



## LEADERSHIP FAILURE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: THE INEXTRICABLE NEXUS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Nigeria's independence from the British in 1960 signaled strong prospects and hope for a healthy and wealthy nation. Today, that hope and prosperous expectations are hung on a tiny string as a result of leadership failure. Considering her enormous human and natural resources endowment, it is a huge embarrassment that Nigeria is one of the poorest nations in the world. Today, the country has numerous unresolved issues such as poverty, unemployment, insurgency and terrorism resulting from leadership failure. This paper, through the use of leadership theoretical perspectives, unfolds the practice of democratic governance in the Nigerian state as characterization of poor leadership which has propelled militancy as a means of placing demand on the Nigerian political system by ethnic nationalities as a result of loss of confidence in the democratic process. This scenario, to a great extent has created heightened political tension in the allocation of state resources, and as a matter of fact threatens the unity of the Nigerian state. The paper holds that unemployment, poverty and security challenges in Nigeria are consequences of leadership failure. The paper also examines the nexus between leadership failure and security challenges in Nigeria.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The road to Nigeria's present democratic experiment which started in 1999 was preceded by threats of the unity of the Nigerian state through the Nigerian civil war, the political topsy-turvy associated with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, coups and counter coups as a result of the personal ambition of the main actors of the Nigerian military among others (Ademoyega, 1981; Oyedele, 1994).

Coupled with the above are issues associated with federalism, the minority question, poverty, poor political leadership and political marginalization, especially in the South-South and South-East geopolitical zones. Thus, in an attempt to solve these identified challenges, ethnic nationalities have reacted through the formation of ethnic militia in order to frustrate the governance of the state so that their voices could be heard.

With the return of democratic governance in 1999, after many years of military dictatorship, the Nigerian people were optimistic that the new democratic experiment was going to address the issues of fiscal federalism and resource control, poverty, unemployment, poor political leadership, among others, which are threats to statehood. However, the socio-economic and political reality in Nigeria today has shown a situation where the hope of the Nigerian people could be said to have been dashed as a result of disconnect between political leadership and followership. This no doubt may have further propelled the heightened activities of ethnic militia, the Fulani herdsmen, the Niger Delta Avengers and the Boko Haram terrorists which is currently threatening the unity of the Nigerian state.

The evident truth is that Nigeria has continued to meander the path befitting failed states. A state that had very great prospects at independence, and was touted to lead Africa out of the backwoods of underdevelopment and economic dependency, Nigeria is still stuck in the league of very poor, corrupt, crisis-ridden and leadership-deficient countries of the world. One cannot but agree with the position that Nigeria is a victim of poor leadership and convoluted systemic corruption which has become pervasive and cancerous in the country's national life.

This view has been strongly held in literature by scholars and writers who have identified the inextricable nexus between leadership failure and security challenges in the country as the continued reason for Nigeria's inglorious economic theories and national underdevelopment. Agbor (2011) argues that the success or failure of any society depends largely on the mannerism of its leadership. He adds that the result of poor leadership in Nigeria is embodied as poor governance manifested in consistent political crises and insecurity.

## **WHO IS A LEADER?**

In answering this question, I will begin by quoting a one-time celebrated Singaporean leader who once wrote, and I quote "we need good people to have good government. However good the system of government, bad leaders will bring harm to the people. On the other hand, I have seen several societies well governed in spite of poor systems of government because good, strong leaders were in charge."

For any organisation, institution, community or nation to succeed in whatever it sets out to accomplish, there must be good leaders. The quality of leadership in any organisation affects to a large extent the success or failure of that organisation. Leadership in its simplest form is the ability to make others move in a desired direction consciously or subconsciously. Leadership has to do with both people and programmes. A leader works with people; is responsible for them and is accountable to them. Good leaders are expected to develop their people, communities and nations.

In his conceptualization of leadership, Eze (2002) posits that “all over the world, leadership is the most important number one factor that determines whether a nation can develop”. He argues further that “a leadership that is free, brave, patriotic, people-oriented, destination-bound; the leadership that understands the psychology of leading and applies it to the development of the people must be at the affairs of men.” Leadership involves the mobilization and motivation of people for greater productivity.

Anybody who finds himself in leadership position must understand that he is not in that position by accident. Good leaders are those who have the courage and will to bring tidings of good governance laced in sincerity of purpose with manifest able developmental trends geared towards the prosperity and progress of common good for common man. A good leader is also a person who possesses the capability to change the course of events (Blondel, 1987). This course of events involves understanding the expectations of followership in authoritatively allocating state resources, providing a free and fair atmosphere for the emergence of political leaders and national transformation through the utilization of ethnicity for national development rather than its use for undermining the unity of the country among others.

There are conceptions of political leadership as an indispensable factor in ensuring political stability and national security (Blondel, 1987). Political leaders, by the nature of their office and function, are expected to take sensitive decisions, including decisions bordering on national security that would aid national development. Political leadership that does not conform to the above stated factors could be classified as a failure. That is, such political leadership possesses weak character (House et al., 2004). The weak character, to a great extent could be said to be synonymous with the Nigerian State, considering the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 which was a major threat to national security (Omodia, 2006). This is coupled with the spate of ethno-religious crises and political instability which characterize the Nigerian state today. This no doubt has led to the manifestation of situational leadership in Nigeria. This is because political instability and threat to national security by insurgents and ethnic nationalities have led to the emergence of leaders that were not fully prepared for the task of leadership.

The Nigerian State today is characterized by heightened socio-economic, ethno-religious and political crises which pose a threat to the country's national security. These crises include the Boko haram insurgency in the North East, the Niger Delta crisis in the South-South, the Indigenous People of Biafra in the South-East and the activities of the Fulani herdsmen. The implication of this, is that these internal crises constitute a major threat to national security in Nigeria, and this cannot be divorced from poor leadership.

## **THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA**

The leadership of the Nigerian State since independence can be generally characterized as poor. The country has been battered by corruption and leadership crises. The question of poor leadership has been a major impediment to development, peace and security for the Nigerian people. Nigerian leaders are greedy for power; they lack direction, and have no respect for the constitution. They are less concerned with the provision of the needs of the Nigerian people, who in the first place elected them to power.

The Nigerian experience from independence till date shows the failure of her leaders to stimulate the Nigerian people to the path of socio-economic and political development. The near total collapse of social infrastructure and other institutions is traceable to massive corruption and crisis. "Corruption has greatly eroded the fundamental values of democracy and the essential principle that government should be representative and accountable to the citizens."

Today at the national, state and local government levels, the Nigerian people have as their leaders a hardcore, small selfish, money-minded few individuals who wage political and economic war against the vast masses of exploited and oppressed people. The democracy embraced by Nigerians in 1999 has produced leaders who have blighted the lives of Nigerians who now wallow in poverty, illiteracy, hunger and unemployment. These leaders are corrupt and have criminally mismanaged the country's resources.

Invariably, the Nigerian political leaders as it is presently constituted lack the moral fibres to champion the cause of the Nigerian people. When political leaders are perceived to be pursuing their personal interests excessively, citizens become disenchanted, questioning the legitimacy of the leaders and the state, and even the legitimacy of the process and the system that produced them.

The practice of good governance is essential in alleviating various ills affecting society, but most importantly, it ensures effective and efficient use of resources which in turn improves the livelihood of the people. However, successive governments in Nigeria have made little progress towards achieving good governance and

associated principles, such as transparency, accountability, participation, equality, equity and rule of law among others. The Nigerian government at various times has failed to ensure service delivery for the citizens. Corruption and leadership failure which have become a chronic illness in the country undermines the capacity of the leadership to provide human security and development in the country.

## THE NEXUS

When the people feel that the government has treated them badly, they are forced to react with a counter force in order to balance the level of violence being supposedly perpetrated against them by the State. An imbalance in the distribution of the national wealth tends to lead to insecurity because those who are left out are likely to react in a manner that threatens the national security. Good leadership requires the creation of sustainable economic ventures in both the public and private sectors that are capable of employing thousands of citizens annually.

In the Nigerian State of today, the fact remains that it is only those who are politically connected or able to give bribes that can have employment. Those who are not connected, regardless of their education, must fend for themselves one way or the other. This breeds an intolerable level of crime, especially armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism which leads to high level of insecurity in the country.

Qualitative leadership thrives in an environment where leaders do not discriminate in their national development plan. It is obvious that for over four decades, the regions in Nigeria with no political influence have been utterly neglected in the national development plan, while development and modernization are concentrated in the regions with extensive political influence.

Stability and national security are not guaranteed in any political system or environment characterized by lack of respect for the national constitution and the rule of law. This leads to insecurity because the citizens will begin to lose faith in the system. There tend to be crisis when political issues are not resolved politically, instead are treated as security matters. Today, the Nigerian state view peaceful political agitations as threat to national security instead of treating such matters as political issues that require political resolution. For example, the failure to resolve the substantive constitutional issues in the 1960s led to the bloody civil war in which more than a million people died; the refusal to listen to the moderate Islamic voices in the early 1970s led to the emergence of the extremists who are now threatening the national security and unity of Nigeria; the refusal to listen to those who expressed concerns about the deplorable situation in the Niger Delta resulted in armed opposition.

## QUASI-FEDERALISM AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

Many scholars have discussed and agreed that discussion on contemporary federalism started with Kenneth C. Wheare who saw federalism as a constitutional arrangement which divides the law making powers and functions between two levels of government in such a way that each within its respective spheres of jurisdiction and competence, is independent and coordinate. Corroborating Wheare's definition of federalism, Kapur (1986) defined federalism as "a dual government where powers are divided and distributed by the constitution between a central and regional or state governments." Kapur asserts further that it is also imperative that the component units must also be left with adequate resources to run their administrations and perform the functions being dependent of the doles of the national government.

In Nigeria, the constituent units i.e. the state governments have always relied on the central government for financial support, thus negating the principle of financial independence of the state governments as identified by Wheare. In this respect, Wheare stated thus:

... finally, if government authorities in a federation are to be really coordinate with each other in actual practice as well as in law, it is essential that there should be available to each of them under its own unfettered control of financial resources sufficient for the performance of the functions assigned to it under the constitution....

It follows therefore that both state and federal authorities in a federation must be given the power in the constitution to have access and control its sufficient resources (Wheare, 1953: 106).

The conceptualization of federalism by these scholars draws us closer to the nature of Nigeria's federalism which seems not to tally with the principles of true federalism. Assessing Nigeria's federalism as a quasi-federalism, Ekpo (2004) observed that Nigeria cannot be said to be a federation when the elements of federalism are lacking – elements such as state police, resource control by the federating units, etc. Although Nigeria is supposed to be a federation, nothing in its structure and administration lends credence to this claim. Ekpo observes further that the only semblance of a federation in Nigeria is the 36 states; otherwise, the country is to all intents and purposes a unitary state.

One of the major problems associated with Nigeria's federalism lies in what Professor KinseOkoko calls "internal colonialism in Nigeria". He notes that in Nigeria, groups that are politically dominant use their political linkage to appropriate more resources to themselves to the detriment of the politically disadvantaged groups. In the case of revenue allocation, their obnoxious practice has been most apparent. Using the oil producing states of Nigeria (the Niger Delta region) as a case study, the central government has consistently become increasingly dominant at the expense of these states.

Ibaba (2001) in his work "Understanding the Niger Delta Crisis", renders account of the contradictions which have caught up with the crisis of development and general state of instability in the Niger Delta region. He describes the region as a "old paradox" in many respects because, in spite of its abundant human and natural resources, including oil wealth of the country alongside its potentials for economic growth and sustainable development, the area represents one of the extreme situations of poverty and underdevelopment. He blames the situation largely on the nature of Nigerian federalism and the alliance between the dominant ethnic groups, the oil companies and the state which restricts the minorities access to the modern and more rewarding sectors of the economy.

Scholars have linked the security challenges experienced in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria to this monumental neglect by the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies in the region. Ibaba (2001) links the myriads of security challenges in this region to what he describes as "internal factors" such as weak socio-economic foundation, education backwardness and lack of entrepreneurship. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria had for decades been a theatre of major confrontation between host communities, on the one hand, and the government security forces and oil companies on the other hand. This had made the region to become an enclave of intense social strife, with the emergence of armed militant groups willing to kill as part of their campaign for a greater share of the region's oil wealth. Various militant groups have sprung up of recent to undermine the activities of oil companies, using different methods and tactics, thereby daring the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies operating in the region.

There has been excessive use of weapons by security agencies in the course of peace keeping often resulting in avoidable deaths. The Nigerian government, exercising the power of coercion, forcefully descends on the communities of the region through the use of regular and mobile policemen, complemented by trigger-happy soldiers and plain-cloths security agents who are ready to kill at the slightest provocation.

Political observers in Nigeria have argued that the agitation for resource control by this region is a litmus test for the enthronement of true federalism in Nigeria.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF STATE FAILURE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA**

With the tendency to blame every of Africa's woes on the incidence of colonialism, it remains debatable, however, whether it was the nature of the State inherited at the end of formal colonialism or the neo-patrimonial orientation of the competing power elites who inherited the post-colonial State that is the problem. Whichever, the African State remains characterized by huge disconnect with the society. There are some negative elements which have combined to make the African State irrelevant to the citizenry, thus eroding its legitimacy. The state now becomes prone to economic dislocation and political instability – all of which are indices of state failure. Rotberg (2002) argues that in the last phase of failure, the State's legitimacy will collapse. According to him,

Once the State's capacity to secure itself or to perform in an expected manner recedes, there is every reason to expect disloyalty to the State on the part of the disenchanted and aggrieved citizens. Logically many transfer their allegiances to their clan and group leaders, some of whom gravitate towards terrorism as they strive to secure common mandate. Mobilizing support from both external and local supporters, the terrorists seek out havens in the more remote and marginalized corners of failed States where they blend in more comfortably in the prevailing chaos associated with State failure.

The various theoretical constructs that attempt to mirror the Nigerian State point to a deep gulf between State and society or in Ekeh's (1989: 5) term "the difficult relations between State and society" or Claude Ake's "Irrelevant State". In the realm of theory, such disconnect is not only capable of eroding legitimacy, but also including State failure and the subsequent repercussions that emanate from it, such as violent crises or terrorism as Rotberg's postulate suggests.

Empirically, Uzodike and Maiangwa have articulated the various conditions and features of a failed State as pertaining to Nigeria, ranging from the Failed State Index in which the country is ranked among the first ten states, terrorism in which she ranked fifth and the Human Development Index Trend where Nigeria emerged 156 out of 186 countries. On this basis they assert that the chaotic and anarchic situation in Nigeria exemplifies the characteristics of a failed State (Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012).



Amidst the overwhelming symptoms of State failure, as the Nigerian State vigorously contest the classification, such economic sabotages occurring on daily basis in Nigeria, committed by the citizens, such as vandalization of oil pipelines to oil bunkering and the cannibalization of vital state infrastructure go beyond ordinary criminality to mirror citizens' sense of exclusion from ownership of the common patrimony.

On the political front, many scholars have provided theoretical and empirical proofs that even if Nigeria has not totally collapsed, it has met the necessary requirements of a weak state. Indeed if Karl Maier's political biography of Nigeria – *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (2000) – is dismissed as a biased assessment of Nigeria by a foreigner, renowned Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, apart from decrying the leadership problematic of the Nigerian State some decades back, notes that Nigeria is an example of a country that has fallen; it has collapsed (Achebe, 1983: 1 cited in Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012: 97).

### **THE HUMAN NEEDS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE**

The human needs and socio-economic perspective which blames social conditions for the security challenges is anchored on the human needs theory of social conflicts. The central thesis of the theory is that all humans have basic needs which they seek to fulfill and failure caused by other individuals or groups to meet these needs could lead to conflict (Rosate et al., 1990). According to Burton, there is a link between frustration which is responsible for human aggression and the need for individuals to satisfy their basic needs. He argues that "individuals cannot be taught to accept practices that destroy their identity and other goals that are attached to their needs and because of this, they are forced to react against the factors, groups and institutions that they see as being responsible for threatening such needs." (Burton, 1979 cited in Best, 2007: 52).

On his own part, Max-Neef believes that "tension between deprivation and potential are main issues addressed by human needs theory because when important needs are not sufficiently satisfied, economic and political problems will continue to grow". (Max-Neef, 1991, cited in Best, 2006: 52). This, no doubt, will lead to security challenge.

"Even though needs scholars identify a wide range of human needs, some of which they consider as basic human needs, they are agreed on the fact that the frustration of these needs hampers the actualization of the potentials of groups and individuals, subsequently leading to conflict." (Best, 2007: 52-53).

The theory is similar to the frustration-aggression theory of violence which posits that aggression is always a consequence of frustration (Dougherty and Pfalzgrate Jr. 1990: 266). According to the theory, relative

deprivation is a perceived disparity between value expectation and value capabilities and that lack of a need satisfaction – defined as a gap between aspirations and achievement generally – relies on the psychological state of frustration and aggressive attitude emanating from it (Midlarsky, 1975: 29). The theory further explains that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct, but that it is the outcome of frustration which results in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured (Best, 2007). The security challenge in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is an example of the way in which frustration leads to aggression. The youth in that region, after waiting and peacefully agitating for what they consider a fair share of the oil wealth that is explored and exploited from their region, they now take the law into their own hands by vandalizing oil pipelines, kidnapping oil workers and generally creating problems for those they believe are responsible for their predicaments (Ademola, 2007).

Nigeria's socio-economic indexes seem to validate the assumption of human needs theory. The Human Development Index Trend, for instance, ranked Nigeria 156 out of 186. The socio-economic factors being adduced as the root causes of security challenges in Nigeria include unemployment, especially among the youth, poverty and a deteriorating standard of living. The high conflict potential of the areas that witness conflict today could indeed be a function of frustration caused by economic deprivation. Frustration aggression tendencies often also manifest misplaced aggression. This trend has featured in the series of violence inflicted upon the ordinary citizen of Nigeria, most of who have no direct connection with political and economic elites whose management of the country's resources engenders the unemployment, poverty and deprivation that breed frustration and foster violence.

## **CONCLUSION/THE WAY FORWARD**

The current economic and security realities in Nigeria is saddening that strong economic growth Nigeria witnessed during its oil-boom years did not serve to substantially reduce the incidence of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria, not witness the expansion and harmonization of Nigeria's existing but fragmented social protection programmes, which ultimately would have directly impacted on the security and economic well-being of the Nigerian people.

Bad leadership paves way for unemployment, poverty and other social ills which affects social cohesion negatively and tends to erode any form of identification with the state. The resulting disenchantment and distancing often witnesses the radicalization of the youths, and the birth and strengthening of criminal

organisations, ethnic militias, terrorists and militants, as we have in the North-East, South-East and the South-South geo-political zones of Nigeria today.

Today, Nigerian citizens are left to provide for themselves under harsh conditions where their very survival is not assured, as they lack security and safety. The convergence of poor leadership and extreme corruption poses a serious threat to state survival. It will therefore be instructive for leadership, institutions of government and state apparatuses to place emphasis on the well-being of the Nigerian citizens for meaningful progress in Nigeria. The near total collapse of the economy, social infrastructure and other social institutions in the Nigerian state today could easily be linked to leadership failure. This has paved the way for frequent security challenges in the country.

The fact that the greatest threat to national security of the Nigerian State is internal is an indication of the level of poor leadership in the country. In order for national security to be entrenched in the Nigerian State, there is need for the present Nigerian Federal arrangement to be restructured.

Progress towards achieving human security for the Nigerian citizen can mainly be driven by leadership by example. At the same time it is critical for the leaders to ensure citizens' participation in every aspect of their lives, including issues of governance. Several approaches can address this problem of leadership crisis in Nigeria. First, the various arms of government through genuine separation of power should act independently to serve as a check and balance mechanism against excesses of leadership at all levels of government.

Second, our leaders must be sincere and sensitive to the needs of the ordinary citizen whom they have been elected to serve.

Third, good governance predicated on the rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of the State must be upheld by our leaders.

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