

THE POVERTY OF LEADERSHIP AND THE PROLIFERATION OF CORRUPTION PRACTICES IN NIGERIA SINCE 1960

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ABSTRACT

The menace of leadership corruption in Nigeria is certainly a major impediment of national development. The study is a critical evaluation of the poverty of leadership and the proliferation of corrupt practices in Nigeria since 1960. The corrupt nature of Nigeria's past and present leaders had negative impact on material production, cost of living, standard of living, unemployment, brain drain, crime and overall harsh economic environment. The paper submits that leadership corruptions has bred, youth violence, and other crimes related to physical assault such as, murder, arson, armed robbery, rape, kidnapping, prostitution, examination malpractices, assassination, pipeline vandals, oil bunkering, internet fraud etc. There seem not to be an end to the misery that is facing the masses as a result of growing corruption perpetuated by the leadership in the country. The paper recommends that constitutional provision to enhance the legal protection of the citizen's socio-economic rights be enshrined. This would ensure that only good rulers who will preserve the lives of his subject will occupy position. The paper would rely on primary and secondary sources in examining the subject.

Introduction

This study is a critical assessment and appraisal of leadership role and the proliferation of corruption in Nigeria since independence. It measures leadership responsibility in Nigeria. It is prompted by the need to speak out against misrule and injustice perpetuated by bad leadership. Nigerians have suffered leadership failure and socio-economic insecurity arising largely from corruption of both the military and political leaders that have ruled the country. The political class in Nigeria is dependent, parasitic and very corrupt in nature including its style of mal-administration. There appears to be a leadership conspiracy over the mass majority of the peoples of Nigeria particularly since 1979. This paper argues therefore, that the fundamental problem which hindered Nigeria's political and economic advancement is leadership corruption and ineptitude. Example is sited here of leaders, when they ruled, what they did and in some cases citizen's reaction to such misrule.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognized certain national objectives which are expected to integrate the individual for the purpose of promoting good governance and welfare of all persons. These objectives are: a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land of

bright and full of opportunities for all citizens. The philosophy behind these principles is to integrate the individual into a sound and effective citizen with the goal of self realization of the human self which will create a better relationship and national consciousness.

Unfortunately, however, fifty two years after independence Nigerians are disillusioned about these principles and their leaders who have failed to deliver the good governance, secure the welfare of persons on the principles of freedom, equality and justice and the purpose of consolidating the unity of the people. Nigerians are amazed and dismayed about their leader's display of power, affluence and financial recklessness. The socio-economic structure to make the citizens feel compel to be patriotic are lacking. There seems not to be any indication to end of poverty.

The Proliferation of Corruption Practices in Nigeria

To be able to find solution to a given phenomenon we must trace the origin of that phenomenon. Historically, Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership. Since independence there has been an absence of intellectual rigor in the political thought of our founding fathers. From the onset the tendency has always been towards material acquisition, and self centeredness. The poverty of thought is exhibited in the biography of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo. He in a solemn vow made by Azikiwe in 1937 he pledged:

That henceforth I shall utilize my earned income to secure my enjoyment of a high standard of living and to give a helping hand to the needy (*Achebe, 1983: 11*).

Obafemi Awolowo was even more forthright about his ambitions;

I was going to make myself formidable intellectually, morally invulnerable, to make all the money that is possible for man with my brains and brawn to make in Nigeria (*Achebe, 1983: 11*).

The Nigerian constitution contains some 'fundamental objectives of state policy' just like the international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights instrument, relates generally to individual welfare in the society. The various provisions proclaim the significance of the rights of the citizens to include; rights to social security, right to work, free choice of employment, just and favorable remuneration, right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, right to education etc. (*Bako, 1998: 118*). These fundamental objectives have not been met because the political class in Nigeria is dependent, parasitic and very corrupt in nature including its style of mal-administration. As a result of the mismanagement of the economy unemployment became a key factor in the labour market even as the cost of living rise beyond the reach of the low income earners.

It is in the light of the above that former Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Chief Emeka Anyaoku recommended surgical operation to curb the menace of corruption in Nigeira. He noted that Corruption is the major problem confronting the nation. It is the reason for our bad roads, lack of electricity and other infrastructures, and falling standard of education. Until the people of Nigeria are allowed to elect their leaders Nigeria would remain in the wood because leaders who emerged through the process of money politics would not be responsible to the electorates (*RUNNEWS, Dec. 2009: 1*)

Nigerian leaders frequently use the phrase, “This great county of ours” This phrase is delusive because according to Achebe:

Nigeria is not a great country. It is one of the most disorderly nations in the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun. It is one of the most expensive countries and one of those that gives least value for money. It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar. In short, it is one of the most unpleasant places on earth (Achebe, 1983: 10).

The individual in Nigeria is left with the arduous task of providing for himself in respect of food, clothing, water, security, house, mobility, education and other basic necessities of life. Hence, the culture of individualism, materialism, and winner takes all continues to grow. To the individual the government is a distant entity that is virtually not responsive or sensitive to the plight of the ordinary citizen. Since independence in 1960, and more so since the 1980s, the standard of living of Nigerians have degenerated so low as a result of mismanagement of the economy by the political class. Prices of some essential commodities rose beyond the reach of the low income earners. (Bako, 1998: 118).

Basic needs such as education, health, housing transport and food are neglected. The health sector is characterized by soaring cost. The general hospital which used to be the savior of the common man’s life in times of ill health is now as expensive as the privately owned hospitals. Public hospitals are poorly equipped which is why the rich and those who held political positions often travel abroad for medical attention when they are ill. According to report of Pediatric Association of Nigeria (PAN) about 55 percent of Nigerian children below the age of five years die of malnutrition (*Daily Times* 15/4/1998)

Indeed, food, housing and clothing are some of the basic needs of humanity. Nigerians have not been elevated beyond the basic needs perspective. Even the basic needs are luxuries to many Nigerians. Other socio-economic needs of man such as ownership of a vehicle which is a mere necessity for mobility are the preserve of the privileged few. Basic needs are recognized as human needs and not as human right. This cumulative experience of the mass majority of poor and low income Nigerians, the absence of fair play which works on the impulses to shove other people aside and move to the fore whenever the opportunity arises. According Chinua Achebe:

Discipline does not invite supervision by an external force but is imposed by the individual from within. Indeed discipline is either self discipline or it is nothing at all. But although society thus appears to leave individuals to their own discretion in the matter of social discipline, this freedom is strictly circumscribed by sanctions of varying severity (Achebe, 1983: 28)

The Poverty of Leadership

The fundamental problem which hindered Nigeria’s political and economic advancement is leadership corruption and ineptitude. Indiscipline pervades our public life so completely that Achebe is justified in saying that it is: the condition par excellence of contemporary Nigerian society. We see and hear and read about indiscipline in the home, in the public service, in the private sector, in government and in legislative assemblies, on the the roads, in the air. The malaise takes so many different forms – sometimes brutally crude, at other times more subtle – that a comprehensive definition of it would be very difficult (Achebe, 1983: 27)

From the onset the Nigerian constitution granted enormous power to the man at the centre i.e. the president such that whoever finds himself in power automatically lords it over other groups or parties. For instance on October 1st, 1979, when the military handed over power to a democratically elected government headed by President Shehu Usman Shagari under the platform of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) who won majority in the election, the real character of the Nigerian political class was enacted. (K. Eso, 1996: 270-2). There was uncontrolled expenditure by the federal government on imported rice and other consumables. There was an army of full-time legislators who doubled as emergency contractors. The result was the drain on Nigeria's foreign exchange which left the country with a huge foreign debt of about \$15 billion by 1984. (Orewa, 2002:115) Between 1979 and 1983, basic needs of humanity, food, housing, clothing, transport or the ownership of a vehicle, health and other basic necessities became a preserve of the privileged few.

The General Muhammadu Buhari regime which took over power from Shagari was able to identify that part of the debt incurred by the Shagari administration resulted from non-existent transactions by which millions of dollars were illegally siphoned by unscrupulous Nigerians and their foreign collaborators in the Shagari cabinet. The Buhari regime was criticized for being high-handed and the way and manner it disposed public fixed assets in improper working conditions declaring them falsely as unserviceable. (Ogunye, 1998: 115-9). Nigerians saw the regime as been too autocratic and harsh on them.

On 27 August, 1985, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida took over the administration of the country. The regime proposed International Monetary Fund Loan (IMF) loan to Nigerians towards paying its foreign debts. After wide consultation the federal government took the alternative course of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) designed for the nation by the World Bank (WB) as a condition for its support (Ogunye, 1998: 119). The SAP was conducted under the slogan 'liberation, rationalization and optimization,' to correct the inherent structural imbalance of the economy. The Babangida administration lacked the strict financial discipline which economic revivalist strategy such as SAP entails. Nigeria which ranked among the twenty economically independent nations in the world immediately after independence came to be the 13th poorest nation. Babangida's administration institutionalized corruption as if it was a cardinal state policy (Emordi, 2008: 4-5).

General Sanni Abacha seized power from the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan on November 17, 1993. Abacha's administration was notorious for tampering with and looting the public treasury. He and members of his family became some of the richest people in the world. He served himself and allowed members of his cabinet to serve themselves as well. For instance, after his death, Chief Anthony Emeka Ani, his finance minister refunded the sum of \$45 million allegedly given to him by his master, Abacha for managing the crumbled economy well. The 'gift' was said to be his share of the \$1.5 billion over-charged by Abacha administration for debt buy-back of \$500 million for a \$2.5 billion Russian debt on the Ajaokuta steel project on which over \$7 billion was spent. The Power and Steel Minister, Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu got DM5 million from Abacha's son, Mohammed who brokered the deal. Under the Abacha administration several public utilities collapsed. Abacha's insincerity to national interest manifested more clearly when foreign investors started divesting capital out of the

country. His regime suffered the most humiliating criticism in particular form pro-democracy activist (Ogunye, 1998: 72) Nigeria's economy was at the mercy of International Monetary Fund (IMF). Nigeria became a pariah state in the comity of nations.

General Abdulsalam Abubakar who took over after Abacha's death in 1997, was noted for official corruption particularly in the award of contracts as in the case of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Defence and Police Force Headquarters. The military handed over power to a democratically elected government on May 29, 1999, after holding on to power for fifteen years (Jan. 1984-May 1999). President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo (former General and military Head of State) who took over power under the People's Democratic Party was not better than his predecessors who ruled the country. The country neglect of infrastructure and refusal to cater for the basic needs of the citizens resulted in growing disaffection and serious tension which in some case resulted to break down of law and order as in the case between the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and the Hausa community in Lagos between 1999 and 2001. The Obasanjo regime was marred by religious riots, communal clashes, militant youth violence and other societal unrest (*ThisDay*, October 20, 2000: 5 See also Ogunye, 1998: ix)

Many of the financial scandals in public offices by our leaders which are reported on pages of Nigerian newspapers are sickening. Some of these include:

Senate Probe N31 billion Halliburton's bribery Scandal to Government Officials.

Financial Standard, Wednesday, 25 March, 2009, 1.

\$490 billion looted from treasury Since 1960 by Public Office Holders with Approximate £10 billion Stolen Every Year. – *Business Day Thursday 21 May, 2009, 50.*

How Oyo State Governor Adebayo Alao Akala Looted N1 billion in 11Months.*Punch*, Monday 14 July, 2008, 2.

Ibora Stole N9.1 Billion – *Punch*, Friday Dec. 14, 2007, 1.N96 million bribe: I collected money, not bribe – *LawanPunch*, Friday, 29 June, 2012, 1.

N96 million bribe: Reps make a U- turn, grill Lawan in Secret *Punch*, Friday, 29 June, 2012, 2.

The Public Service in Nigeria is the Least Productive in Africa.*Radio Nigeria Network News FM 97.50, Lagos, 16 August, 2012.*

Ribadu: I Reject Overtures to compromise report – *Daily Champion*, Tuesday November 6, 2012, 1

FG says one year of capital dredging of 572 km River Niger completed but neighbouring community say no dredging has been done particularly in Lokoja and Baro.

Radio Nigeria Network News FM 97.50, Lagos, 21 May, 2012.

Former Governor of Abia State, Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, is on a new crusadeThe founding member of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) says he;s going to prevail on every possible international anti-graft agency to compel all former Nigerian public office holders to disclose the

source of the stupendous wealth. – *The Will Newspaper, Wednesday September 05, 2012.*
(Downlad from facebook)

Our religious and political leaders must live a life of self denial. The disciples of Jesus Christ lived simple life of self denial. They lived an exemplary life. But our political and religious leaders today are living extravagant life. The religious leaders in Nigeria are not telling people the truth. They preach prosperity instead of holiness. Their concern is that the people prosper even at the expense of holiness, insecurity and strife. Or how can we explain a situation where a church pastor owns four private jets in a church where worshipers come to worship on stomach?

Churches today have become a vast money making venture which have made some to call on the government to task the church. Some of the so called men of God Profitably wine and dine with corrupt politicians and dubious captains of industry. They are their major financiers who sow massive seeds into the lives of these men of God. For love of money, some ministers of God fight and lobby for contract proposals to serve as officiating ministers in thanksgivings, birthdays, weddings, burials etc. In some churches ladies dress half naked that makes one wonder if he has come to night club

In the words of late Alhaja Kudirat Abiola:

When God's punishment comes on a nation with bad leaders, both the guilty and the innocent will suffer. Only those who speak out boldly against injustice shall be left out (*Fagbohunge, 1999: 39*)

Men and women are not likely to be assessed by their longevity but more importantly, their contribution to the improvement of the human condition (*Ray Ekpu, Newswatch: 1991:10*)

While in power Nigerian politicians pursue their own interest rather than the interest of their subjects. This is why there is much competition by people to rule, to be in the position of authority, because they want to govern for cash. Most people who found themselves in government do not pursue the interest of their own subjects. It is difficult to find good rulers because honest men are not ambitious to rule, they are not petty, they live above physical or material pleasures. According to Mukherjee and Ramaswamy:

Good men will not consent to govern for cash or honours. They do not want to be called mercenary for exacting a cash payment for the work of government or thieves for making money on the side, and they will not work for honours, for they aren't ambitious....(*Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007: 61*)

Local government chairmen/administrators in Nigeria have relegated their responsibilities to their citizens in the aspect of providing basic infrastructural facilities as stipulated in the statutory instruments. Local governments have been most effective in areas where they derive crucial benefits for themselves. The activities of local government administrators is focused on projects which generates income such as assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates, collecting rates from shops, kiosks, restaurants, bakeries, laundries, licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor. The local governments have not

lived up to expectation in the aspect of provision and maintenance of primary and adult, and vocational education, the development of agriculture and natural resources (*Iheme, 2000: 44-5*)

Conclusion

In this paper we read that Nigerian leaders are unpatriotic, evil, wicked, and renege on the on the social contract between the ruler and the ruled which is why the country has since independence being denied its enjoyment of peace, progress,, justice and necessary development. Consequently, the citizen cannot perform his patriotic duties. The study has shown that Nigerian leaders petty, mean, corrupt and could not live beyond physical or material pleasures devoid of emotional ties. Nigeria has not been able to produce good leaders because honest men could not find their way to power. There appears not to be any opportunity for people who are good and honest to occupy political positions. As a result of this situation there can not be enduring peace, true democracy nor serious economic advancement. For any meaningful development to be achieved therefore, the rule of law, separation of powers, and the good human, social and economic agenda must be entrenched.

Recommendations

At the end of this study the following recommendations are made:

First, The provision of certain basic necessities of life such as food, cloth, shelter, health and an efficient transport system must be regarded as a right and not as a privilege or luxury for all Nigerian citizens.

Second, provision be made in the constitution to make it possible for citizens to sue their government at any level to enforce their social, economic and cultural rights in accordance with the UN General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) Of 3 January 1976.

Third, Representation in the legislature should be a part-time employment so as to minimize the expenses on national expenditure on governance.

Fourth, only good men with unblemished records should be allowed to contest political positions, for only good men can make good rulers and good ruler will preserve the lives of his subjects. He will also transform them to quality human beings.

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ThisDay, October 20, 2000: 5 See also Ogunye, 1998.

Radio Nigeria Network News FM 97.50, Lagos, 16 August, 2012.

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