

Palliatives of Death

BY ZAINAB SULEIMAN OKINO

Sharing of palliatives to cushion the effect of extreme deprivation and hunger is Nigerian government's answer to their self-created hardships engendered by subsidy removal, devaluation of the Naira and the effect of existential security challenge. However, in place of food and other essentials, death and maiming of citizens have trailed the exercise. Palliative sharing is not sustainable; it is ad hoc and a stop-gap measure that can never replace the permanent needs of individuals – three square meals and other essential provisions. The bureaucracy and logistics involved in buying, stocking, planning, and arranging such palliatives alone are herculean. Yet, sharing foodstuff in an environment of desperation, misery, impatience, and organizational deficit is not only tragic but also leaves potential beneficiaries with the hard choice between death and hunger.

It all began in Lagos. As part of the government's knee-jerk reaction to the reality of hunger in the land, the Nigerian Customs Service was directed last month to distribute 20,000 seized bags of rice and other grains to the public. Individuals were required to show their NIN and purchase a 25kg bag of rice for N10,000, whereas previously, a 50kg bag of rice sold for N70,000. However, due to the lack of proper planning and structural support, a stampede occurred, resulting in the loss of seven lives – all over rice. The dust was yet to settle on the Lagos incident when news filtered in that two students lost their lives, again while struggling to get palliatives at the Nasarawa State University in Keffi penultimate week. Governor Abdullah Sule initiated the distribution of 7.5 kg bag of rice and N5, 000 to each student in what ordinarily would have been a good gesture. However, the chaos and stampede that accompanied the distribution led to deaths and injuries to at least 23 others. Elsewhere in Bauchi state, during the distribution of Zakat of N10, 000 by a philanthropist during the Ramadan, seven people also died. Palliative sharing is clearly not working and not enough to stem the tide of massive deprivation in the country. There is something wrong with our society when it comes to sharing and distribution of anything. We simply lack decorum and orderliness, and either out of desperation or the need to outsmart others, confusions often arise from such efforts no matter how noble.

With regards to palliatives being shared by governments at all levels, which is becoming a jamboree, there should be other means of reducing burdens than queuing to collect food that cannot even last a week for a modest family. And if it must, governments should have a formal structure to be applied such as random picking of numbers to be spread over days. Once you bring a mass of people together, it is human to witness confusion and chaos. Without rules and regulations and systematic planning, any gathering for food in this difficult time is a disaster waiting to happen.

Meanwhile, we need to interrogate how we got to a situation requiring the distribution of palliatives. How is palliative an answer to food insecurity and hunger? How can a hungry man patiently queue for food without losing his head over the



slightest provocation? What is this nonsense called palliatives anyway? How is it a substitute for provision or availability of food? Palliatives are supposed to be temporary measures, so how did it become a "national policy" that governors are falling heads over heels to show the biggest pyramid of grain palliatives? How sustainable is it as panacea for food insecurity occasioned by banditry, abduction, farmers deserting their farms and government's insensitive anti-people policies?

While we should self-regulate and learn lessons in patience and orderliness, governments need to implement the right policies to make palliatives unnecessary. Eight years ago, rice was N7, 500 and eight months ago, it was between N30, 000 to N40, 000. At between N70, 000 and N80, 000, why won't people scramble, fight, and "kill" one another to get it 70 percent cheaper. It is a failure of the government to prioritize palliatives over the welfare of the people. Doing so is akin to abdicating constitutional responsibility. Nigerians demand permanent solutions to this food crisis. Moreover, queuing for food is not elegant; it dehumanizes, more so in peace time and when everything ideally should be available and affordable or at least commensurate with earnings.

Another aspect of this palliative issue is the sheer size, volume, and red tape involved. Billions will end up in the hands of contractors in this poorly handled tokenism, which is what palliative is all about. It will serve as another sad reminder of Sadiya Farouq's era as Humanitarian Affairs Minister, where millions were spent on school feeding during the COVID-19 lockdown. Specific examples are spending 500 million Naira on school feeding for children in Ogun, Lagos and FCT during the COVID-19 lockdown and "over N2 billion expended by the federal government in Adamawa under the National Home-grown School Feeding Programme".

...Zainab Suleiman Okino is a syndicated columnist. She can be reached via zainabsule@yahoo.com

On Nigeria's leaders and insatiable greed

by Hroon Aremu

Amidst the chaos and corruption in Nigeria, I strongly believe that there are still those who stand as beacons of hope. These are the leaders who, despite facing myriad challenges, remain steadfast in their commitment to uplift the nation and its people. Their unwavering dedication serves as a deep contrast to the rampant greed and self-interest that often circulate the political arena.

Yet, amidst the noble efforts of these few, there exists a pervasive culture of corruption and greed that threatens to undermine the fabric of our society. To those who prioritise personal gain over the welfare of the nation, I implore you to pause and consider the legacy you are crafting. For in the annals of history and in the eyes of a higher power, your actions will be judged not by the wealth you amass, but by the lives you impact and the integrity you uphold. It is never too late to heed the call of conscience and strive for a future where service to others reigns supreme.

When one looks into the realm of the current Nigerian politics, one often wonders why people vie for political seats. Is it to serve the nation and its people, or is it simply a means to amass wealth and power? The unfortunate truth is that for many, the latter seems to be the primary motivation. The political seat is far from being merely a luxury or a recreational spot for leisurely pursuits; it is, in essence, an institution designated for diligent work and devoted civil service. Can we envision a scenario where individuals or collectives emerge with a genuine commitment to public welfare, forsaking any allowances associated with governance? Consider the prophets of God, who delivered divine messages without seeking worldly gain, exemplifying a selfless dedication to their cause despite their poor state; a lot will clap back by saying that is their time. Perhaps it is time for a paradigm shift in the remuneration of government officials, redirecting focus from personal enrichment to altruistic service.

It's no secret that the temptation of political office in Nigeria is often equated with a slice of the proverbial "national cake", a euphemism for the opportunities to enrich oneself through corrupt practices rather than a genuine desire to serve the public. Think of our nation as a national cake realm, a cake that everyone must have their fair share of. However, instead of viewing political office as an opportunity to serve slices of this cake to the people, many politicians see it as a chance to devour the cake entirely for themselves. This insatiable greed has fueled a culture of self-serving leadership rather than one focused on genuine service to the nation.

Imagine if every politician approached their role with the mindset of a servant-leader, dedicated to improving the lives of their constituents rather than lining their own pockets. It would be a transformative shift that could reshape the trajectory of our nation for the better. But the problem doesn't solely lie with our political leaders; it's a societal issue as well. We, as citizens, must acknowledge our role in perpetuating this cycle of greed. Just as individuals jostle for a larger portion of food during palliative distribution or communal gatherings, so too do

politicians maneuver to secure their own interests at the expense of the common good.

Even within religious institutions, the same self-serving mentality persists. Tithes and offerings intended for the upkeep of the church are often misappropriated for personal gain by those entrusted with their stewardship. It's a sobering reminder that greed knows no bound and can corrupt even the most sacred of institutions. We must look beyond the teachings of our religious leaders, individuals who are meant to serve as role models for our political leaders. Yet, even within religious institutions, we see a prevalence of greed and self-interest.

We need to emulate the discipline and selflessness of historical figures like Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ, who lived modestly and prioritised the welfare of others above their own. While we may not reach the same level of their attainment, we can certainly strive to embody their spirit of service in our own lives and actions. Political office should be seen as a platform for service, not a pathway to personal enrichment. It's a mentality that has perpetuated corruption and hindered genuine progress in our beloved nation. But it's high time we changed this narrative.

Imagine if, hypothetically, serving in any political position only guaranteed an allowance equivalent to that of a senior-level civil servant. Would the corridors of power still be as crowded with eager contenders? Certainly not. This hypothetical scenario underscores the stark reality that for many, the zeal of political office lies not in the opportunity to serve but in the promise of personal gain. Nigeria's political leaders are among the highest-paid political office holders globally. Yet, their earnings do not commensurate with the development and progress our nation so desperately needs. It's time for a paradigm shift—a shift towards leadership that prioritizes service over self-interest. It's imperative that we look to the examples set by our heroes, individuals like Nelson Mandela, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and the host of others who sacrificed personal gain for the greater good of their nations. These individuals sacrificed their own comfort and well-being for the greater good, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire generations. They believe that true greatness lies not in amassing wealth but in leaving a positive and lasting impact on society.

As political leaders, it's incumbent upon us to leave behind a legacy of service and selflessness. What will you be remembered for as a senator, honorable, governor, or president? Will you be hailed as a national hero, servants of the people or slaves to our own greed; will your name fade into obscurity? Remember, the true rewards of heroism extend beyond this life—they await us in the hereafter. Let us strive to be worthy of such accolades.

Haroon Aremu, youth corps member at PRNigeria centre, writes via exponentumera@gmail.com.