Leadership, Governance, and Poverty in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the incidence of poverty has been on the rise in spite of the fact that the country had again returned to democratic governance in 1999. The poverty profile of the country had not improved after over thirteen years of uninterrupted purportedly liberal democratic practice. This paper therefore examines the relationship between leadership, governance, and poverty in Nigeria with particular reference to the Fourth Republic; and argues that the worsening poverty situation in the country is due principally to poor political leadership and the resultant bad governance. It was therefore recommended that a more rigorous and competitive political recruitment procedure should be put in place so as to ensure that only the best available persons with transformational vision are elected to high political offices.

 Keywords: Leadership, Political Leadership, Good Governance , Poverty, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, the disturbing trend has been raising poverty among her populace despite her abundant human and material resources. Regrettably, after over 13 years of uninterrupted democratic governance in today's Nigeria the poverty situation in the country has not improved. Indeed, poverty is still growing. Yet, the eradication of poverty by 2015 is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) subscribed to by Nigeria. The essence of governance, as UNDP (2004) emphasized, is the improvement of the welfare of the governed.

The thesis put forward in this paper is that increasing poverty among Nigerians is due principally to bad governance resulting from poor and ineffective (non-transformational) political leadership. The leadership-governance- poverty interface can be represented diagrammatically thus: (see figure 1).

Transformational leadership tends to facilitate good governance and resultantly decreases poverty. In contrast, non-transformational leadership is more likely to bring about bad governance and consequently increases poverty. Successes and failures of nations are attributable directly or indirectly to leadership. There is no gain saying that leadership matters. There seems to be a general consensus among Nigerians (Bichi 2002, Akanbi 2003, Natufe 2006, Fagbadebo 2007) that poor political leadership is the bane of Nigeria's development. Asuquo (2011) established in his study that poor governance, mismanagement of resource, corruption as well as poor execution of economic development policies and plans were all linked to political leadership in Nigeria. Leadership is the ultimate activity which brings to success the potential of a country and her people. The main aim of this paper therefore is to examine the relationship between political leadership, governance, and poverty in Nigeria with particular reference to the Fourth Republic that began on May 29, 1999 when democratic governance was restored in the country after about 15 years of military rule or dictatorship.

2. Conceptual Overview

It is pertinent to examine and clarify the three major concepts namely leadership, governance, and poverty that are germane to this discourse.

2.1 Leadership

Leadership, according to Barnard (1948), refers to the quality of behaviour of individuals, whereby they guide people in the activities in organized effort. Koontz & Donnell (1955) see leadership as "the activity of persuading people to cooperate in the achievement of a common objective". Terry (1956) stated that leadership is the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for mutual objectives. Leadership basically entails influencing the actions of other people in cooperative effort that is goal-directed.

But leadership is not a synonym for management. In distinguishing between management and leadership, Kotter (2001) says that management is dealing with complexities, practices and procedures while leadership is coping with change. In general, leadership requires a higher order of capability than management. Leadership could be described as 'doing the right things' whereas, management could be stated as 'doing things right' (Odgers & Keeling 2000). Shafritz, Russell & Borick (2009) write that:

> *Leadership is the exercise of authority, whether formal or informal, in directing and coordinating the work of others. The best leaders are those who can simultaneously exercise both kinds of leadership: the formal based on authority of rank or office, and the informal, based on the willingness of others to give service to a person who special qualities of authority they admire. It has long been known that leaders who must rely only on formal authority are at*

> *a disadvantage when compared with those who can also mobilize the informal strength of an*
> *organization or nation.*

 Political leadership involves the exercise of political power or authority. Simon (1957) defines authority as the power to make decision which guides the actions of another. It implies that someone has the right to receive obedience; hence legitimate power is often referred to as authority (Mahajan 2008). Power, according to Roskin *et al*. (2008), is the ability of one person to get another to do something. Power is used to produce intended effects.

Nigro (1965) stated that the essential quality of leaders is that they are convinced that something must be done and they persuade others to help them to get it done. Warren Bennis declares that the single defining quality of leaders is their ability to create and realize a vision (Bennis 1989). Effective political leadership is clearly essential to good governance.

2.2 Governance

The World Bank defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. The bank's conception of governance has three applications: In the form of the political regime; the process by which governmental power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources; and the capacity of government to design, formulate and implement policies (World Bank 1992).

Governance can also be seen as an ongoing global movement towards democratization highlighting the rule of law, human rights, participatory development and efforts towards open and transparent administration. This links up governance to the older ethical normative issue of 'good government in political thought literature (Basu 1994).

Good governance is a multi-dimensional concept, the interrelated dimensions of which includes the political, institutional, and technical (Hussein 2003): The political dimension is concerned with the form of political authority that exists in a country and it encompassed democratic governance and such elements as decentralization, legal and institutional frameworks, accountability, transparency and popular participation. The institutional dimension is concerned with the ability to manage and get things done through institutional mechanisms. It is closely related to the technical dimension, which focuses on resources constraints and the technical know-how concerning efficient and effective utilization of resources in quality service delivery and economic development.

Good governance is usually associated with effective liberal democratic political regimes. Marie Besancon writes that:

> *The practice of good governance distinguishes successful democratic nations from those many*
> *states which do little for their people. Governance is the delivery of a number of critical public*
> *goods to citizens: security, rule of law, political freedoms an enabling framework for economic*
> *performance, education, health, and so on. Where a regime fails to perform-fails to provide*
> *reasonable quantities and qualities of essential public goods-it is governing poorly (Besancon*
> *2003).*

Good governance is people-centred: There is apparent concern with focusing on people's issues and ensuring that people are the focal point for development-this is manifested in concerns about poverty eradication at the national level (Commonwealth 2003). According to Downer (2000), "Good governance means competent management of a country's resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people's needs". Good governance is the pathway to poverty reduction and possibly eradication.

2.3 Poverty

Poverty, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica (1981), is a lack of means to satisfy a person's needs for nutrition, housing, clothing, and other essentials of life. These needs may be defined narrowly as those necessary for survival or more broadly as determined by the prevailing standard of living in the community. The World Bank (2000) states that poverty means lack of what is necessary for material well being especially food, housing, land and other assets. The World Bank (2003) provides a comprehensive and graphic description of poverty thus: poverty is hunger, poverty is lack of shelter, poverty is being sick and not able to see a doctor, poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water; poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

Poverty can be defined narrowly as absolute poverty or broadly as relative poverty. Poverty can therefore also be measured in absolute or relative terms (Burkey 1993). A set standard which is consistent over time across countries is used to measure absolute poverty. The World Bank defines extreme absolute poverty as living on less than US$1 (Purchasing Power Parity-PPP) per day, and moderate absolute poverty as living on less than

US$2 a day.

In contrast, relative poverty is socially defined and dependent on social context, thus it is a measure of income inequality. Usually relative poverty is measured as the percentage of the population with income less than some fixed proportion of median income. Unlike absolute poverty that measures material deprivation or hardship, relative poverty measures inequality. Our concern in this paper is more with absolute poverty than relative poverty.

3. Theoretical Framework

Burns (1978) identified two types of political leadership; transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders use exchange relationships to influence their followers. Such leaders motivate followers by exchanging rewards and promises of reward to secure essential efforts from their followers or pay for services rendered. Transactional leaders give their followers something they want such as jobs in exchange for something that they (the leader) want such as votes-an exchange of values akin to a barter of sorts. A transactional leader will rely virtually on formal authority. Fred Luthans maintains that "transactional leadership is a prescription for mediocrity" (Luthans 2008).

On the other hand, the transformational leaders articulate a vision and inspire followers to achieve success to make the vision become reality. The transformational leader, according to Bass (1998) inspires people through a vision. A transformational leader will rely on both formal and informal authority.

In the context of a developing country like Nigeria, a transformational leader will promote development. Such a leader will be committed to the development of the society over which he or she rules, ensuring the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at enhancing the quality of life of all the citizens. This is essentially a transformational task as it involves moving a country from a lower level of development to a higher level with reduced poverty, marked by significant improvements in respect of the basic needs of education, health, food and housing (Adamolekun 2005). The focus of this discourse is on transformational leadership, rather than transactional leadership because a political leadership that is visionary, transformational and development oriented will invariably better the lives of the people.

The four key characteristics (Bass & Riggio 2006) of transformational leaders are summarized as follows:

a)   Idealized influence- builds trust and respect in followers and provides the basis for them to accept radical and fundamental changes.

b)   Inspirational motivation- changes the expectations of the followers to believe that the nation's problem can be solved.

c)   Intellectual stimulation- address the problem of creativity by stimulating followers to be innovative and creative.

d)   Individualized consideration- the purpose of individualized consideration is to determine the needs and strengths of others (followers) and use this knowledge, acting as mentors, to help followers develop to successively higher levels of potential and take responsibility for their own development.

These four transformational leadership factors represent a cluster of interrelated styles aimed at: changing situations for the better, developing followers into leaders, providing followers with new strategic directions and inspiring people by providing energizing vision and high ideal for moral and ethical conduct (Bass & Riggio 2006). Tichy & Devanna (1980), from their study found that effective transformational leaders share the following characteristics:

i.   They identify themselves as change agents

ii.   They are courageous

iii. They believe in people

iv.   They are value driven

v.   They are life long learners

vi.   They have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty

vii. They are visionaries.

The major defining features of transformational leadership identified by Bass & Riggio (2006) as well as Tichy & Devanna (1986) are useful in the classification of national political leadership in post-independence Nigeria into the two broad categories of transformational leaders and non-transformational leaders. Being a developing country Nigeria needs transformational leadership, more than any other leadership style, as such a leadership is development- oriented.

4. Leadership, Governance, and Poverty: An Analysis of Nigeria's Situation

The trouble with Nigeria, as Chinua Achebe rightly observed "is simply and squarely a failure of leadership"

(Achebe 1998). Nigeria has experienced democratic governance for over 23 years: 6 years in the first republic-October, 1960- January, 1966; 4 years in the second republic- October, 1979- December, 1983, and now over 13 years in the on-going fourth republic-May, 1999-? The country had also been under military rule for about 28 years: January, 1966-September, 1979; January, 1984-May, 1999. Within a period of 52 years, Nigeria has had 14 heads of state comprising 9 unelected and 5 purportedly elected political leaders.

Whatever has been the pattern of governance, whether military or democratic, the country has not been blessed with transformational/development-oriented political leaders at the national level. As Achebe (1998) puts it: "… Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership…". A fact corroborated by Obasanjo & Mabogunje (1991), Sklar et al. (2006), and Kew (2006). According to Obasanjo & Mabogunje (1991), "the performance of leaders to date has made governments to become instruments for under development, rather than its opposite". Sklar et al. (2006) contends that the leadership pattern in Nigeria lacks the necessary focus capable of instilling national development and promoting political stability. On his part, Kew (2006) avers that the Nigerian government (political leadership) remains distant from serving the interest of its people.

It is hardly debatable that Nigeria's progress has been undermined by a run of successive non-transformational political leaders. Consequently, 'much motion and little or no movement' has been more or less the governance style in the country since independence. The return to democratic governance in 1999 has not fulfilled the hope of Nigerians for good governance. It is instructive that Nigeria's governance performance has consistently rated poorly in the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance that provides a comprehensive collection of comparative quantitative data for the annual assessment of governance in African countries. Key indicators used in the index as proxies for the quality of the process and outcomes of governance are: safety and Rule of Law, participation and Human Right, Sustainable Economic opportunity, and Human development. Nigeria was ranked 39th (from 48 countries), 35th, 40th, and 41 in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively out of a total of 53 African countries ranked in the governance index. The Mo Ibrahim good governance report indicates that between 2006 and 2011, Nigeria's overall governance quality deteriorated. (Mo Ibrahim 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012). This dismal governance rating of Nigeria is hardly contestable as signs of bad governance abound in all sectors of national life such as the economy, energy and industry. Nigeria's rising poverty incidence is an offshoot of poor governance. The level of poverty that prevails in Nigeria after over 13 years of democratic experience is unbelievably high. The total poverty head count rose form 15 percent in 1960 to 27.2 percent in 1980 and to 69 percent in 2010 representing approximately 112. 518 million Nigerians living in poverty defined as living on less than US$1 a day. Inequality and unemployment are correlates of poverty.

Gini coefficient (income inequality measure) that was 0.429 in 2004 rose to 0.447 in 2010 indicating a 4.1 percent increase in income disparities in the country (FOS 1961, NBS 2005, NBS 2011). This means that the gap between the rich and poor is widening in the country. Unemployment rate rose from 12.3 percent in 2006 to 23.9 percent in 2011 (NBS 2012).

In 1999, Nigeria was ranked number 146 out of 176 countries in the human development index of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); in 2011, the country dropped to the 156 position out of the 187 countries surveyed putting her among the 31 poorest countries in the world (UNDP 2000, UNDP 2012). Corruption that is a major hindrance to the goal of eradicating poverty is also on the rise in Nigeria. On a scale of 0-10. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for Nigeria was 1.6, 2.2, and 2.4 in 1999, 2007 and 2011 respectively. The country ranked 81 in 1998 but slipped to the 143 position out of the 183 countries surveyed in 2011 corruption perception index. It was reported that between 2010 and 2011, Nigeria's position declined by nine places, which indicates that Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International 1999, 2000, 2008,2011, 2012).

Clearly, leadership is the missing link on Nigeria's path to good governance and improved quality of life for her citizens. We can not help but agree with the opinion expressed by the National Chairman of an Opposition Party-the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) Chief Sam Nkire that:

> *"… it was rather unfortunate that PDP led federal Government in the last 13 years was not able to protect lives and property of Nigerians let alone provide employment, housing, steady electricity, good roads and cheap transportation for the people… it was sad that rather than make the people prosperous, government officials made themselves richer and Nigerians poorer, through bad policies, huge allowances and corruption" (Daily sun Tuesday July 17, 2012, p. 8).*

5. Conclusion

From the fore goings, it is inevitable to reach the conclusion that the nature of political leadership determines the quality of governance and consequently the incidence of poverty in the polity. The scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an incontrovertible fact. Nigeria presents a paradox: a rich country with poor people. The prevalence of poverty in Nigeria is due to bad governance resulting from poor leadership.

Following Seers (1972), addressing the three central problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality is critical for positive developmental outcome. Poverty is therefore one of the major problems a transformational and development oriented leader must successfully tackle. An uninspiring, visionless, and lethargic leader can not possibly accomplish the goal of poverty eradication. To underscore the importance of leadership, Pfiffner & Sherwood (1960) declares "get the right man (person) in the leadership job, and all your problems will be solved".

It is salient to point out that the 'illiberal democracy'- regimes that are elected but lack democratic qualities (Roskin *et al.* 2008), being practiced in Nigeria partly explains the country's bad governance and rising poverty incidence. In order to overcome the challenges of poor leadership, bad governance and rising poverty, the following suggestions are advanced:

i)   A more rigorous and competitive recruitment procedure should be put in place so as to ensure only the best available persons with transformational vision are elected to high political offices.

ii)   The country and her political leaders must endeavour to practice liberal democracy alright by embracing best global democratic practices.

iii) Political leaders need to rededicate and recommit themselves to the service of the people rather than self in order to Steer Nigeria to a prosperous and better future.

iv)   Nigerians deserve better life and must therefore be proactive in demanding good governance from the political leadership.

v)   The political leadership should fight corruption , that aggravates poverty, with all seriousness and sincerity of purpose.

vi)   The Nigerian state must be retooled to make her better able to achieve national development goals.

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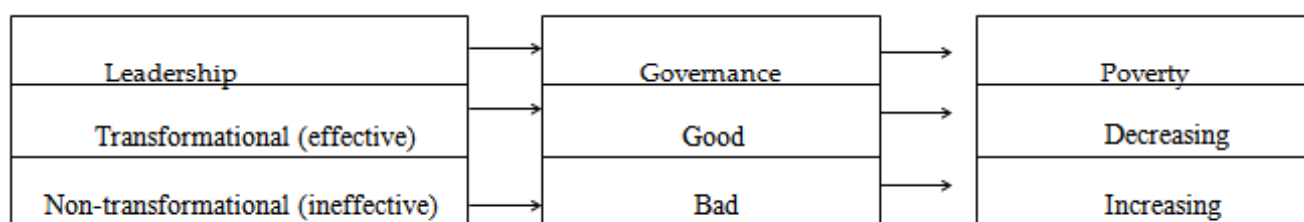

Figure 1, Leadership – Governance – Poverty Interface

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