Uganda, Yoweri Museveni came back in Uganda, Matthew Kerekou did same in Benin Republic, and of course our own General Obasanjo has done same in Nigeria. Babangida's ambition is apparently parochial and very self-serving. Positional leadership syndrome is responsible for this. "I was this, I was that, I am this, I will be this....etc" without any driving philosophy, ideology or vision and without any accomplishments worthy of envy. The madness must stop! Babangida, like other retired generals, must quit the scene completely. Their re-intervention is an arrogant display of how they have permanently captured Africa. What is more? Nigeria's examples are setting a very dangerous precedence for the continent's nascent democracy. We cannot afford to have a return of soldiers to power under any guise if we must move ahead in the 21st century.

Furthermore, African rulers must stop running their

a thing of tomorrow, not that of yesterday. The west we try to ape has the perception that all situations are conquerable and changeable for the best. This has made them not to tire in making inventions, developing their scientific and technological knowledge base, of which we are all beneficiaries. African politicians, rulers, people must change this attitude towards development if they must make a headway in mainstream globalization that is staring them in the face.

Lastly, after decades of centralized “command and control”, government leaders espouse market-led economic growth and community empowerment without a clear understanding of the changes this likely requires in their roles and behavior. After years of operating as what many in their own lands considered “pariahs” and “profiteers”, business leaders are unfamiliar with emerging norms of public-private cooperation and corporate social responsibility. And, eternal advocates for change, civil society leaders often lack a clear understanding of the need for business and government alike to satisfy multiple stakeholders in order to create truly sustainable prosperity and peace.

WAYS FORWARD

The crisis of leadership in Africa results in continued poverty for millions of men, women and children, underdevelopment and continued dependency on the west. The causes of this crisis have been identified. But high among them is the fact that many African countries lack a broadly shared vision of the future that effectively melds the demands of globalization with local values. To overcome the perennial leadership challenges, a Zimbabwean official of the World Bank noted in 2001 that Africans must come:

- (i) To identify and address their personal strengths and weaknesses as leaders.
- (ii) To understand the challenges they face as participants in a rapidly globalizing society.
- (iii) To share and refine their respective visions of the society they would like to live in.
- (iv) To lead by example in building this society.

The continent stands on the verge of an opportunity which should be grasped. African leaders are increasingly taking the reins to define where they want to take Africa and to build a new partnership between donors and African countries. This was highlighted in July 2001, when the Heads of States of the African Union adopted the African Initiative in Lusaka. The challenge now is to take this forward forcefully. The new initiative is accompanied by a growing consensus, both within Africa and among donors, that poverty reduction should be at the center of development efforts, and that the development agenda should be led by Africans themselves. Africa is the only continent where poverty is on the rise,

and not decreasing. Decisive action is needed if we want to cut severe poverty by half by 2015. We need more growth, at least 5 to 7 percent, and we need to ensure that the poor benefit from such growth. Tangibly speaking, what are these challenges posed before Africa in the century that will reposition it for development within the global system?

Redefining leadership in Africa

This will require setting agenda, goals and targets that are well informed by a sound technical and knowledge base, and by a vision that is vigorously pursued, not mere dreams that die with the dreamer. Indeed, through the strengthening of democracy, civil society becomes a tool with a capacity to enhance sustainable peace, security, stability and development; and that there can be no civil society without our collective and direct involvement. Much international spotlight has been cast on the severity and magnitude of Africa's challenges. Addressing those challenges in a new cooperative spirit should nurture and sustain change and renewal in Africa. But problems and challenges can be hardly tackled in a vacuum.

Our getting involved, all of us, in all spheres of leadership is half of the battle in overcoming the challenges we face. After all, history and great accomplishments start and end with us as individuals and the commitment and sacrifices we are willing to make in the public interest.

Leadership training and culture

This is the belief that becoming a leader is only possible when training grounds are not just available, but are properly positioned for great acculturation for the youth.

Emergence of role models

Africa's 21st century is secure if there are role models for the leadership “apprentice” or student to emulate or to inspire them. The youth best learns by example, not experience. Old ideas are good guides, but fresh ones build changing societies.

Improving governance and resolving conflicts

It is observable that well-managed countries, countries with effective institutions and sound policies tend to be more successful. Over the last decade, dysfunctional governance has taken a heavy toll on Africa's development. Endemic corruption, skewed budget allocations and a corroded fabric of state-society relations, often continue to undermine the potential for successful development, and in some cases even foster conflict.

A quantum improvement in governance is needed. We

