Leadership and Followership in Nation Building: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

Challenges to Nation building are numerous particularly in the developing nations like Nigeria. These challenges include amongst others intergroup tension and conflict, unequal socio-economic development, to power-sharing as well as leadership and followership issues. Leadership and followership are very essential factors for nation building yet it has remained a major universal challenge to all nation states. The challenge of impotent leadership and followership syndrome has resulted on bad government that has been unable to propel their economy and social welfare of the citizenry to a comfortable level. For Nigeria to experience a sustainable growth and development, the issue of leadership and followership require proper attention. However, this is an issue that has been the bane of the country. This paper examines the relationship between leadership and followership, the influence that the mutual activities has posed to nation building in Nigeria. The paper used document analysis to examine the place of leadership and followership in Nigeria. It concludes that nation building requires leadership with vision, ability and integrity who will promote the values of justice, equity and tolerance; followership who are not sycophants but vocal. A situation where followers remain adamant and aloof to the excesses of their leaders is not healthy for nation building.

Keywords: Nigeria, Followership, Leadership and Nation building.

Introduction

Nigeria being a heterogeneous country is believed to have about 289 ethnic groups (Aluko, 2005). The Nigeria territory and its inhabitants and groups even though interrelated has different identities and it is doubtful if British colonization and the amalgamation of 1914 in particular, succeeded in welding these groups together giving them one destiny. So, before the time of independence in 1960, it is very difficult to ascribe the status of a nation to Nigeria.

Nation building as a concept has attracted several definitions. (Ehimika, 2003) sees it as the process of reduction of the diverse groups within a state to one. In the opinion of (Pye, 1962), nation-building refers to the process "whereby people transfer their commitment and loyalty from smaller tribes, villages or petty principalities to the larger central political system". Contrary to this (Elaigwu, 2005) is of the opinion that the process of nation-building does not involve the transfer of commitment and loyalties from narrow or parochial levels of ethnic groups to a larger political unit such as Nigeria. Explaining further he said that being an Efik, Ibo, Idoma, Yoruba etc. is a matter of identity which cannot be transferred. That one cannot cease from being an Ibo, Hausa, Tiv, Idoma simply because one so declared. To him, nation building involves the widening (rather than transfer) of horizons of identity of parochial units to include larger units such as state. It is the progressive acceptance by members of the polity of the legitimacy and necessity for a central government and the identification (as a result of widening horizons of parochial loyalties) with the central government as a symbol of the nation. This he called horizontal dimensions of nation-building. It involves the acceptance of other members of the community as equal fellow member of a "corporate" nation to share the bitter or the sweet of the system.

On the vertical dimension, (Elaigwu, 2005) sees nation building as the identification with several authorities of the state as the symbol of the

political community. It is the understanding of not only having a state, but for the people to accept the authority of the state not merely by its coercing power but as a symbol of their political community.

Simply put therefore, nation building is the process of creating unity among heterogeneous groups, and how the various groups are integrated into a nation, it is the process of making many, one.

The concept of leadership and followership

Bryman (1992) in Ngwube (2010) defined Leadership as a process of social influence whereby a leader steers member of a group towards a goal. Leadership here involves influence. It is concerned with how the leader affects followers. Fafowora et al (1995) also sees leadership as implying a purposeful direction of the affairs of the led. Leadership is all about influence. Northouse (2001) defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Tannenbaum in Thom-Otuya (2007) explained Leadership as interpersonal influence exercised in situation and directed through communication process, toward the attainment of goals. Stogdill in Irikana and Orisa (2007) defined Leadership as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group towards goal setting and goal achievement. R.J House in Thom-Otuya (2007) described leadership as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members. According to Newman (1997) leadership is the special and unique ability to influence people to move towards goals that are beneficial and meet the group's best interests. Asubiojo, Adewusi and Oyediran (2005) defined leadership as the art of asserting special influence on people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards achievement of group goals. Leadership in the opinion of Kazim (2004) is the focus of activity through which goals and objectives of the organization are accomplished". It involves influencing or directing people's efforts towards the achievement of some specific goals, objectives at minimum cost.

Leadership according to Dressler (2000) is "expected to mobilize all resources toward the existing goals in the most economic and profitable way".

From all these, it can be said that leadership also connotes so many things put together and that is why Asubiojo *et al* (2005) said leadership is a discipline, it is an activity and is a process, a status, ability, a quality and so much more". So, to lead is to guide, construct, direct and protect others. A leader must possess that special charisma to influence his followers to carry out their responsibility without being forced in any way. In his own view, Ojikutu (2008) says a leader must see self as first among equals, realize that leadership only succeeds when you carry your subordinates along. It is a team work and everybody from the one at the top to the lowest in rank in organizations has a vital role to play. Therefore, a leader is someone in a position of integrity or that who directs and conducts the affairs of a group of persons, influencing their behaviours and decisions towards complying to the achievements of some desired goals. Leadership therefore involves the element of vision, courage, motivation, integrity, initiative and successfully mobilizing an organization or group of persons towards a goal. To succeed, a leader must be ready to carry along others. A leader must be efficient, skilful, insightful, courageous, and motivate members to work towards the goal (Thom-Otuyah, 2012).

Followership according to Jehn and Bezrukova (2003) is a people-oriented behaviour and that behaviours builds relationship between leaders and followers providing an environment that promotes all organizational members to focus on a common goal. (Gatto, 2015) defined followership as the willingness to cooperate in the working toward the accomplishment of a defined goal while demonstrating a high degree of interactive team work. Followership demonstrates the capacity to willingly follow a leader. Writing on effective followership, Gatto said that effective followership is active participants (partners) in creating the leadership process, that followership permits leaders to establish and keep themselves in control of a situation that is productive, efficient and people-oriented.

Both Jehn and Bezrukova (2003) also suggested that good followers may be a catalyst for change in an organization as followership "inspires others to follow toward a common goal; creates enthusiasm and desire to excel fully; engages others, builds confidence, moves the organization ahead as one entity than separate parts". Werlin (2002) indicated that good followership must build on motivation rather than control and instilling values into followers is essential to develop a culture of trust and good relationship. He asserted that the balance of power must be maintained in order to provide a culture of openness that promotes self-engagement.

Emphasizing on the critical role of followership in an organization or country, (Wigston, 2019) declared that while effective leadership in any organization is essential, if teams are unable to carry out the vision, even the best leaders will not be able to meet their goals. This is why the role of followership should not be overlooked. He said "whether an organization or project will succeed or fault depends in part on the actions and behaviour of followers and understanding the traits of a good follower will help all individuals play that role when necessary and also help leaders cultivate good followership".

It is not possible to have a leader without followers and so the role of followers is not to be mindlessly implementing the ideals of leader. Their role is to help the leaders come effective while remaining true to their own values and essential needs, demonstrating self-management skills and being effective individual contributors even in the absence of leadership (Gatto, 2015). Therefore, followership can be described as adherence to a leader, it is the virtue of supporting leaders and helping them to lead well; and they have a responsibility to actively participate in the achievement of a nation's goals. So, no matter the personal ability of the leader, the contributions of the followers must not be neglected.

Leadership styles

Leadership styles according to (Abefe-Balogun, 2015), has to do with pattern of attitudes, assumptions, methods and feelings about and to other people. He classified leadership styles as follows:

1. Autocratic (boss-centred) leadership: is the styles of leadership in which the leader assumes monopoly of knowledge, he spends most of the time giving instructions to the followers on what to do, how to do it, when to do it. He exerts power over the followers, never obtain advise or consult others and want his instructions and decisions carried out without questioning. This type of leadership is also known as dictatorial or authoritarian leadership. All the military regimes of Nigeria are good examples of autocratic leadership.
2. Laissez-faire (free-reign) leadership: this is a type of leader that gives his subordinates a "free-reign" over the approach of decision making and activities. He does not get goals for the group because he has no confidence in his leadership ability and so made little or no attempt to regulate the members of the group or their progress towards achieving their goals and objectives.
3. Democratic (subordinate- centred) leadership style: this leadership style encourages and invites the participation of subordinate followers in decision making. Followers participate, give ideas, new ideas and changes are welcome while a feeling of belonging and responsibility is developed within the group. This leadership style tries to influence without dominating the thinking and behaviour of the group, he seeks the opinion of his subordinates, and takes cognisance of the advice and recommendations, and there is a belief in team spirit. In the opinion of Mohammed (2012), this style of leadership produces effective results and can move the society forward because followers repose trust and confidence in such leaders.
4. Charismatic leadership style; a charismatic leader is enthusiastic, a good motivator of people who affects others with his energy and

belief, he boosts the morals of the followers. In fact, in the words of (Abefe-Aloko, 2015) the ability to inspire and motivate is the hallmark of the charismatic leader.

5. Transformational Leadership styles: In this Leadership styles, the leader is visionary, he is a great communicator and he delegates responsibilities. With his vision, he inspires and leads others.

Functions of Leadership: Leadership functions are very numerous but they all point to leader's capability to mobilize his people to achieve a set goal. These functions according to (Thom-Otuyah) include:

Maintaining effective Communication: where there is effective communication between the leadership and followership, doubts and suspicions are reduced thereby sustaining the follower's interests and participation and policy implementation. The responsibility rests on the leaders therefore to ensure cooperation and effective communication.

Provision of Resources: commanding the loyalty of followership comes a bit easy when resources, both material and non-material are made available through the leadership. Followership expects on reward or the other from their leaders. For instance, when leaders facilitate the passage of budgets, followership becomes much more loyal realizing that they stand to benefit when the budget is implemented.

Taking initiative: this is a fundamental function of leadership. Creativity, initiatives, distinguishes a good leader. These qualities help him to detect and mediate in challenges that may confront the state or the organization.

Evaluation of Follower's Needs and Capabilities: a leader must understand the needs of his followers and make deliberate efforts to motivate them. This He can do by patiently fostering their values, aspirations, listening to them, understanding their capabilities as well as

their commitments. This is Irikana and Orisa (2007) noted that, "a purposeful and insightful leader creates new ideas, project discussion, etc., and positively and invariably lead others in the group to develop or carry out the tasks".

From the above, it is very clear that a leader must be consistent and principled in his utterances, activities and in policies formations and implementation, being a person of vision, motivation and person to succeed in all facets of challenges. He must be seen to be selfless, credible, intelligent, courageously strong and flexible in his official dealings with people (Abefe-Balogun, 2015). A leader must be goal-oriented, must be decisive "intelligent, think in advance and develop possible ways of doing things first, for the success of and effective management of his group/organization or nation's resources (Adeniyi, 2014) cited in Abefe-Balogun, 2015). A leader must be able to use his initiatives and come up with ideas that will help and keep his group/ organisation/nation going well, he must maintain organization/nation successfully for good and sustainable results. A leader must be able to design and build groups/organizations vision and mission's statements, roles as well as policies into structures and means to successfully achieve desired goals. This is why (Okorocha, 2012) advises that "leaders must provide quality leadership that has the capacity to manage the resources of our land (Nigeria)".

Functions of Followership

Functions of followership are: surrender to leadership, that is, followership must be willing to obey the laws of the land and to be directed and guided by a constituted authority. Followers must obey the command of a leader, being loyal to leadership and they must act as a mirror of leadership, checkmating the activities or excesses of leadership. For this to be done, followership need to be articulate, vibrant and vocal, acting as a check on the leadership. Newman (1997) listed ten essential qualities which an effective leadership should possess to enhance followership. They are: a

leader should have vision, discipline, wisdom, courage and humility. A Leader should be a decision maker, have executive ability, be tactful and diplomatic, able to develop friendships and exude enthusiasm. Leadership is put in place in order for her to achieve a certain goal.

Leadership / followership in Nigeria

Every society needs to be led by their leaders. Ever since the social contract between man and government, in which man surrendered some of his right to the center called government, there was a social contract that as a result of the surrender of these rights, government should be able to use law to regulate the society and ensure the security and welfare of the people (Hobbes, 1651 cited in Appadorai, 2014). It is this situation that gave rise to Leadership and followership in any human society. The relationship of leadership and followership rests on leadership because he is the driver of the relationship. A leader must be able to give direction for the followers to comply. Nigeria has faced leadership crisis since her independence. She has moved from a Parliamentary system of government to a Presidential form; from one civilian regime to another, and from one military regime to another, yet leadership in Nigeria has not been able to deliver the needed dividend of our resources to her people nor a satisfactory social welfare service, though her followers have exhibited a good level of commitment.

Nation Building in Nigeria: The Historical Experience

The challenges of nation-building are not peculiar to Nigeria, it is one of the challenges of political development that all nations go through. The problems of nation building in Nigeria are both historical and multidimensional (Ikime, 2006). As (Coleman, 1958) rightly stated, the "Present unity in Nigeria as well as its disunity is in fact a reflection of the form and character of the common government, the British superstructure and the changes it has undergone since 1900". The forces of the past have shaped the country and this will help us understand the challenges of

nation building. The British colonial administration had great consequences for nation building.

In 1900, what later became Nigeria today comprised three (3) colonial territories: the colony of Lagos, the Northern protectorates and the Southern protectorates. These were differently administered under British colonialism. In 1906, the colony of Lagos and the protectorates of southern Nigeria came under a single administration. The year 1914 saw the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates. By 1939, three (3) provinces were created; the Eastern, Western, Northern provinces. Each province had a commissioner responsible to the Governor in Lagos. The British's major objective by the arrangement was just to have a political fusion for administrative convenience. It was not intended to unify neither did they envisage that a "nation" would come out of this amalgamation.

The British did not encourage understanding among the different groups in the colonial state. Not only were the provinces separately administered, the British officials also struggled to keep each province separate except for the unification of some essential departments such as custom, police, and education. There was little or no effort made at integration. In fact, through the old "divide-and–rule" strategy, the British encouraged inter-ethnic quarrels, competition and hostility. So given the multi-ethnic composition of Nigeria, the separate political development of the north and south was only suitable for colonial rule and not for the development of a nation.

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a three-region structure which had implications for nation-building. In each region there was one dominant ethnic group whose economic and political interest became the interest of the entire region. In the north, Hausa, Fulani elite interest became regarded as the economic and political interests of the entire region (Ikime 2006). The middle-belt people and other minority nationalities in the region had little or no opportunity for projecting, let alone advancing their socio-economic interests. The same thing allied in the Western and Eastern region where the Yoruba and the Ibo dominated their regions respectively.

Under this scenario, the various nationalities in the three regions could not yield their loyalty to the Nigerian state. Therefore, at independence, Nigeria was already bedeviled by problems arising from mutual suspicion and fear of domination among the various groups. So a serious contest was already established between the groups at the closing of colonial period.

Moreover, since independence many citizens in Nigeria are denied basic rights such as right to education, housing and health. Not only that, variations equally existed in the level of enjoyment of these rights across the country. So different Nigerians live different lives in different parts of the country. High level of socio-economic inequalities has several implications for nation building:

i. Citizens are not motivated to support the state or society because they do not feel that the state is concerned about their welfare.

ii. Marginalized, hungry, poverty-stricken citizens can hardly be expected to play their role in the development of the state.

iii. Socio-economic inequalities fuels fear and suspicion which keeps the people divided.

One major justification for the post military intervention in governance is the mismanagement of the country's resources by the civilian government which in turn has led to poor socio-economic development of the citizenry (Eminue, 2006). The military leadership established some programmes such as National Directorate of Employment NDE (1986); the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure DFRRI (1986); the Family Support Programme 1993; the Better Life Programme for rural women amongst others. But the poor state of the economy, hunger, poverty, disease and insecurity is an indication that the policies and programmes have not really transformed the economy talk less of having meaningful impact on the lives of the citizens. As (Ake, 1981) rightly observed, the socio-economic improvement of a nation is often the yard stick for

measuring the performance of any government. The absence of available and promotion of equitable distribution of socio-economic facilities produced poverty stricken and unskilled citizen whose loyalty and support the leadership could not command for nation-building.

Years after independence, leaders are yet to tow the path of correct leadership. According to (Adeniran, 2011), "Leadership problems have bedevilled this country for long. At various levels, we have not been able to rise up to the challenges". Leadership is a critical factor in nation building, however "the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership" (Achebe, 2008). (Gambari, 2008) declared that nations just don't have by historical accident; they are built by exemplary men and women with vision and resolve.

Nation-building requires leadership that is committed to the rule of law. Leadership that has a demonstrable sense of fair-play, leadership with ability and integrity, leaders with vision for Nigeria, who wants to accomplish greatness for Nigeria and not just for themselves and their immediate families. Nation building equally requires leadership who by words and deeds are achievers and not deceivers. Unfortunately, however, the standard of leadership in Nigeria over the years, are leaders who do not understand the socio-economic and political problems of the country not to talk of finding lasting solutions to them. They have been leaders who abuse public office for private gain, leaders who were interested in silencing their opponents, who see themselves as champions of only one section of the population. Leaders who resolved to build a nation indeed "must imbibe and promote the values of justice, fairness, equity, tolerance and accommodation of all". These ingredients were not found in the leaders. Hence, nation-building has remained elusive (Ekundayo, 2019).

Abefe-Balogun (2015) identified the following major problems of leadership in Nigeria:

i. Lack of vision/ target. He who lacks good objectives and set goals will lack planning, foresight, and passion and so the nation has been without any direction to succeed because the leadership has

poor focus, lacks good mission and direction to maintain organizational goals. No wonder (Newman, 1997) wrote that, vision is the key to understanding leadership. That imagination is one of the most powerful things a leader must possess because; imagination is a leader's dream machine. He further stated that, confusion of leadership on the vision will result in diminished accomplishments. The vision of the leadership must be clear and concise.

ii. Endemic corruption, diversion of public funds and crude oil, theft. Nigerian leaders are not ready to sacrifice self-interest for the good of their citizens/ followers hence the gross financial diversion of funds.

iii. The issue of employment and federal character has necessitated the selection and appointment of unqualified, unskilled people into offices of leadership that require experts and professionals. Influences which could be political, racial, familiarity prevail over expertise resulting in poor leadership incompetence and national backwardness.

iv. Lack of self-confidence: that is a leader must have the courage to trust the life of the led (followers) such that their hearts are submitted to trust their leader in return reciprocally because without the people (followers), the leaders cannot get credible results.

The failure to learn from their mistakes and improves is another leadership problem in Nigeria. Bad leaders exhibit arrogance which makes them to feel they have reached a stage in career where development is no longer required.

Other problems of Leadership in Nigeria identified by (Thom-Otuyah, 2012) include:

Lack of integrity: This is the quality that makes subordinates and followership to trust their leaders. Integrity and character is synonymous with honesty. A leader with integrity will have positive impact on his subordinates and the organization will subsequently experience performance and productivity improvement. In Nigeria corruption has almost become a value system; this can be attributed to lack of integrity on the part of her leadership. Corruption has ruined the economy of Nigeria, and it is putting her leadership into suspicion by her people and the International community. Nigerians lack trust in their leaders. If Nigeria is to develop and grow according to her potentials, her leadership must act with integrity at all times.

Ethnicity: Nigeria parades about two hundred and eighty-nine ethic tribes. She was not a country until the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates in 1914. In that year, communities and tribes within the river Niger geographical zones became one Country. The amalgamation brought different perceptions, some saw it as a mistake, while others saw it as a necessity for the administrative convenience of the colonial masters. Since then till now, Nigerians including their leaders pay more allegiance to their tribe than to the country. Even in time of elections people vote according to their tribal interest, when leaders emerge too, they reciprocate these tribal gestures. Nigerian leaders should grow above tribal sentiments and look at the country as one indivisible nation that her cultural diversities could be used as strength rather than as a weakness. National interest should prevail over tribal or ethnic interest.

Lack of legitimacy: Legitimacy is the foundation of leadership. Most Nigerian leaders come into power through a questionable process. When a military dictatorship imposes himself on the people as their leader, he creates an atmosphere of fear which is very inimical to good governance. The people are only forced to followership; they cannot criticize or dialogue with their leaders. In the same manner, civilian leaders come to power

through questionable electoral process. Most election results that brought our leaders into power have been widely contested in a tribunal or Supreme Court. This issue of legitimacy reduces the people's confidence on their leaders because their votes hardly count in the election of their leaders.

Problem of Followership in Nigeria

Sycophancy: Nigerian followers are fond of not telling their leaders the truth, they praise them, tell them lies; as soon as they leave their office, that is when followers turn against their leaders to criticize their lapses.

Inability to Influence Government decisions: in Nigeria it has become obvious that elections and election results are manipulated such that peoples vote become meaningless and do not count. Since leaders do not come to power through people's vote, the people's opinion is also undermined.

Being used by some leaders to make trouble: the desire of leaders to fulfil their personal interests make them to organize followers who ally with them to create trouble in the society thereby diverting the attention of the people.

Poverty: In Nigeria followership are faced with certain problems which disallow them from checking the excesses of their leaders. Poverty is one major factor that impairs the role of followership in Nigeria. In Nigeria those who are rich are very rich and wealthy; the poor are really poor; the middle-class are in-between self-sufficiency and poverty. The fear of oppression from leadership made the poor to be afraid to criticize or checkmate the excesses of their leaders. A weak and fearful followership are usually passive about the activities of their leaders.

Conclusion

The issue addressed in this paper is the place of leadership and followership in nation building. The quality of leadership and followership is very important in any society, If the society is to succeed in achieving set goals and objectives. Nigerian leaders have not been able to satisfactorily meet the needs of her followers. The welfare and security of her followers have become serious issues, the vision and aspirations of her followers have not been assured, there is deterioration in infrastructural facilities which is traceable to poor leadership performance and poor governance. Nigeria becoming a state was an arbitrary sandwich of people into a territorial state which to many was a mere geographical expression. The people in the state therefore had no serious identification with the state as a symbol of the people and a political community. If the colonial and historical experiences did not have the objectives of a unified state or Nation building, then the task of nation building must be a conscious and deliberate effort of committed men and women (leaders and followers alike).

For Nigeria to succeed in Nation building, there must be leaders with vision who are principled, credible, intelligent, courageous, strong with integrity, vision and committed to the rule of law not leaders who consider themselves as champions with flair for only some sections of the country, not leaders who place themselves above the constitution or who are interested in silencing their opponents than pursuing Justice. There is need for a harmonious relationship between leadership and followership. Nation building is a complex or dynamic task, followership must enhance leadership and followership relationship. They have to cultivate good public opinion pool that can serve as a check on leadership. Their continual docility can play the leadership into dictatorship. Integrity and skills not oratory and charisma on the part of the leadership will enhance leadership and followership relationship and, in the end, enhance nation building.

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