

LEADERSHIP AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

Dr. Anthony Danladi Ali

Department of History and International Relations

College of Humanities

Redeemer's University

Km 46, Lagos-Ibadan Express Way

Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on leadership and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria. The study discusses the various civil and military regimes starting with that of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979, and terminates with the regime of President Umar Musa Yaradua which commences in 2007. It is common knowledge that from 1979, Nigerians suffer the fear of leadership failure and socio-economic insecurity arising from civil misrule and military oppression. The study adopts historical methodology in examining leadership and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria in the period of study.

. Introduction

The study is basically on political administration of the country and the socio-economic challenges faced by the entire citizenry. It focuses on the political class, its dependent, parasitic and very corrupt nature including its style of mal-administration. The paper attempts to trace the history of leadership and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria from when Nigeria started operating the American democracy in 1979. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, made by the military is nothing but a codification of military maladies and promoted unitary ideology. It could be described as a quasi-federal constitution.

Forty nine years after independence Nigerians are disillusioned their leaders who have failed to deliver the good governance, secure the welfare of persons on the principles of freedom, equality and justice and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of the people.

This study is a critical assessment and appraisal of leadership role in Nigeria since 1979. Although some have argued that the fundamental problem which hindered Nigeria's political and economic advancement is leadership ineptitude, the truth still remains democracy cannot thrive on the basis of a skewed leadership and a disoriented society where decisions are made against the wishes and interest of the electorates by the government. A situation where the people began to think more and more of fending for themselves is bound to lead to increase in violence and crime rate.

The study is a critical assessment and appraisal of both the military and the return to full blown democracy which Nigeria has had since 1979. From the 1980s, 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. This study is prompted by the need to speak out against misrule and injustice perpetuated by bad

leadership. The political regime headed by President Yaradua which we now are will only be partly examined as it is still on. Nigerians are amazed and dismayed about their leaders' display of power, affluence and financial recklessness. The social, economic structure to make the citizens feel compelled to be patriotic are lacking. There seem not to be any indication to end of poverty.

The study examines the social and economic rights of Nigerians. It discusses the national objectives of the constitution and the principles behind these objectives. It is critical about the attainment of these objectives. It also examines the social economic rights of citizens based on the provisions of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and other statutory instruments. Social and Cultural Rights could be used as a basis to measure leadership responsibility in Nigeria with a bid to ascertain whether or not the citizens fill fulfilled.

Leadership and socio-Economic Challenges in Nigeria

When the Second Republic was born on 1st of October, 1979, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari won majority in the election, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo which had the second largest votes formed the opposition party. Shagari again was elected, on August 6, 1983, to a second term in office. Again his keenest rival was Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Again Awolowo made his second prediction as to the ills which would befall the country if the polls were rigged. As he rightly predicted, ills did befall the country and returned the country to military rule. (Eso .K. 1996: p.270-2).

The real character of the Nigerian political class was enacted during the Nigerian Second Republic which lasted briefly from 1979 to 1984. The Second Republic ushered in the regime of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari as civilian President in 1979. During this regime the basic needs of humanity, food, housing, clothing and other basic necessities of life such as ownership of a vehicle became a preserve of the privileged few.

Going by the social contract theory, the question of citizen's patriotism, justification for patriotism and the issue of whether the citizens feel compelled to be patriotic is determined by the quality of leadership for, the state. The people and the leadership are held together in a symbiotic relationship. The citizens owes allegiance to the state, the state in return shoulders the citizens responsibility by making his life worth living (*Bako . S., 1999: p.117*).

The concept of human rights tradition evolved from historical and philosophical perspectives of the liberal enlightenment of the 18th century. In contemporary form, it has evolved with emphasis on juridical form linked to growing social, economic and cultural rights. The first generation rights historically date back to the 17th and 18th centuries as propounded by reformist theories (Onyekpere .E. 2000: p.1). These rights conferred on citizens, the basis for civil and political claims or redress against governments in the event of an aberrant or wrong exercise of power. In 1948, for the first time, these rights were accorded international recognition by the United Nations through the adoption of the universal declaration of human rights (*UDHR, UNO, 1948: AIII*).

From the early 1980s, the standard of living of Nigerians continued to degenerate even as the cost of living keeps rising spirally. Prices of some essential commodities rise almost above the reach of the low income earners. Infrastructures gradually collapsed. Infrastructures included facilities provided by the community to help those in need. (Adejuge, 2002: p.58) The World Bank underlined the importance of social infrastructural

services. The adequacy of social infrastructures helped to determine a country's success or failure – in diversifying production, expanding trade, coping with population growth, reducing poverty, or improving environmental conditions. Good infrastructural services raise productivity and lower production cost. Infrastructural services also help the poor and the whole society to contribute to environmental sustainability.

Beginning from 1983, the productive sectors of the Nigerian economy could not acquire plants, machinery, equipment and spare parts at reasonable prices and also the consumers could not acquire the product satisfaction at reasonable prices. Thus, the real income levels could not be maintained or made stable (Orewa .G. 2002: p.116-7) Inadequate infrastructural services adversely affected manufacturing activities. Most manufacturers and commercial establishments had to generate their own electricity and sink bore hole to ensure their private water supply. The extra cost on production was shifted to the consumers. Inadequate clean water and poor sanitation, pollution was the order of the day in the urban areas. (Adejogbe .M. 2002 p.58). There was shortage of housing accommodation in the urban areas due to overpopulation caused by rural-urban migration. Only a small percentage of households particularly in the suburbs of the urban centres had refuse disposal services.

The supply of electricity which is the force behind the modern economy started to become erratic during the Shagari regime. Energy utilization is often used as a developmental index. Electricity generation in Nigeria was almost the exclusive preserve of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), a public corporation which generated about 99.5% of the total electricity consumed. Transportation which played an important role in a country's economic life and the overall economic development of a state became truncated. The various transport modes in Nigeria namely; road, water, rail and air were poorly maintained.

The 1979 constitution which contains the 'Fundamental objectives of state policy' just like the international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights instruments, 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 favourable 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. These rights ought to be achievable in Nigeria because the country is blessed with human and natural resources. Nigeria has some of the best quality crude oil in the world and ranks fifth position among Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Bako .S. 1998: p.118).

The Mohamadu Buhari's regime which took over power on January 1, 1994, after overthrowing the Shagari regime, had a sense of direction in tackling the country's economic problems and foreign debt incurred by the Shagari administration which was estimated at \$15-16 billion. (Orewa .G. 2002: p.115) The regime was able to identify that part of this debt resulted from non-existent transaction by which millions of dollars were illegally siphoned by unscrupulous Nigerian and their foreign collaborators in the Shagari cabinet (Orewa .G. 2002: p.115) The Buhari regime was credited for in 1984, was the only full year in the 1980s and 1990s in which Nigeria paid promptly for all imports with foreign exchange earned by the nation not borrowed from any international organization outside Nigeria. This re-established Nigeria's image in the foreign market. As a result of the various measures taken to conserve the foreign reserves and control the foreign debt level, the

Nigerian currency (naira) retained its strength all through 1984-5. (Orewa .G. 2002 p.116-7)

The Buhari administration was determined to make every Nigerian disciplined in his public life as a step towards nation building. The War Against Indiscipline (WAI) crusade soon made the public to imbibe the discipline of queuing in public places. What went wrong with the regime was the harshness with which officials given the responsibility for handling foreign exchange dealings handled the affairs. Many of these officers corruptly enriched themselves in the process. There was public outcry over the manner in which former political office holders suspected of financial mismanagement were sent to jail and many died in detention. The regime also disposed public fixed assets in improper working conditions declaring them falsely as unserviceable (Orewa .G. 2002: p.118-9).

General Ibrahim Babangida took over the administration of the country on 27 August, 1985 because according to his team, General Buhari was autocratic and that there was abuse of human rights of individual Nigerians. The administration went into nationwide consultation on the conditions of the proposed International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to Nigeria towards reducing or clearing its foreign debts. The federal government reaction was to take the alternative course of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) designed for the nation by the World Bank as a condition for its support (Orewa .G. 2002: p.119)

By the time General Babangida assumed office as the sixth military Head of State Nigeria's external debt had dropped to \$21.2 billion, but in addition to \$17.8 billion owed to the private financial market. The situation of the oil glut at this time which made the price of oil to drop to \$14 per barrel as happened in late 1970's during Obasanjo era, affected, not only government finances but also investment activities. The net result was that by early 1990s important construction activities dropped by 10% (Emordi .E. 2008: p.4-5) and some projects abandoned making Nigeria's landscape to be dotted with capital and development projects in various stages of completion partly because they were not properly planned and partly because of politics of development. This development was due in part to the failure of oil to have direct linkage with other sectors of the economy such as agricultural – related manufacturing concerns and companies to process mineral resource which should have expanded the employment base.

It was in order to overcome the economic problems that in October 1985 Nigeria witnessed the imposition of an economic state of emergency for a period of fifteen months and later extended to 1988. It was later supplemented by the Structural Adjustment Programme in July 1986, conducted under the slogan 'liberalization, rationalization, and optimization,' to correct the inherent structural imbalance in the economy. SAP was designed to correct the superficial nature of the economy and redirect it to the part of self-reliant sustainable long-term development. With the devaluation of the local currency all sorts of extra-ministerial parastatals were established as an adjustment to SAP. (Emordi .E. 2008: p.4-5)

Thus, because Babangida's administration lacked the strict financial discipline which economic revivalist strategy such as SAP entails, Nigeria, which was among the twenty economically independent nations in the world immediately after independence later ranked among the 13th poorest nation. The result of this development was the sporadic IMF riots across the country. This was due largely due to the fact that the reforms were too sharply focused on micro-economic target. Social services were badly hit especially as majority of

the population of the country had little access then to operate private businesses. Babangida administration institutionalized corruption as if it was a cardinal state policy. (Emordi .E. 2008: p.6-7)

When General Sanni Abacha assumed office on 17 November, 1993, after overthrowing the interim national government under Chief Ernest Shonekan, he declared that his administration inherited an economy which was characterized by grave debilities and instability. To put the economy on a better footing he produced a budget of N110.2 billion and introduced a tight monetary policy. In addition, to demonstrate his readiness to achieve economic management in 1994, especially as it concerned corruption, he promulgated the failed bank (Recovery of Debts) and financial malpractices Decree, as well as the money laundering Decree of 17 December, 1994. As novel as these were, Abacha turned them into tools for settling personal scores and a lot of people such as Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki and the Sultan of Sokoto were jailed. (Emordi .E. 2008: p.11)

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 his lieutenants 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. This "Ani Gift" was said to be his share of the \$1.5 billion over-charged by Abacha administration for debt buy-back which entailed the paying of some \$500 million for a \$2.5 billion Russian debt on the white elephant Ajaokuta steel project, which itself swallowed some \$7 billion. Ani's steel counterpart. Power and steel Minister Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu, got DM5 million from Abacha's son, Muhammed who brokered the deal (Emordi .E. 2008: p.11-12)

Under the Abacha administration several public utilities collapsed. The four refineries stopped production of petroleum products, thereby creating a severe domestic shortage which led to Nigerian importing fuel on a massive scale. By the last quarter of 1994, when Abacha's insincerity to national interest began to have a serious negative impact on the economy foreign investors started divesting capital out of the country. By the time his regime came to an end occasioned by his sudden death, capital flight, associated with uncertainties surrounding his self-succession bid, had caused the naira to devalue to the extent that exchange rate went up to N93/\$1 from N85/\$1. (Emordi .E. 2008: p.14) Abacha's attempt to re-direct the economy was a colossal failure.

General Abacha suffered humiliating criticisms in the hands of the pro-democracy activist after he abandoned his promise to revisit the annulled June 12, 1993 elections. He quickly reasserted his authority by striking at those whom he had a grievance and his perceived enemies – either real or imagined. Top on the list of his victims were, Bashorun M.K.O Abiola himself. He was arrested and detained on June 23, 1994 for declaring himself President a year after the annulment of his elections. He was charged for treason in the Abuja High Court. Chief Abiola's attempt to regain freedom from detention through judicial process was frustrated. The last time he came to court was in 1994. He never appeared in court again until he was suspected to be poisoned in detention and died of cardiac arrest in 1998. (Ogunye .J. 1998 p.72)

Abacha dictatorship laid the country waist in moral. Citizens were disillusioned, disenfranchised and pauperized. Political antagonism among groups and nationalities was heightened. A huge percentage of the national income had been spent on security for the

dictator's image making. During the regime industry and agriculture recorded very low growth. Incomes were static. Prices rose beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen. Education standard was seriously affected. Many could not afford the cost of schooling. There was acute fuel scarcity. The economy was at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Nigeria became a pariah state in the comity of nations. (Ogunye .J. 1998: p.72)

When General Abdulsalam Abubakar came to power he attempted to revamp the economy but failed. However, available evidence shows that General Abubakar was able to pay Nigeria's external debt which reduced from \$7.7 billion to \$4 billion. He also recorded a budgetary deficit of N100 billion. (Emordi .E. 2008: p.16) Official corruption was also evident during the Abdusalam's administration particularly in the award of contracts as in the case of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Defence and Police Force Headquarters. Following the recommendation by a salaries review committee under the chairmanship of Vice Admiral Mike. Akhigbe then the Chief of General Staff (CGS) the government approved N3500 minimum wage for federal government workers and N3000 for state government in 1998. The increase in wage was intended to cushion the effects of inflation on workers, and to motivate productivity. General Abubakar considered the option privatization of government agencies and public corporations to revamp the economy.(Emordi .E. 2008: p.16-17) This policy has been seen as no simple panacea to solving the sufferings of the mass majority of the people.

From May 27, 1999 when President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo was sworn into power in Nigeria up till 2008, which covers part of the new regime of President Umaru Musa Yaradua Nigeria has witnessed series of civil disturbances across the country. The civil disturbances which rocked the early years of Obasanjo's regime were compounded by religious riots across the country emanating from the imposition of the Sharia legal system in some states by some state governors. Governor Sani Yerima of Zamfara State had enforced the Sharia Islamic legal system in Zamfara state. The imposition of sharia made it mandatory for every residence of the state to be subjected to summon before the Islamic court. The Sharia riots which ensued in most parts of Northern Nigeria caused a mass exodus of Christians from the southern part to their homes of origin or find habitation elsewhere.

The neglect of social infrastructures and the refusal to cater for the basic needs of the citizens has resulted to growing disaffection and serious tension and in some cases communal clashes, religious riots, militant youth violence and other societal unrest such as the recent clash between the Birom and the Hausa community in Jos, the Ogoni people and other communities, mostly from Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom states have become vocal and agitating over their dissatisfaction about official disregard to their well-being (ThisDay, Wed. Oct. 20 2000, p.5) The economic situation in Nigeria under President Umar Musa Yardua who assume office on 27 May, 2007, is less better than his predecessors. Nigeria cannot be said to be making meaning progress in catching up with the advanced countries of the world.

Conclusion

We have seen in this study that the changes initiated by the various regimes in Nigeria were mostly cosmetic and deceitful. Many of them were abrupt and some of them were violent. Though they possessed the characteristics of revolutionary action, they generally re-established the status quo and further widen the gap of existing class order. There impacts

and after effects made it difficult to draw a line between a new regime and its immediate past. Generally, the changes by the regimes were usually dramatic in their execution but with little or no positive impact on the mass majority of the people.

The study also shows that the political class in Nigeria was not engaged in any form of production of goods and services neither does it embark on problem solving toward making the country a developed nation. Rather, it concerns itself with the embezzlement of public funds so as to corruptly enrich itself. In order to do this successfully it employs the strategies of propaganda, destabilization, political unrest, social upheavals, economic sabotage and rumors. These are usually carried out with the collaboration of certain group of individuals, institutions of the state and foreign interest. The result of all these is the suffering, poverty and general deprivation on the mass majority of the people. There is also infrastructural breakdown in form of very bad roads, non-functioning railway system, water transport is neglected and air transportation is expensive. There is erratic supply of electricity, education and health are beyond the reach of the poor.

Recommendations

The study has discovered that civil disorder, disaffection and youth militancy in Nigeria's is caused by socio-economic dissatisfaction of the citizens. It is therefore recommended that the only guarantee for peace, stability and an enduring democracy in the Federal Republic of Nigeria is good government, founded on the principles of constitutional democracy, the rule of law, separation of powers and a good human, social and economic agenda.

The study recommends that to check civil disturbances, religious riots and militant youth violence in Nigeria only people of upright integrity and credible credentials should be allowed to contest election. Politicians and public office holders who have been found to have misappropriated or embezzled public funds should be bind from further holding public office.

The Nigerian leadership must seek legitimacy from the people and seek their collective consent rather than a phenomenon where government is imposed by force and threat. Public office holders and politicians should be made to declare their assets before and after leaving office.

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About the Author

Anthony Danladi Ali holds a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D) in History and Strategic Studies from the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He specializes in Economic History with special focus in the sub-field of trade and transport. He lectures in the Department of History and International Relations, College of Humanities, Redeemer's University, Redemption Camp, Ogun State, Nigeria. He is published in journals and books. He was a practicing Journalist before he joined the academia. He is the author of *Success in Economic History* (March, 2012) and *Trade and Transport in the Lower Niger Region 1830-2011* (September, 2012).