Rethinking Leadership and Social Change in Nigeria: Policy Implication for the Buhari Administration

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Abstract: *Nigerians have endured untold economic hardship and misery over the years because of leadership without a moral purpose and the nightmare appears endless because the politicians, who have been preaching good governance, economic prosperity and democracy since the return to civilian rule in 1999, are not effective "change agents." This paper is therefore premised on the construct of leadership and social change in Nigeria, and attempts to analyze Nigeria's preoccupation with state building through proactive efforts of the present administration. The paper is also an in-depth study of the challenges facing contemporary Nigeria since to lead a multi-ethnic society while remaining committed to democratic principles or norms is an uphill task. Elite theory is adopted to provide framework for this paper and prescribes that there is need for the Buhari administration to rebuild Nigeria harmoniously and do so within the purview of the rule of law, for the current Change Agenda to be meaningful, correct the errors of the past and be able to put the nation on the path of sustainable progress.*
Keywords: *Elite Theory, Leadership, Policy, Nigeria, Social Change*

1. Introduction

Change is the only permanent thing in life and it is ubiquitous in any society, particularly in a society with a strong desire to fulfill human needs. Social change is a product of a true, patriotic and committed leadership. Dike (2008) opines that Nigeria's short life has been packed with successions of social changes which cut across the different strata of the nation. There has been the shift from regions to states, farms to cities, agriculture to petroleum and now, political power has shifted from the party which ruled for sixteen years to an opposition party. The irony however is that these previous changes have not been for the benefit of the common man. The successive leaders are not working for common good, but prefer the status quo, which enables them to amass wealth through deceit and intimidation. The direction of change in any society depends on how well national resources are mobilized by the leaders to improve the people's living conditions and the people's attitude and behavior toward change. The problem of Nigeria is not so much as lack of wealth but mismanagement and unequal distribution of wealth due to lack of a purposeful leadership. Not many countries are fortunate to have the abundance of natural resources and manpower that Nigeria has.

The foregoing assertion provides a sound perspective for understanding the enormous problems confronting Nigeria. The successive administrations after political independence did not show any consistent and convincing commitment to any fundamental change in the society. Thus it was '*business as usual*'. Only those in the corridors of power have gained from those with multiplicity of riches, while the ordinary citizens have remained in wallowing penury. In other words, the masses have been preoccupied with the struggle for daily survival. Since independence in 1960, the series of development plans merely translated to further underdevelopment, unemployment, primitive accumulation of public wealth due to lack of commitment, lethargic and lackluster approach to developmental projects by successive governments. This resulted in the dominance, predominance, and prolongation of oppressive rule in Nigeria combined with corruption to undermine due process, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and efficiency in government.

This background is essentially relevant to the issues that manifested during the 2015 general election that produced President Muhammadu Buhari. The fundamental objective of this paper is to critically rethink leadership and social change in Nigeria with the purpose of understanding how to achieve sustainable social, political, and economic development as well as the morality and ethics in Nigeria. Hence, the paper prescribes that President Muhammed Buhari alone cannot install the expected monumental change in the political landscape of this country; also socio-economic and political development cannot be achieved until there is attitudinal change among Nigerians.

Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng

Page 67

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
2.1 Leadership

Before delving into the issue of leadership, it is necessary to make certain what a "leader" is. The definition of a 'leader' is as diverse as the myriad of books and articles written on the construct. This is because each writer has defined leadership from a different perspective. Aristotle's book, *The Politics*, as translated by Robert (2007) describes the characteristics of the kings and kingship in ancient Greece. As quoted by Reuben (1951), in eleventh century Iran, Unsuru' l-ma'ali wrote *Qabus-Nameh* and Nezan Mulk Tussi wrote *Siyassat Namehs* advising the kings of the time on effective governance. Machiavelli (1469-1527), wrote *The Prince* in Florence, Italy, during the sixteenth century guiding European rulers in politics. Ibn-e-khaldun (1377) from Tunisia provided his observations and guidance to the ruling groups of North Africa in his famous book *Muqaddimah* in the fourteenth century. No matter the angle from which the definition of leadership is viewed, a leader is one who exerts unusual influence and considerable power. According to McFarland (1969), a leader "is one who makes things happen that would not have otherwise happen. If the leader causes changes that he intended, he has exercised power, but if the leader causes changes that he did not intend or want, he has exercised influence, but not power". Hook (1943) shares a similar view as McFarland. In his work, *The Hero in History*, Hook depicted a heroic leader as one who makes things happen that ordinarily would not have happened. "The hero in history," he opined "is the individual to whom we can justifiably attribute preponderant influence in determining an issue or event whose consequences would have been profoundly different if he had not acted as he did." The hero is "an event-making individual who re-deter-mines the course of history".

Obviously, students of leadership would share the views of Hook and McFarland, that the prerequisites of leadership are influence and power. Accordingly, a person who is endowed with these qualities in the context of a group, community or nation has the personality of a leader (Kofele-Kale, 1976). Henry Kissinger (US Secretary of State in the Nixon Administration) pointed out in one of his famous speeches that a leader has the power to invoke the 'alchemy of great vision.' This, in other words, means that a leader should possess the power or influence of transforming something common into something precious.

Leadership in Islam means a person or a group that will lead humanity from the brink of destruction to the way of Allah (SWT) the Almighty. Leadership in Islam is a trust (Amanah). It represents a psychological contract between a leader and his followers that he will try his best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly and with justice. According to Islam, every person is the "shepherd" of a flock, and occupies a position of leadership. Hence, the focus of leadership in Islam is on good deed. Every movement has a need for leadership and the importance of leadership is like the engine of a train. The train does not move anywhere without the engine moving. Thus, a successful leader is one who attains his ends in the best possible manner, with the least inconvenience to the team, at the minimum cost, in record time and with a high quality performance. In a democratic society, leaders perform these functions within a framework of constraints. This includes an uncorrupted electoral process, the rule of law, institutional checks and balances and a free press. Moreover, the checks on power must be in working condition, or the laws of the land would be circumvented. In this paper a "leader" refers to persons who occupy important positions in the formal polity such as President, Ministers, Governors, Legislators, Party Officials, Local Government Chairmen, Council Members and of course, the Priests, the traditional rulers or local Chiefs.

2.2 Types of Leaders

There are many leadership types and each has peculiar attributes. In this paper, we will discuss the two types of political leadership found in contemporary African societies, namely: Instrumental and Societal leadership. According to Dike (2008), the "Instrumental" leader uses power and influence primarily in the pursuit of private (personal, close family, cohorts) goals. Community objectives are secondary to an instrumental leader. The main concern of the instrumental leader is how he can use his office to achieve personal objectives. He may not be lacking in social/community commitments, but in practice more considerations are given to self over the interests of the society which he governs.

The "Societal" leader is a public servant first and only secondarily a private person. While the instrumental leader uses his position to promote private and selfish goals, the societal leader subordinates private narrow goals for broader community objectives. For him power and influence are important only if they

Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng

Page 68

can be used to solve human problems. While the societal leader is likely to resign when he is convinced he cannot influence changes to the benefit of the public, the instrumental leader would hold on to power as long as his private objectives are achieved. He does not care whether the community derives any benefit from his rule, or not.

Given the above descriptions and the antecedents of Nigeria's past leaders, it is clear that the majority of them were instrumentalists and opportunists. In other words, they were 'instrumental' leaders, or what David Apter called "Consummatory" leaders (Apter, 1960). Chinua Achebe, one of Nigeria's legendary writers, in his little but powerful and widely cited book, *"The Trouble with Nigeria"* rightly pointed out that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership." He pointed out that "there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character, there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else," but leadership (Achebe, 1983). The lack of selfless, non-corrupt and committed leaders has contributed immensely to the socio-political and economic predicaments facing Nigeria today.

2.3 Social Change
Social change is defined as "significant alteration of social structures." And social structures here mean the "patterns of social action and interaction," which include norms, values, and cultural phenomena (Moore 1967, p.3). Others have defined change as "variations or modifications in any aspect of social process, pattern, or form;" it is also "any modification in established patterns of inter-human relationships and standards of conducts" (Fairchild, ed. 1955, as cited in Lauer 1982). Generally, change is a universal, unavoidable, irreversible and is a necessary phenomenon. Change is everywhere and happens all the time. It is unavoidable in the sense that it imposes itself upon us. It occurs whether we like it or not. Change is endemic; therefore all societies must change. Those that do not will disappear. Indeed, the general view that is found in the Eastern and the Western literature affirms the universality, irreversibility, necessity and unavoidability of change. The term change is itself part of the western jargon of political sociology and as such it reflects the values of the Western scholars like Comte, Durkheim and Weber.

2.4 Theoretical Framework
2.4.1 Elite Theory
Elite theory's origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). Mosca emphasized the ways in which tiny minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities, adding that "political classes" – Mosca"s term for political elites – usually have "a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority" over those they govern. Pareto postulated that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections. Pareto sketched alternating types of governing elites, which he likened, following Machiavelli, to lions and foxes. Michels rooted elites ("oligarchies") in the need of large organizations for leaders and experts in order to operate efficiently; as these individuals gain control of funds, information flows, promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning power becomes concentrated in their hands (Linz,, 2006). Emphasizing the inescapability and also the relative autonomy of elites, all three men characterized aspirations to fully democratic and egalitarian societies as futile.

The elite factor is an indispensable element of leadership. And leadership itself is indispensable to any association of human beings desirous of achieving whatever goals it sets for itself. When such an association is engaged in a difficult undertaking or is in pursuit of a risky objective such as nation-building, the need for competent leadership becomes particularly urgent. It is like having the captain who takes control over those "who go down to the sea in ships" or up into the clouds in airplanes. When we speak of leadership, we generally are thinking of political leadership. This is to be expected, because under normal circumstances political institutions provide the over-arching structure of human society. But there are other kinds of leadership operating under the political super structure: military, industrial, artistic, religious; et cetera. Each of these sub-groups evolves its own peculiar rules and chain of command from the top through a more or less restricted core of middle managers down to the mass of followers. This model can, of course, be described as elitist.

Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng

Page 69

3. Methodology

The methods used to generate information for this paper were based on secondary source of data collection. The documentary source is a secondary technique of data gathering for research purpose. The use of this method greatly enriches this study in the area of review of related literature and document. The secondary data obtained from this source were used to analyze contemporary thinking on the vexed issue of leadership and social change in Nigeria. Thus, this method has done much to generate the required information on the nature of leadership and social change. Having conducted 2015 General election peacefully and successfully in Nigeria, the authors found this method to be suitable to undertaken inventories of leadership relations elsewhere to prescribe feasible suggestion for the present administration of President Muhammed Buhari who came to power on the premise of social change.

4. Observations/Findings

4.1 Political Elites Control of Power and Resources over the Masses

As shown in Figure 1, political elites are constantly controlling power and resources over the masses. The elites have power over the state, the civil organization of political power. Even though they could have conflicts with the masses, which certainly can affect political decisions from "top down" to "bottom up" (Easterly, 2008), the possession of multiple forms of capital (social, cultural, economic, politics, among others) allow to elites to ensure their social reproduction as well as the cultural reproduction of the ruling class.
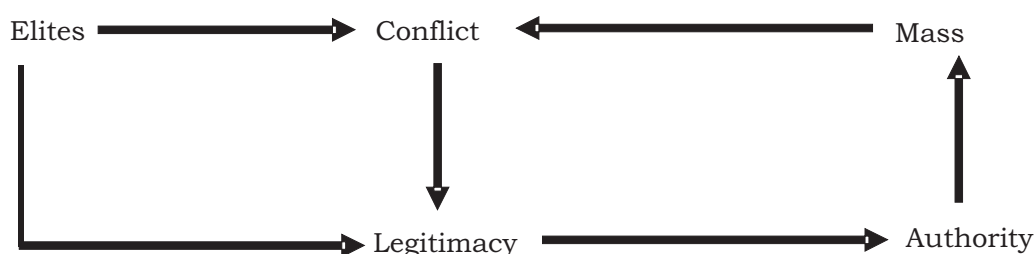

Figure I: *Political Elites Control of Power and Resources over the Masses*
Source: *Own Elaboration*

Unfortunately, "elitist" has become a dirty word in contemporary usage in Nigeria. Elitism as a democratic perspective unfolds the understanding that representative democracy is a function of the dictates and manipulations of the elites based on class organization and acquisition of political skill (Olaniyi, 1997; Varma, 2001). Thus, it negates the Marxian conception of masses control of democratic process because the masses lack the organizational and political knowledge which democratic leadership requires. Conversely, it is important to accentuate that the fact that there are various forms of elites-political, traditional, bureaucratic, military etc, is an indication that the elitist class is not as homogenous as envisaged by the classical elite theorists (Omodia, 2004). The result therefore, is the manifestation of elitist contradiction even within the political elite class when it comes to power acquisition. This scenario, no doubt, is obtainable in the Nigerian state in that one could argue that the greatest threat to the survival of the Nigerian state is the elitist contradiction associated with the competition for political offices by the political elites.

4.2 Social Change in Nigerian Political Landscape

Change is ubiquitous in any society, particularly in that which strives to fulfil human needs. And it takes a committed leadership to accomplish a propitious change in a society. Having experienced untold hardship since 1999, Nigerians want change. They desire fundamental changes to the way things are currently in their lives at the visceral level. Today, the country is characterized by high spate of insecurity, blatant corruption, impunity, poverty, unemployment, and ineptitude, lack of power supply, poor health facilities, decayed educational system and moribund economy. It could be recalled that the Peoples Democratic Party- a party with the slogan *'Power to the people'*, gave birth to the opposition party with the slogan *'Change'*. The change did not come without some sacrifices and selflessness. This change did not come until we saw the last of political parties like the ACN, CPC, ANPP and a fraction of the APGA. These political parties came together and metamorphosed into the party with the acronym APC (All Progressives Congress).

Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng
Page 70

Shaw as quoted by Mazer (2012) said: *"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."* On this note, the change agents spearheaded by Gen Mohammadu Buhari, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Rochas Okorocha as well as some aggrieved members of the PDP called *"The New PDP"*, capitalized on the PDP's inefficiency and boastful approach to governance. Every Nigerian, Muslims, Christians and idol worshipers united to have a new life in the country just as it had happened in 1993 when Nigerians stood firmly for Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the 1993 Presidential election that was annulled by the Military regime led by General (rtd) Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. At this time, Nigerians were convinced that Buhari was the man to save the country that appeared to be derailing under former President Jonathan, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) flag bearer.

President Buhari has been described by many people as the "masses friend and the elites nemesis". He is feared by the elite over his likely crackdown on corruption and waste in government. Buhari arguably has the largest street support among Nigerian masses irrespective of their ethnic and religious affiliation. He is also perceived as a strong character that is capable of quelling the insurgency that has ravaged large swathes of the country's North-East region. The emergence of the APC presented Nigeria with its first true and potent opposition party since the country returned to civilian rule in 1999. Many political analysts submitted that the presidential election presented the best opportunity for an opposition party to clinch the coveted post of the presidency in Nigeria. The APC grabbed the opportunity in resounding fashion. The pertinent question is that: Can the present political leadership maintain the tempo of positive social re-engineering going on in the nation" For any intended change to occur in a society the people must be convinced by the leaders that such a change is both possible and desirable. Hence, there is need for systematic set of ideology that reflects the feasibility and desirability of particular change. Ideology interprets the past, makes meaningful the present, and portrays an ideal future (Dike, 2000).

Lest we forget, in 1965 when Singapore was granted independence, Nigeria was ahead of her in many indices of developments. But the former British Colonial trading post was transformed from the third world to the first under the charismatic leadership of Lee Kuan Yew. Today, Singapore is said to have the best airline, the best airport and the busiest port of trade as well as the fourth highest per capita in the world. Dubai whose hospitals are now patronized by Nigerian rulers was a mere desert two decades ago. Has it occurred to the Nigerian leaders that most of the doctors, pharmacists and nurses in the hospitals in Dubai and Saudi Arabia are Nigerian citizens" This means that with a dedicated leadership that is determined to mobilize our abundant human and material resources for development, Nigeria can certainly achieve sustainable development.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion
Conclusively, Nigeria's fundamental approach to leadership is troubling. The leaders have the capacity to influence public policies to make a difference in the lives of the citizens, but have failed to do so because their primary goal of assuming leadership position is self-enrichment. Successive leaders in Nigeria have been ineffective and tyrannical because they are incompetent or ignorant. Neither has the lack of administrative or intellectual expertise to formulate and properly execute growth enhancing policies been the major problems. Quite simply, some Nigerian leaders have acted in their own selfish interests in total disregard to existing rules and laid-down procedures. They have the power to educate, inspire, and provide the people with the resources to advocate for the causes they believe in, but like bad parents, they have failed in their responsibilities to lead by good examples. Rather than view Nigerian leaders as buffoons, we see them and their actions from the perspective of the interests they serve.

On assumption of office on May 29, 20015, the Buhari administration met a nation with vital infrastructure such as roads, power, water etc in comatose state, while key sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, education and transportation were floundering. High spates of insecurity and blatant corruption have become the order of the day. In the light of the foregoing, the question is how does President Buhari intend to achieve economic development and make positive change a reality with the current situation" It is the position of this paper that Nigeria requires the collective responsibility of all to achieve meaningful and sustainable development in Nigeria. There is a need for complete change of attitude on the part of all Nigerians, including the political leadership class, to bring about positive change in the polity.

Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng

Page 72

5.2 Recommendations

This paper offers the following feasible recommendations for Buhari administration to transform Nigeria and instill the positive change we desired:

1. *Vision and Idealism:* For Nigeria to achieve national development, our rulers must have a vision of a better and harmonious society. This vision must be informed by the realities of the historical antecedents of one's society, contemporary realities of the world in which the society exists, and the potentialities and possibilities that the endowments of nature and human resources can transform for posterity. We have mentioned the importance of education in leadership development, but we must reiterate that factor of historical education, which will create in the leaders an awareness of how other peoples have related to his/her peoples and the consequences of such interaction. In which case, the leader would be better prepared to use such knowledge for the advancement of the interest of his/her peoples. Why it is important for a leader to have a vision and a dream of a better society arises from the need to plan for future generations and ensure that the plans are realistic. It is necessary that leaders be able to lead from the front and be good examples for followers if there is to be effectiveness in leadership. In this wise, it is important that leaders be well educated in the traditions of their society as well as the associated histories of societies that have impacted on the traditions.

2. *Honesty:* Honesty is a requisite of true leadership. Honesty necessitates transparency and fairness. The infectiousness of honesty cannot be underestimated as the character of the leader shapes the demeanour of the followership in many instances. In fact, the previous reforms, agenda and visions failed in Nigeria due to insincerity of purpose, lack of transparency and dedication to the cause of the society on the part of successive governments. The degree of cynicism that pervades the Nigerian consciousness is a consequence of the distrust of the leadership. Thus, it is clear that if we cannot trust the leader, how can we follow the words emanating from leadership" This explains the reason why these reforms were not successful as people doubt the sincerity of the leaders. Honesty requires that leadership accept blame for missed opportunities, wasted resources, and excesses in governmental exploitation for self and connected parties. The first step is repentance – that is, willingness to confront the populace with the truth. An acknowledgement of error, rather than the mystification of power and the harassment of the poor into submission, is the first step in atoning for the pernicious effects of dishonest leadership that has pauperized the Nigerian societies. Therefore, the Buhari administration can only achieve positive change in the country if the desired goals of Nigerians are pursued with the sincerity of purpose and government adopts mechanism to listen attentively and patiently to the diverse views in the society.

3. *Being a Good Listener:* As Bell and Smith (2002) opined "leaders can point to many reasons why they are not good listeners, but none of these reasons excuses them from the obligation…to listen." Leaders who listen are, however, known to respond well to criticism and crisis, build more loyalty, and increase the morale of the followers. Listening is a way of showing that a leader cares about others. Thus, the Buhari administration should constantly have its ears on the ground for information (signs of shift in public opinion) that often guides in policy formulations and implementations. The world's leading economies are what they are today because their leaders were innovative and always searching for solutions to their social, political and economic problems. But that is not the case with Nigeria; evidence of bad leadership is all over the landscape as the leaders have not gone beyond a promise for change. They are only good at drumming the nation's problems without finding their solutions.

4. *Good Governance:* The Buhari leadership should endeavor to promote good governance. It is axiomatic to say that in a heterogeneous society with many groups and interests is likely to produce more conflicts than homogeneous one. It is as a result of this that the government should govern on the basic principles of rule of law, fairness, equity, justice and without bias and prejudice.

5. *Reposition of Public Service:* The Buhari administration should realize that the public service as the principal vehicle through which the promise of a better life can be accomplished, must naturally be the centre-piece of public attention and, therefore, its transformation is a major policy imperative of new policy framework. Defining the role of the public service to be put in place

Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng

Page 72

must lay considerable emphasis on a public service which is to be more responsive and relevant to the needs of citizens, and more efficient and effective in the use of public resources, as well as more representative of the diversity and needs of all, especially the most disadvantaged sectors of the society.

6. *Strengthen the Institutions and Legal Frameworks:* There is need for the Buhari government to strengthen the institutions and legal frameworks for fighting corruption in Nigeria. As things stand now, Nigeria is still being perceived as a topmost corrupt nation in the world, even with her anti-graft crusade. The political will of President Buhari to fight corruption and the subsequent reinforcement of anti-corruption agencies such as EFCC, ICPC, CCB charged with the renewed responsibility of investigation and prosecution of offenders according to the tenets of the Law are in order, should be sustained and supported by all and sundry.

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Abuja Journal of Business and Management Vol.2, Issue 5 [67-73], March-2016
www.abujajournalofbusinessandmanagement.org.ng

Page 73