

Nigeria's challenge is political leadership corruption

Over the years, Nigerians have heard, to the point of being deafened, that the government is committed to promoting good governance. The inaugural addresses of elected leaders and military coup plotters reveal uncanny similarities in promises. Yet, as the quality of successive leadership deteriorated, Nigeria has regressed in terms of the truly important yardsticks for measuring the progress of nations. All these notwithstanding, it is pointless to look back with regret and anger at lost opportunities. Since the return to democracy in 1999 the political class has shown impetuous and irresponsible behaviour at the expense of the people. The looting and the waste going on in Nigeria in the name of governance has no parallel anywhere else and is responsible for breeding an angry and alienated citizenry who see no dividend in this democracy. On all accounts, Nigeria at 62 is yet to fulfill her destiny. The current structure of Nigeria today, which is anything but federal, holds down the country, stunts its growth, truncates its progress and actually threatens its unity.

Nigeria challenge is that its political leadership has been corrupt, and lack ability to govern the country effectively and place her on the path of progress. The present administration under the APC lack the strong political will to fast track the development of the nation. No patriotic Nigerian can pretend to be satisfied with the development and progress of this country 62 years after independence. Yet, it is not misguided optimism to argue that the nation's best days are still ahead. Nigeria remains a country of diverse nationalities, cultures, religions and values, and has defied all doomsday predictions to remain a united nation. This is enough reason for self-congratulation and hope of a better future. On balance, however, there is little to celebrate about Nigeria at 62. As the depressing indices show in areas such as security of life and property, food production, industrial output, quality of education and healthcare, economic diversification and productivity, there is indeed cause for worry. Not only do Nigerians eat the bread they do not produce, wear clothes they do not weave, and drink wine imported from other countries, they now import almost everything, including toothpicks. And let no one be deluded that 62 years is a short time in the life of a country.

The Nigerian economy is in dire straits with the potential to get worse if sound political and economic judgment is not brought to bear on the affairs of state. It is indeed tragic that the Nigerian economy officially registered its first recession

in more than two decades. The National Bureau of Statistics released a raft of official data on GDP, inflation, unemployment, and capital formation, which along with the CBN manufacturing performance index, show a terrible economic downturn. With foreign reserves depleted significantly, exchange rate rose up to unexpected, and oil prices unstable, the impact is only better imagined if all the fundamentals are not mustered to manage this situation. Given the terrible scenario playing out in the country,

manifested in mass poverty, high corruption in government, gross official recklessness and near zero governance, it is no surprise that the Nigerian ship of state is rudderless and adrift. There is hardly any aspect of governance that cannot be faulted for corruption and incompetence. The failure of leadership has resulted in shattered hopes, broken promises, missed opportunities, and unfulfilled aspirations. A nation, it has been said, rises or falls on the quality of its leadership. Nigeria is a terrible victim of the poverty of good leadership, but most destructively, political leadership.

What poor leadership in Nigeria has done is to create 200 to 250 million passive citizens who have no voice.

The needs of the country are enormous and available resources are meagre. The level of infrastructure decay and deficiency is mind-boggling. Most of the roads are death traps. The electricity supply is epileptic, at best. Water and basic sanitation are luxuries to many citizens. Education standards are deteriorating. Unemployment is creating substantial economic problems, and from East to West and South to North, Nigerian youths are hopelessly unproductive, restive, and endangered species. The social consequences of these are evident in the involvement of the youths in terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and secessionist agitations across the country.

To chart a course of progress, Nigeria needs big dreamers and even bigger dreams, leaders who would do things the unusual way. It is not too late to rescue Nigeria from the brink. Exemplary leadership is imperative at all levels to realize the dreams of the founding fathers who toiled for Nigeria's statehood. Nigeria must demonstrate its coveted state of independence by beginning a new chapter, and the time to do so is now. What the nation requires now is a political leadership which has the understanding and capability to set the tone and direction for national growth and development. The leadership that must incorporate all citizens, irrespective of ethnic or geopolitical affiliation in a grand vision of collective dynamic growth.

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