

Appendix 25:

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Leadership As A Trust: Its Role In Sustaining A Viable
Democratic Culture In Nigeria
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Courtesies,

Nigeria occupies a prominent place in Africa at large and the West African sub-region in particular. She has continued to sacrifice the lives of her citizens and God's given material resources for the maintenance of peace and order on the continent; first, in the struggle for the independence of sister nations (Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa), then in brokering or keeping the peace in her neighbourhood (Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Cote d' Ivoire etc.) and elsewhere on the continent (Republic of Congo, Sudan etc.) and beyond (Bosnia, Kosovo, etc.) either under the banner of ECOWAS, African Union or the United Nations. Nigeria has, indeed, in the past three decades restored hope in many warring countries where despair has set-in, paving the way for the return of democracy and the rule of law.

Nigeria has been able to carry out these humanitarian activities because she is blessed with fertile soil, beneath which are overflowing oil and natural gas, - with 2.2 million barrels of oil per-day in 2004, the Country was ranked the 13th in oil production in the world. Add this to the population of over 120 million energetic and talented people, no wonder the Country is tagged as Africa's giant. Ironically however, the Country is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world with seemingly endless problems of corruption, infrastructural decay and a sporadic ethnic violence of destabilizing proportion. What therefore, is the tottering about?

Perhaps because for the past four decades since its independence Nigeria has been experimenting with Euro-American inspired concepts, ideas and institutions in the running of the affairs of the Nation without much success. The Country is still searching for a more viable and enduring political structure; a constitutional reform conference is currently on-going at this material point in its history. In his recent monumental work on Leadership and Governance in Nigeria, Mahmud Tukur summed up, in his 600-page book, the dilemma Nigeria is facing in these words: "the Country is still searching of a system which will enable it to develop effective and efficient institutions and a style of government which will facilitate the creation of a civil polity and the tackling of socio-political and economic problem in a manner harmonious with the worldview, way of life and temperament of the population"

Much earlier in 1983 another illustrious son of Nigeria, Chinua Achebe has concluded that:

“The problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. 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. The Nigeria’s problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility; to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership.”

Distinguished audience, in this short treatise I would like to start by looking into the inherent problems of nurturing democratic culture and then walk back to the issues of leadership as a trust. My point of departure is the clamour to democratize.

Beyond the Clamour to Democratize

The clamour to democratize by many developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, has often left them in quandary. Rather than reap the fruits of democracy, which is peace and prosperity, many end up in pieces with an aggravated poverty, as was the case in Eritrea, Somalia and Cote d’Ivoire . Others rather than have their nations united by the rule of law and fair play that democracy advocates, deviate into the vices of division and exclusiveness, leading to mutual distrust, as it happened in Angola and Uganda. Yet, others rather than deliver the nations from dictatorship of maximum rulers exposes them to the tyranny of civilian dictators in the garb of democracy, as we have witnessed in Eyadema’s Togo.

These problems arise out of the genuine difficulties in adjusting to the forces of globalization that have suddenly been thrust upon these nations. Who will expect things to be equal or easy in the face of the rapid integration and democratization on a global scale of the world’s culture and economy through the instruments of transnational investments and communication and information technology? It is within the dynamics of these forces that we will find answers to the difficulties our Country is passing through in its attempt at a rebirth.

The West, especially the renewed campaign by the United States to “spread democracy” in the world is not helping matters. The foreign-backed efforts we see nowadays in developing countries at setting-up constitutional conferences followed by formation of political parties and then the eventual elections of legislators and the president, will never guarantee a sustainable democratic polity; because democracy is a product of a particular cultural milieu, conceived and nurtured within the western cultural setting over several centuries. The universal application of its fundamentals is not in question, but any attempt to impose the Euro-American world will always see third world countries dying in the throes of attempt to give birth to alien specie, which more often than not endanger those societies with crisis of values and breakdown of law and order in the name of freedom and defense of human rights.

We must face the fact that democracies as introduced to the developing nations are too expensive to run, too prone to corruption and too cumbersome to implement. Democracy as a concept of governance has its own soul and spirit as well as its outward form and manifestation. We must go for the spirit and then adapt its outward form to suit our cultural peculiarities; after all, culture is symbolic, learned, shared and adaptive.

In essence, democracy stands for the rule of law, mutual consultation in matters of governance and the safeguarding of human rights. These ideals are not far, for example, from the teachings of the Sharia, which we opted for in the Northern Nigerian State of Kano. In fact they are at the core of its philosophy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what we are saying is that there are far less success stories to quote about democracy taking firm root in Africa and other developing countries since decolonization than we all expected. This means there are far deeper structural problems in the implementation of democratic models than we, the world at large and the West in particular would like to accept. I strongly believe it is high time we faced this problem squarely. It will, with due respect, involve the West swallowing its pride and accepting the fact that democracy in its western forms cannot be supplanted outside the West without major structural adjustments or without framing it within the history and cultural experiences of the people. And the developing countries must be willing to sit with political experts from western capitals, in the like manner they normally do with economic experts and fashion out home grown political models that will suit their social, cultural and historical antecedents. Until this is done, it will be a formidable task for leaders to deliver the goods as trust and sustain the ideal democratic culture. However, this is not to suggest that leaders in Nigeria and elsewhere in the developing world should not strive to leave above board.

The Caliber of Leadership

My dear listeners, you would agree with me that it is the quality of leadership at helm of affairs that can guarantee a sustainable democratic culture despite all the inherent distortions in the system. It is the caliber of leadership at the top that will be courageous enough to address these distortions so that a viable democratic culture will be entrenched in the Country. Until the political turf is cleansed of the erroneous notion that power is sought out as a means of investment rather than an opportunity to serve the people, the question of sustaining true democratic culture will not even arise. Until we stop seeing leadership as a means of getting at our real and imaginary foes, sustainable democratic culture will remain a mirage. And until our vision for the Nation transcends our ethnic conclaves, sustainable democratic culture will not see the light of the day.

There is no single person in position of authority in Nigeria today who is oblivious of the fact that he is expected to deliver the burden of trust given to him by government or by the people's direct mandate. But the difficulty in delivering the trust often arises from our lack of sacrifice, insatiable greed to accumulate wealth and a larger society that is not only intolerant but also encourages corruption. The first two traits we must learn to imbibe and control respectively, while the last we must learn to wage a war of societal re-orientation falling back on the moral teachings of our two sacred religions, Christianity and Islam. In Kano State we have since established a directorate and saddled it with the responsibility of re-orienting our society towards its pure and cherished values. When we set out to re-orient the people, our platform is the religion the majority of the people believe in – Islam. And the approach we adopted is directed towards completing the circle of our carefully chosen and adopted policy of Human Development, aiming to rejuvenate the morale of the citizens who have been known, over the past centuries, to be people with high ethical standards. Our task is to lead the people and prevail over them to re-embrace the Islamic-Christian embedded values of discipline, hardwork,

tolerance, co-operation, accommodation, decency, cleanliness, moral uprightness, respect for law and order, respect for elders, proper upbringing of children, respect for the rights of women and above all, the fear of God; and to, in the same token encourage them to eschew unethical behaviours that are manifested in dishonesty in business dealings, dereliction of duty by public servants, hawking by the girl-child, begging by boys, reckless driving on roads, drug addiction, willful idleness, thuggery, mismanaging the marriage institution, prostitution, examination malpractice and general indiscipline.

Of recent, as a strategy to intensify our vigilance on transparency, good conduct, fairness and accountability, the State Government has established another Directorate with responsibility to receive and gauge complaints against public officials as well as monitor and fight corruption in public service. This demonstrates our sincerity and our diligence to ensure that every pronouncement we make is backed up with action.

Towards Sustainable Democratic Culture

Ladies and gentlemen, for the leadership in Nigeria to guarantee a sustainable viable democratic culture we must ensure the following:

Sincerity of Purpose: This is the essence of leadership. Without sincerity, the leadership is at the peril of loosing focus, which in turn will lead to fire-brigade approach to important matters of state and in the end hurl the government into the pit of indignity. All policies we propose in the course of our duties as leaders must be for good of the greater people of our dear Nation or states. Deliberate policies to retard the development of some part of the Country or accelerate the development of the other parts will not create an atmosphere that will guarantee democratic culture of fairness and level-playing field.

Respect for the Law: The constitution as the instrument of governance must be respected by all. No one should be above the law. Immunity clauses that found their ways into our Constitution are a misnomer to this all-important factor of democracy and respect for the law. Leaders must strive to ensure justice is done to all and sundry. Selective application of justice must be avoided at all cost, because not doing so is the surest way to drive the Nation into the state of anarchy.

Good Governance: This involves key factors such as probity, transparency, due process and accountability in matters of governance. Lack of putting these moral codes into the act of governance in the Country is the bane of our leadership in Nigeria today. There is real quest for good governance in our people as illustrated by the mass turn out of voters during the 2003 elections. The zeal and determination with which Nigerians fought with their voting cards is a testimony to their determination to reject bad governments at all levels. The results of the elections were however fiddled with in most cases, and are still being contested in the courts of law.

This is why in Kano State, when we were voted into power we moved and put in place all instruments that will guarantee good governance. We emphasize enlightenment of key actors as to their expected responsibilities through regular retreats, seminars and workshops; and then we ensure strict budget discipline and put in place a whole directorate of monitoring and evaluation

to ensure proper and accountable execution of capital projects. To regain the lost confidence of people on government, we strived to ensure that whatever government owed to any individual, or organization was paid off. It is in line with this that we settled a backlog of pension arrears of over 20 years amounting to over N1 billion. We have ensured prompt payment of not only salaries to civil servants, but also all other entitlements. Within the span of two years in office, we have approved two salary increments in the State. In addition, we are determined to redeem all pledges made to the electorate either during campaigns, in our inaugural address or in the course of the steer of the mantle of leadership.

My dear compatriots, in our little ways of encouraging fiscal responsibility we routinely assessed and paid genuine debts owed by the State, and we issue out contracts only when we are sure of the availability of funds to back them. In fact it is the contractors that are wont to cheat the Government now as our widely reported N4 billion fertilizer contract to Sino-Afric demonstrates. At a time when many people in authority are keeping their distance from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), we engaged their services to help us recover our money and the fertilizer the contractor was unable to supply. Our opponents who thought we were birds of the same feather that would flock together with them went to town with all kinds of fabrications insinuating that officials of our Government were corruptly involved in the fertilizer contract saga. But by the time the EFCC finished its investigation Kano State Government came out clean of any inappropriate act.

Surely, the Federal Government is slowly now waking up to the reality that good governance is not mere rhetoric. Going by the recent falls of the high and the mighty within the Government, there is a sudden realization at the federal level that corruption and good governance cannot co-exist. One must give way to the other. And unless we fight corruption to a standstill and in its stead entrench good governance, we will never be taken seriously in the comity of nations. So long as the corruption index of Transparency International continue to categorise us among the most corruption nations in the world, no serious investor will come into Nigeria to invest. Ladies and gentlemen, I will not end this short treatise without commenting on the National Political Reform Conference going on in Abuja. The national confab, as it is being referred to in Nigeria is a classical example of the failure of our leadership to match courage with sincerity of purpose. The courage to lay all the cards on table (without any no-go areas) is manifestly absent, and sincerity of purpose to carry all people and all institutions of government along is glaringly thrown overboard. The states and the national assemblies did not approve of the conference, and because of this disapproval, no law backed the setting up of the conference and the definition of its limitations and operations. This portrayed the illegality of the conference, and this, in itself not good for the healthy growth of democratic culture. As leaders, we must strive to operate within the scope of the law of the land no matter how difficult it is to arrive at a consensus. Similarly, the fact that no section of the Country is without some misgivings about either the composition, the manner of convening the conference or its agenda, is testimony that the sincerity of the Federal Government in convening the Conference is under question by most Nigerians. This sincerity question must be addressed for the Conference to achieve its desired objective of promoting a stable, strong and united Nigeria. Surely the possibility of the confab opening a new chapter in Nigeria's march to greatness is not in doubt, but it must be handled with utmost sincerity and decorum, and above all justice.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, distinguished audience, whatever happens we must find a way of making the correct forecast in the face of the cyclone that is ravaging the shores of the world in the name of globalization. Notwithstanding, we must accept the fact that leadership is a trust that must be delivered. To deliver it we must equip our selves with leadership qualities such as **personal integrity**, which includes traits such as openness and honesty, **political wisdom**, which enables the leader to read and understand the political climate in which he operates, and **drive for result**, which will push the leader to hold people to account for what they are contracted or delegated to do. Once our leaders captivate these qualities, then delivering the trust burden of leadership will not be a big problem. And once leaders deliver their trust then we are on the path for a sustainable democratic culture. Otherwise Nigeria will continue to play “Giant of Africa” on the continent and an “idiot savant” at home. In any case our leaders will do well to always remember the Day of Reckoning (Here or hereafter). Otherwise leadership will be but blame, regret and punishment as it has turned out to be on many in our very recent history.

Mr. Chairman, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for listening.