

The Nexus between Effective Leadership and Vibrant Economy: the Nigerian Case

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is the vehicle that has the capacity to transform a nation and propel it to the highest point of economic buoyancy if it is in the hands of dedicated, selfless people. It becomes effective when it harnesses resources at its behest to impact positively and meaningfully on the lives of the followership. This paper posits that national economy will depend on whether leadership is good or bad. In other words the paper establishes a correspondence between good leadership and a buoyant economy. It also, in retrospect assesses the performance of the Nigerian leadership that predates the incumbent and points out that its lustreless performance impacted negatively on the national economy. It goes further to the x-ray the present government and its activities which have led to the return of hope and a forward leap for the national economy. The paper concludes that there is a nexus between effective leadership and vibrant economy. It recommends that Nigeria should guard against the emergence of poor leadership and its attendant deleterious consequences ; that the cost of governance which is prohibitively high should be reduced drastically; that there should be a renewed fight against insurgency especially in the North Eastern part of Nigeria; that the war on corruption should be sustained until it is totally wiped out and that the efforts to make energy available in terms of availability of fuel at filling stations should be maintained.

KEYWORD: *Economic buoyancy, effective leadership, rapid transformation, followership.*

1.0 Introduction

The greatest factor that accounts for the highest level of success in any endeavours is effective leadership. Various scholars have defined leadership in a variety of ways. The importance of leadership in any human society is so great that a single definition of the term will be reductive. The concept is so wide and far-flung that we have such phrases as political, religious, social, regional, colonial and post-colonial leadership. Each of these descriptions points to what individuals and institutions did or failed to do in beating a path for the progress of others who are the followers. Leadership, whether natural or emergent, serves the purpose of positively influencing the environment in which it holds sway. This is why it is commonplace to hear such phrases as good or effective leadership when a society is orderly, just, socially integrated, politically stable and economically buoyant. On the contrary we can talk of bad or ineffective leadership when people, the governed, live in want in the midst of plenty; wallow in poverty in the arena of wealth; go through unabated regime of injustice when there should be

law and order in place; endure a life of political and social upheaval when the polity can be stable and peaceful. This impels us to conclude that there is a nexus between leadership and economic development.

2.0 Conceptual Review

The concepts of leadership and vibrant economy are reviewed in this section of the paper. Each concept is treated in separate subdivisions as seen in the following:

2.1 Leadership

The term 'leadership' has been defined from various perspectives depending on the passion and specialization of the person giving the definition.

Olowe O.F. (2005), for example, sees leadership as the ability to persuade others to work enthusiastically towards the achievement of defined objectives. He adds that leadership also connotes the work that a person performs to cause people to take effective and efficient action. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (2007, 4th edition) states that leadership is the position of being the leader of a group, country, organization etc. as well as the quality of being good at leading a group, organization, country etc.

Leadership is seen by Verderber (1990) as 'means of exerting influence to accomplish a goal.' The purport of this view of leadership is that a leader is able to influence the attitude and actions of others without using force by any means. If a leader takes a decision that accords with the interest or desire of his group he will be able to influence their views and outlook. Unconsciously he would have become their role model. Everything about a leader; his outlook about life, his public appearance, his tastes and dislikes, his innate qualities and disposition to public life and private duty will aggregate to a considerable influence with which to get his group to accomplish the tasks he has set for them.

The concept of leadership has been further widened by the attempts made by scholars to identify various leadership traits. Amongst these are the Great men or Traits theory which emphasizes the natural abilities of a leader in the discharge of his duties; the Behavioural theory of Bernard (1967) which is mainly concerned with the various approaches a leader adopts in finding solutions to various problems that arise in the course of his duties as a leader; the situational theory which holds that a leader is thrown up by the exigencies of the situation in which he finds himself. Others are the contingency theory of Fried (1967) which states that leadership is determined by a leader's system of motivation and finally, the Path-goal theory which believes that a person is motivated by the reward he expects after successfully performing the tasks given to him. A leader, here is the symbol of motivation for his followers.

These definitions provide insights into what leadership should be in a country, like Nigeria. Leadership should be seen as the inherent mental, physical, psychological and emotional abilities deposited in an individual which enable him to show others the ways and means of achieving objectives that promote the good of all.

2.2 Vibrant Economy

A country is said to have a vibrant economy when its citizens are gainfully employed and make meaningful contributions to the overall growth of the national economy. Kruss G. et.al (2010) sees a vibrant economy as a pace and pattern of broad based economic growth that creates productive jobs for the unemployed, increases the productivity and real earnings for workers throughout the economy and leads to sustained poverty alleviation. For Felipe, J.et. al (2012) a vibrant economy is a scenario which represents interventions designed to enhance

socio-economic opportunities for the populace, particularly the poor. It also includes the interventions designed to remove current constraints to growth and create a more level playing field for the Province's businesses. From the foregoing, it is clear that a vibrant economy is inclusive. It is all embracing. It affects all sectors of the national economy without enhancing some to the neglect of others.

In view of this, Nigeria with effective leadership can still retain and sustain its position as a leading economy in the African sub-region.

3.0 Activities of Past Nigerian Leaders

In the recent political history of Nigeria, the government at the Federal level has fallen short of satisfactory performance of its statutory duties of managing the national economy, providing internal security and maintaining social equilibrium. Until recently, the problems posed by the religious sect, Boko Haram, have pushed Nigeria to the point of disintegration. It was only retrieved from the precipice by the succeeding government. The period under reference was marked by several industrial actions by lecturers in all the three sectors that make up the gamut of tertiary education in Nigeria. The health sector almost went into coma with a prolonged strike embarked upon by health workers. The avoidable waste of lives that came with the strike had terrible demographic consequences on the population of Nigeria, especially the productive age bracket. Even now the roads which link major cities and state capitals together are in a sorry and sordid state. They are an ugly inheritance from the misgovernment that benchmarked the period under review. In the midst of unbearable national economic anguish, the government increased the pump price of premium motor spirit, PMS, generally known as petrol by as much as 50%. The infamous decision was reversed by a massive nationwide protest that threatened to shut down the economy. The power sector was no less hard hit. Nigerians had to pay for electricity pre-paid meters even when there was power outage. Consumers were not allowed to pay for what they consumed but were conscripted to pay bills in anticipation of consumption. One could go on, *ad infinitum, adnauseam*. The scenario depicted above effectively crippled the national economy with the result that the nation is still held in the grip of its ravaging consequences. The bad shape the economy assumed was a direct consequence of the ineptness of the leadership that Nigeria experienced at that time.

4.0 What is Effective leadership?

In looking at what effective leadership means attempts will be made at situating our positions in the context of the dynamics of Nigeria as a polity. Effective leadership is that which re-awakens trust in the people of a country, a people who have become justifiably despondent because of many years of rape, deception, misgovernment and careless handling by their leaders. This has been the case in the last sixteen years of Nigeria's democracy. Leaders have been largely unaccountable to the people and have carried on with impunity for this length of time. Nigerians therefore welcome the new lease of life ushered in by the incumbent presidency of Muhamadu Buhari.

Today, things are steadily looking up; despondency is giving rise to faith, despair is being replaced by hope, optimism is driving away pessimism, the high and the mighty are being very careful because there are sacred cows no more.

In greater and luculent details this paper now examines what makes leadership truly effective.

5.0 Manifestations of Effective Leadership in Nigeria Today

In the contemporary political history of Nigeria it is clear that it is no longer business as usual. Everybody, regardless of his status or station in life is being whipped to line so that our system can work. One after the other, specific areas in which leadership has performed creditably and commendably is presented here.

5.1 Power

The country has begun to witness the supply of relative steady electricity the moment the incumbent government was sworn in. Needless to say that a robust economy, especially the type that accommodates the input of the artisans and lowly Nigerians, can operate in Nigeria if there is steady power supply. Before now power generation was abysmally low such that it was not available for prospective consumers but it has marginally increased to a more acceptable level according to the Transmission Company of Nigeria. There is the likelihood that the situation in this regard will improve steadily. In that case vulcanizers will be profitably engaged, owners of barbing salons will be in business, and owners of entertainment centres which sell drinks will be productively engaged. The list is indeed, endless.

5.2 Cost of Governance

The greatest burden that an economy could suffer from is an unusually heavy cost of governance. This had been the case in our recent political history. Cost of governance was prohibitively high and imposed a terrible financial disequilibrium to allocation of funds to other equally important sectors of the economy. The functions of core Ministries were duplicated by other agencies and parastatals. The outcome is that manpower and efforts are replicated only to get the same results that a lean team would naturally get if other things are equal. Today, things are different. Some of the Ministries and Agencies whose functions are similar are being merged to reduce wastage, duplication and to trim the workforce. .

The result of this on the national economy is that money which is saved from such wasteful expenditure is ploughed back to the productive sectors of the economy. States which are indebted to their workers in excess of six months are being assisted with bailout funds to offset such debts.

5.3 Renewed Fight against Insurgency

To put the national economy of any country in the right shape, government must combat any form of threat in the guise of insurgency in any part of the country. This is precisely what the Federal Government is doing at the moment. Government is determined to liberate the North, East from the clutches of the destructive group called Boko-Haram. The military high command has relocated its combat headquarters to the theatre of war in the North-East. Some of the towns and villages that were captured by the notorious sect have been taken back by the Nigerian troops. Life is gradually returning to those war ravaged areas with the result that economic activities are resuming there. The population of Internally Displaced Persons, IDP is rendered unproductive in resettlement camps where they live at the moment. They are better and more productively engaged in their natural habitats. This is what the government is doing at the moment with the result that the nation will maintain its position as a leading economy.

5.4 Fight against Corruption

Whilst examining the ramification of corruption and its destructive capacity in relation to the Nigerian economy and polity, Oguntuase(2015) laments that “today’s Nigeria is bedevilled by many ills but the most virulent and seemingly intractable of the lot is corruption.” So bad is the situation that Achebe (2012) noted in a prophetic declaration that corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage, and Nigeria will die if we continue to pretend that she is only slightly indisposed.

The war against corruption right now is that of life and death. Every machinery is being deployed to deal a fatal blow on the malaise. Government has directed and enforced compliance that all monies accruing to or generated by all agencies of government must be remitted to a Treasury Single Account, TSA. Nigerians have recently been informed that in the last three years the sum of N3.8tn was not remitted, to the Federation Account out of a total of N8.ltn. by the NNPC. The people have also been told that the Excess Crude Account, ECA had been depleted by N2bn. Nobody would have heard of this sleaze if there had been no transition to a government that believes corruption should be wiped off completely from our national life.

5.5 NNPC Clean-Up

The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation is the proverbial goose that lays the goldeneggs on which the nation survives largely. Unfortunately little or no attention is paid to the well-being of the Corporation such that it is incapable of optimal functionality and production. For close to a decade no Turn Around Maintenance, TAM, is carried out on the four refineries in the country even when funds have been officially allocated for same. The national economy would have plummeted and died completely but for the current efforts aimed at recurring the Corporation from the throes of death. With our backs turned against Agriculture, Mining, Timber, Iron and metal fabrication the NNPC which refines oil that is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy would simply have ground to a halt. Most of its top officials, now facing charges of corruption locally and abroad, are amongst the wealthiest people in the world.

The operations of the corporation have been overhauled with a new leadership put in place to ensure functionality, optimal productivity, accountability and a new lease of life for citizens. Premium Motor Spirit, PMS, which was sold at N120.00 per litre was reduced to N87.00 with a promise that price per litre will still go below this. This will invariably affect the prices of commodities, especially staple food items because cost of transportation will reduce and consumers can save more money for other uses.

Unfortunately, the price had to be increased to ₦145.00 per litre because independent marketers were milking the nation dry through import waivers and sundry financial operations which threatened to collapse the national economy.

5.6 Foreign Policy

If the economy of a nation revolves exclusively and entirely around what that nation produces it will be difficult to lift that economy from doldrums. International co-operation and collaboration is important in the development of any national economy. Nations are mutually interdependent for economic growth. This is where the principle of comparative advantage comes in. What a nation has in quantum can be exported to other nations in exchange for what the receiving nation possesses. This can only be the case where there is mutual understanding and international co-operation. Where there is strained diplomatic relations between nations, trade and economic co-operation will be put in abeyance.

The Federal Government has, in recent times, moved to normalize relations with the United States during the last visit of the Nigerian President to the White house in New York. Other African nations are also on the same page with Nigeria on the fight against insurgency which is threatening to decimate Nigeria in general and neutralize the North East in particular. International co-operation, based on mutually beneficial foreign relations is therefore one of the steps that a serious government can take to make its national economy robust.

5.7 Education

Education at all levels is being taken seriously because the leadership of Nigeria is aware that it is an important thing to do to put in place a healthy economy. Emphasis is being laid on technological education which has the inherent capacity to drive the national economy to prosperity. Government has mad bailout funds available to offset the arrears of indebtedness to workers in the states of the Federation, amongst them teachers and lecturers. The greatest good that any government can do to itself and to its country is to give good, qualitative, utilitarian education to its citizens. That way the minds of the citizens are liberated from ignorance, superstition and poverty of ideas.

Conclusion

From the foregoing it is safe to conclude that good governance and a robust national economy are sequential, one leads to the other. A country that is bereft of political upheaval and social instability will be a natural arena for economic growth and general sustainable development. If Nigerian leaders bear the points raised in this paper in mind and studiously implement the recommendations below, Nigeria's place will be maintained and guaranteed in the comity of economically buoyant countries of the world. Although Nigeria will not be automatically translated into an El-dorado it is obvious that things will start to look up especially with the determination of government to ensure steady power supply, motorable roads and national security.

Recommendations

In view of the discussions, observations and conclusion reached in this paper, the following recommendations are made in the hope that if they are fully considered Nigeria will benefit from effective leadership which will lead to vibrant economy in the nation.

- a. Nigeria should guard against emergence of poor leadership because of its attendant deleterious consequences.
- b. Government should ensure steady electricity supply in Nigeria. That way Industries will no longer relocate to neighbouring countries where power is readily available. Small scale industries will equally benefit from this.
- c. Cost of governance should be drastically reduced so that savings from un-necessary expenditure on bloated appointees can be channelled to more economically productive ventures.
- d. The current zeal and determination to rout insurgency in Nigeria should be sustained so that all citizens are safe in this country.
- e. The fight against corruption must remain fierce and relentless. Cheats and abusers should be thrown out of the system to bring back decency, justice and fairness in the distribution of our collective patrimony.

- f. Since it is unequivocal that education is a *sineque non* for national development, government should ensure that funds are available to tertiary Institutions to enable them to fulfil their respective mandates.

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