



# **Africa Development Problem And The Absence Of Right Leadership: 1960-2014**

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## **ABSTRACT**

African countries from 1960s when they started having independent from the colonial powers have experience various forms of government and leadership tussle. The desire to be in charge and aspirations to developed like other civilize countries of the world was the aim of much agitated nationalist movements in the continent. leadership is a very crucial tool in development of any nation or organization. From the 60s when the leadership of Africa countries fell into the hands of Africans the desire development that forms the course of the agitation for independence is yet to be achieved. This paper takes a look at the African development problem which was majorly anchored on the quality of person that sit on the head of affairs of government from government from 1960. The paper is survey paper which anchors on secondary material as it methodology where some concepts that relate to leadership and development were ex-rayed. Some notable leaders of some African nations where highlighted and leadership effect. The paper therefore conclude that the backwardness in African development from 1960 to the period under review was as result of wrong leadership.

**Key words:** Africa, development, independent, leadership,

## **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership plays a crucial role in the development of any nation. When a nation is blessed with a visionary, charismatic and pragmatic leader, there is bound to be massive positive development, but when a nation has at the helms of her affairs a focus less and egocentric leader, that nation is, most likely to experience underdevelopment, retardation and a unabated anarchy.

It is no exaggeration to state categorically that Africa's greatest problem has been the problem of leadership. After so many years of independence, citizens of African states are yet to enjoy the fruit of independence. Because of failure of leadership, the economic landscape in Africa is replete with power failure, dry water taps, epileptic communication system, abandoned projects, under-utilized industrial capacity, unemployment, under-employment and increasing demographic pressures that are bursting at the seams and desecrating the urban development with ghettos, destitute and mountains of garbage.

Jeffrey Herbst captured the pitiable situation of the Africa continent when he maintained that:

"Africa is in the grips of an economic crisis that threatens to permanently impoverish the world's poorest continent. Africa per capita income only equals \$340 compared to an average of \$800 for the third world, generally life expectancy at birth is 51 years compared to 63 for all poor countries and daily caloric consumption is 2,011 versus 2,468 unless current trends change, by the next century Africa will be a continent immersed in poverty and squalor with deteriorating social conditions, less food, greater energy shortages and more unemployment and indeed economic decline has continued for so long that the basic viability of some African countries may soon be challenged<sup>1</sup>.

The deplorable poverty and chronic underdevelopment that characterize the landscape in Africa is so unfortunate and worrisome. Apparently, the political independence of African states without the requisite economic emancipation is the worst kind of slavery. The end result has been political instability exacerbated by military coup d'etat, dwindling productivity, wanton capital flight, demographic explosion high interest rates, low commodity pricing, undiversified economic base, dwindling export credits, crushing debt burden and finally the castration of African economies by the international donors and creditors thereby turning African states into mere trading post that are wholly import-oriented<sup>2</sup>.

At the base of these problems militating against African development is the apparent and systematic failure of leadership. This has made some scholars to describe Africa as human and environmental disaster area, moribund, marginalized and periphery to the rest of the world and indeed Africa is the Third World's Third world.

### **The Pitiable Situation in Africa**

The current level of development in Africa is a source of great worry to rationale thinkers because Africa had hitherto been in the vanguard of human progress and emancipation. Ronald Senegal had this to say about Africa:

Long before in the evolution of man himself, Africa had helped shape history. And while the centers of European culture flourished, decayed and sprouted in their turn, Empires in Africa rose, ruled, resisted and succumbed. .Scholars studied and disputed in Timbuktu as in Paris and what the Italians achieved with payment, the artist of Benin accomplished with bronze. The culture (government and polities) were different, but only to the horizontal, the vertical separation into superior and inferior was a product of conquest<sup>3</sup>.

The above assertion clearly shows that Africa contributed immensely to human progress and technological innovation. This position is corroborated by J.E. Casely who stated that before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people, having our own institutions and our own ideas of government.

It is so unfortunate that the situation in Africa now is so appalling and devastating. Buttressing this unfortunate situation, the former military president of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida hit the nail on the head when he stated at the international conference on African Economic Community Treaty that;

There was a time, when Africa was regarded as the centre of the world, not just for its geographical location but because of its immense contributions to scientific development and human progress<sup>^</sup> while it is true that the geographical location has not altered, virtually everything else has changed. The civilization that gave the world Egyptian Pyramids thousands of years ago, now finds itself having to import virtually everything needed to build a house. A people so versed in the intricacies of algebra barely two millennia ago are now awe-struck spectators in the field of science and technology. Today, Africa has been so relegated to the periphery in world affairs, that the genuine fear is that the continent runs the risk of becoming permanently marginalized in the global scheme of thing. It does little credit to our, Africans to note according to nearly all the indices by which human progress is measured at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Africa enjoys the dubious distinction of bringing up the rear<sup>4</sup>.

Going through memory lane, one recognizes the fact that Africa particularly sub-Saharan Africa has always been at the sad end of epoch-making events. For instance, the growth of the industrial revolution while igniting the technological take up of the rest of the world dehumanized Africa following the up surge in the demand for Africa slaves. Also the discovery of diamond and gold in South Africa rather than garner blessings for Africans then led to the obnoxious apartheid policy. Currently the discovery of black gold (petroleum) instead of being a means to her economic emancipation has chained her to economic slavery epitomized by the debt burden. Furthermore, unlike in other continents, where political independence ushered in a sustained new lease of life for their citizenry, in Africa the opposite is the case, as a result, Africa seems again to have lost at both ends, by being slave in heaven (pre-independence) and now rulers in hell (post-independence)<sup>5</sup>.

From one country w another, the ugly picture of the African man is painted with frightening poverty and chronic under-development. Undoubtedly, Africa is today alarmingly de-industrializing and the decay into contingent anarchy is so serious that former president Olusegun Obasanjo in comparison with progress elsewhere particularly in East Asia has lamented with what is now taking place in Africa; it is difficult to believe that we inhabit the same historical time<sup>6</sup>.

Robert Whelem of the institute of Economic Affairs asked for the privatization of African countries. He also argued that multi-national companies should be invited to bid for the right to run African nations under leases for 21years, they would undertake to provide specific services and bring about efficiency and discipline in return for pre-set tax revenue<sup>7</sup>.

Indeed, the economics of the African countries are so weak and fragmented reflecting decades of gross mismanagement of material and human resources. African has suffered from a policy that deliberately inhibited industrial development and promoted heavy reliance on the export of primary products. Underlying the inadequacy of the efforts at technological development was lack of aggravation of the contribution that science can make to develop Africa as a result of lack of purposeful commitment towards the sciences which retarded self - reliance in technology. There was even in Africa a sense of inferiority in the field of science and technology despite the fact that experience has conclusively shown that service and technology can be learned in a predictable manner by all people irrespective of culture, and country<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, public sector projects for industries and infrastructure are often financed by aids, which meant that the capital equipment, design and engineering technology had all to be purchased from the country providing the finance. Sometimes, the technologies were already obsolete or were unsuited to local conditions. In many cases, the agreements do not allow domestic firms to be associated with the construction of plants or their expansion. As a result capabilities bought at great cost remand unused or soon become outdated and unviable. The multi-billion naira Ajaokuta steel project in Nigeria is

a case in point.

Without sounding immodest, Africa has become a theatre for the dramatization of corruption, mismanagement, ineptitude, poverty of the spirit and the pocket, embezzlement in both high and low places. I see Africa as a rich land of lost opportunities because Africa has all it takes to launch itself into an economic power house but through incompetence and poor leadership, Africa is facing dangerous and critical times. In an age when men had landed on the moon as far back as 21<sup>st</sup> July 1969, and are reaching out for move frontiers, Africa is still faced with the problems of living in the midst of plenty.

In real sense, looking at Africa's echoes of past and present, it is quite evident that the sound of Africa seems lost in the echoes of troubles, shattered dreams and in the echoes of hopes betrayed. As a result African citizens are generally poor and entrapped in conditions which fall below any rationale definition of human decency and in effect development is simply not reaching them in any decisive degree. Chinweizu aptly captured the pitiable situation when he stated that:

By 1984, it was the only continent that was unable to feed itself, famine raged or threatened across wide swath of Africa. Its dominant image was one of chronic incompetence symbolized by the emaciated refugee with a begging bowl glued to his palm. As African leaders clamoured for relief and as millions starved and died, Africa becomes an object of world charity, pity and thinly disguised contempt after a quarter of century of effort, Africa had never attained modernity nor gained the respect of the world<sup>9</sup>.

### **Meaning and Concept of Leadership**

Leadership generates a measure of controversy in its conceptualization. Some traditional scholars view leadership in the same manner as Plato and Machiavelli who felt that leaders are persons who are by nature endowed with extraordinary powers of wisdom and knowledge and hence they are born to lead or rule others. Accordingly, the leader is considered as a mystical person from his group using extraordinary powers of insight, foresight, intellectualism and dominance to manipulate the group. Hence the major tools of leadership are command, threats and bossism<sup>10</sup>

Although leadership is not personal, it is solidly founded on the personal qualities of the leader. Hence Macleaver and Page define leadership as 'the capacity to direct and persuade which come from personal qualities rather than from office'. A flaw in this definition is that it ignores the legitimacy which is very vital in organizational leadership. The emphasis on the definition is power rather than authority. Personal qualities of a leader are dispensable for the effectiveness of the leadership, but compliance to his directives flows from his office, the belief by the members of the group that the directives are legitimate. Indeed leadership is a strategy for accomplishing work effectively.

Leadership according to Emmanuel Idika is the ability to take initiative to motivate, to influence, to direct, and to control the thoughts, the opinions and actions of the people in any given society towards the achievement of any desired goal'. Leadership no doubt makes the difference in every human society because the moment a leader makes his appearance, and leadership becomes effective and precise, order replaces, confusion.

Writing on the divine origin of leadership, James Keller strongly stressed "respect for legitimate authority goes hand in hand with the knowledge that ruler derives their true power ultimately from God even though delegated to them through their citizenry. Furthermore, leadership is a great burden of responsibly entrusted to a few chosen men by God and that the leader is willing to accept the burden of responsibility because self-confidence comes from a deep and abiding faith in God and genuine concern for his fellow men<sup>12</sup>.

### **Concept of Development**

Development generally means the improvement of people's life styles through improved education, incomes, skill development and employment. The idea of development is quite similar to the other concepts of progress or advancement. A society may change in a number of ways. It may become

richer, more peaceful, less authoritarian or poor. The list of characteristics could be greatly expanded as the combination of possible changes. Initially no one would deny that development is a kind of social change during which the wealth and income of the society markedly increase. Some would argue that not only must the wealth available to society increase, this increase must be reflected in higher average incomes of families and persons within the society. Others would counter that social change must include some liberalization of the political and ideological structure<sup>13</sup>.

In essence, development has to do with transformation and emancipation of the human society for the better. It entails the harnessing of both the natural and manmade resources for the edification and betterment of the human society. It is growth that is on the positive side with its attendant benefit because under-development is a disease that must go so that the process of development can set in.

### **African Leadership and African Development**

The problem of leadership in Africa originates from different factors and ways. These include among others selfness, partisan and ethnic sentiments, lack of vision, nepotism, egocentrism, greed and sit-tight syndrome. African leaders have developed unusual penchant for staying in the office even when it becomes obvious that they have lost the people's confidence.

One major factor responsible for Africa's economic backwardness and crises and conflicts is that most of its leaders are not the right persons to occupy such positions. It is evident that most of the elections that have taken place in Africa were marred by irregularities and corruption. The desire to stay long in power by good number of heads of state and government in Africa is arguably the reason behind election rigging. A substantial number of African leaders have really been in power for more than three decades. They organize elections to favour them. But lack the traits to transform their society through implementing development – oriented policies that mass provide man power and wealth.

Sit-tight syndrome have made many African leaders to see leadership as their birth-right and they can go to the extent of manipulating the constitution. Examples of such leaders are: Hosni Mubarak, the former President of Egypt was in power from 1981-2011; Muammar Gaddafi of Libya was in power from 1969 to 2011; Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has been in power since 1980; Paul Biya of Cameroun since 1982; Idrissu Deby of Chad since 1990; Yoweri Museveni of Uganda since 1986; Al Bahir of Sudan since 1989; Ben Ali of Tunisia from 1988 to 2011; Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea since 1979; Jose Santos of Angola since 1979; Blaise Campore of Burkina Faso since 1987; Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast from 2000 to 2011 and others<sup>14</sup>. In this context, these selfish leaders do not know that a good leader is one who has successors, and when you do not prepare for thus, you are preparing for crisis and underdevelopment.

Frankly speaking, since years of dependence, it has not been possible to get a true leader to pilot the affairs of the different States of Africa. Most of the leaders that have emerged so far have been independent heroes who were concerned with the sectional interest of their parties and their ethnic groups. It must be mentioned that formation and allegiance of political parties in Nigeria in the first and second republic have ethnic orientation and colouration. It is obvious that the bane of political development in Africa lay with ethnicity and politics. Ethnicity influenced, the formation of political parties and this has not encouraged national cohesion and the consequence is the absence of true leadership. African leaders lack the spirit of patriotism, vision and nationalism because they see themselves firstly as members and leaders of their tribal groups before seeing themselves as leaders of the nation. A classical example was the Northern People's Congress slogan, in the first republic which was "one North, one people and one people destiny".

A few centuries ago when Shakespeare wrote that the trouble is with us not with the stars, he was probably referring to Africa. Why can't this continent so endeavoured with human and material resources ever get it right? Why Africa must build other empires but remain poor herself? Some centuries ago, able-bodied Africans were ferried to America to build the new economy; their physical energy built the wealth that launched the United States on the path of economic super-power. Colonialism came, which saw European countries controlling the resources and fate of all African countries. Africa is now independent but their leaders have failed woefully in the past four decades to transform political independence into economic independence.

After a careful scrutiny of the problems militating against Africa's march to economic emancipation and development, one major factor is the belief that the continent needs outsiders to sort its problems. Here, African leaders got it so wrong and refused to ask some pertinent questions; who will pay the high interest rates charged by foreign banks if Africa put her house in order? Who will produce cheap cocoa and coffee for the rest of the world if the continent joins the industrialized world? Who will buy second hand cars discarded in Europe if Africa suddenly becomes prosperous? <sup>15</sup>.

Failure of leadership is manifested in self-defeatism and feeling of inferiority complex. African leaders look for other world leaders for direction on development, giving credence to imperialism. Walter Rodney attacked them blatantly when he stated "Africa sell-out" as leader of African countries who dance in Abidjan, Accra and Kinshasa when music is played in Paris, London and New York' <sup>16</sup>

Corruption, mismanagement and embezzlement of public funds have become the characteristic feature of African leaders. Ojukwu captured this vividly when he maintained that

Whoever controlled the Nigeria government could not only do to himself and UK infinite good but he could do his opponent infinite harm. Political victory by all means and at all cost is seen as insurance to join a clique of oppressors, foreign exchange dealers, contractors and collectors<sup>17</sup>.

In other world, African leaders are more of tacticians than strategists. They therefore, give only faint thoughts about the future and wrong most about the present. They live as it were for the moment and in short term. Because of this strategic approach actions are generally taken at adhoc and in fire-fighting manner of tackling the effect rather than the cause. This epiphenomenal addiction of sweeping problems under the carpet and deodorizing the ferment rather than scrapping off the rot is the bane of Africa.

### **The Effect of Leadership on Citizens**

It is no exaggeration to state that most Africans live in abject poverty in a land of surplus natural resources which include mineral oil and agricultural resources. The masses in such a deplorable economic state preoccupy themselves with toiling for livelihood, almost indifferent to the political programmes of selfish and visionless leaders. This is the brain behind the brain syndrome where many African professionals out of desperation are leaving the shores of Africa for greener pastures overseas. The masses are not provided with the basic amenities, thus the government owned organizations keep on deteriorating.

In Africa, it is either you join the band wagon of corrupt and shameless leaders or you remain where you are. The few that belonged to the African states are those whose relations, intimate friends are in corridors of power and party faithful. Why would the masses not lose their sense of patriotism and nationalism in a situation where workers are not paid or the wages increased after they might have embarked on industrial action? Where human right to freedom and liberty is being demand and not given? Where there is no scholarship for young people to study and no welfare scheme for the old people. These are pertinent issues that African leaders have no answers for.

In Africa, we hear and witness communal clashes, religious mayhem, riot and passive resistance among African citizens here and there. It is just an external manifestation of the frustration that originates from a failed leadership <sup>18</sup>. Chinua Achebe captured it rightly when he stated that "a leader's undisciplined reaction can incite the masses to anger and rebellion".

### **CONCLUSION**

The only thing standing between Africa and greatness is leadership. Failure of leadership is the bane of the present woe in Africa. There is no doubt that Africans are what they are because their leaders are not what they should be. Africa can transform today if she discovers leaders who have the political will, the ability and the vision to bring change and make it permanent. The truth of this statement was clearly demonstrated with the four years when Nelson Mandela was leader of South Africa.

Therefore, all well meaning African people who believe that Africa is being destroyed by bad leadership, corruption and inequality should join hands towards a new social and political order for Africa, by embracing the challenge of thinking seriously about the problem of leadership, searching for good leaders and most importantly by being careful that new generation leaders are chosen through free and fair elections based on personal qualities devoid of ethnic prejudices. This requires proper education of the electorate, the electoral commission and law enforcement agencies. The kind of leaders that the African states need among others is leadership with mass oriented spirit, leadership rooted in the fear of God, leadership endowed with divine grace, leadership with a sense of direction and purpose, a charismatic leader that enjoys legitimacy and support of the people who will change the fortunes of Africa for the better.

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