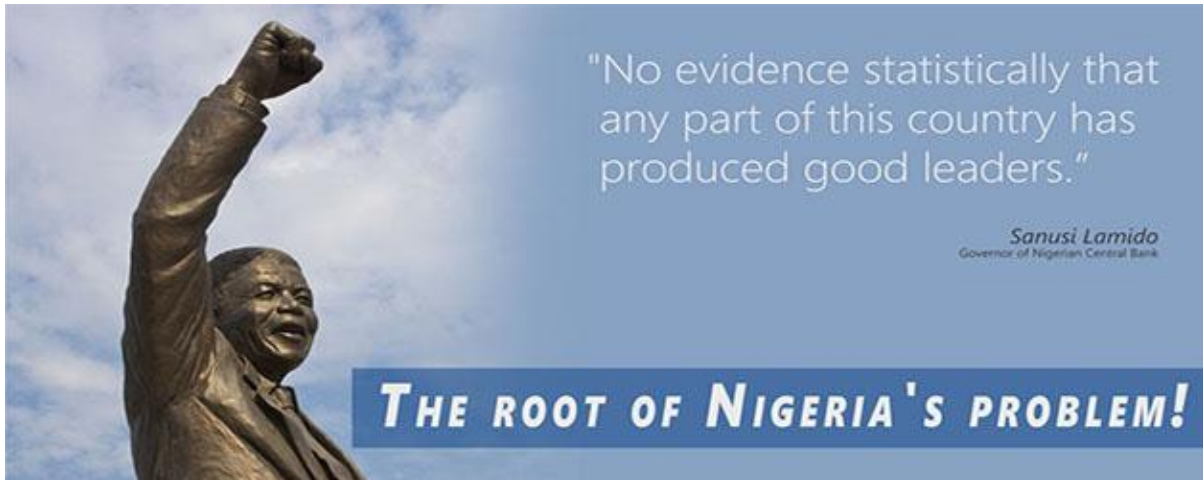


LEADERSHIP OF A NATION: Lessons for African Youths



“The strength of every society depends largely on the quality of its leadership. Throughout history successful societies have been those whose leaders were able to rise to the occasion to calm storms during crises and advance the course of prosperity during peace time. During economic hardships, poverty and wars it is those leaders who are competent, dedicated, visionary who are able to pull their nations and peoples from such troubles and economic misery. Such leaders also show selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, transparency and strong leadership and are committed to democracy, rule of law, freedoms and human rights in their dealings with the people”.

Editor
Business, Education & Opinion

This write-up is dedicated to drawing attention to the leadership issues facing Africa and their impacts on development and quality of life across the continent. These issues go to the root of the mission of Openmind Foundation. Leadership makes a whole lot of difference in the progress and wellbeing of a family, people, institution and nation. For example in 1215 when England faced acute poverty, diseases, homelessness, corrupt and aristocracy, there was revolution that forced King John to resign the Magna Carta. This bold action paved way for the free and prosperous England of today. “The French too when faced with a brutal, corrupt, merciless, bankrupt, despotic monarchy and aristocracy chose to rebel, ushering in a revolution which forced the King out of power, and turned France from a property estate of a King into an independent prosperous Republic” (*ibid*). In Africa today, Egyptian Youths have led the way with the Tahrir Square Revolution.

Without a doubt, the state of African countries and peoples today has been shaped to some extent by external forces: -

- over 400 years of both Trans-Atlantic and Arab slave trade
- nearly a century of colonial domination
- decades of post-colonial interference and manipulation

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- an unjust international economic system
- predatory practices of multi-national corporations, etc.

It is equally an undeniable fact that the condition of African countries and peoples has been made “immeasurably worse by internal factors such as:

- misguided leadership
- systemic corruption
- capital flight
- economic mismanagement
- senseless civil wars
- political tyranny
- flagrant violations of human rights and military vandalism, among others” (Yaw Sappor).

Leadership is at the root of African problems. Let’s start this review on leadership with a powerful extract from an article written by Robert I. Rotberg and published by the Council on Foreign Relations.

“Africa has long been saddled with poor, even malevolent, leadership: predatory kleptocrats, military-installed autocrats, economic illiterates, and puffed-up postures. By far the most egregious examples come from Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Zimbabwe -- countries that have been run into the ground despite their abundant natural resources...Such leaders use power as an end in itself, rather than for the public good; they are indifferent to the progress of their citizens (although anxious to receive their adulation); they are unswayed by reason and employ poisonous social or racial ideologies; and they are hypocrites, always shifting blame for their countries' distress.

Under the stewardship of these leaders, infrastructure in many African countries has fallen into disrepair, currencies have depreciated, and real prices have inflated dramatically, while job availability, health care, education standards, and life expectancy have declined. Ordinary life has become beleaguered: general security has deteriorated, crime and corruption have increased, much-needed public funds have flowed into hidden bank accounts, and officially sanctioned ethnic discrimination -- sometimes resulting in civil war -- has become prevalent”

The leadership curse on Africa

Great nations and peoples have one thing in common. They have had a great leader at least once in their history (Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi).

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- Whose leaders were able to rise to the occasion to calm storms during crises and advance the course of prosperity during peace time.
- During economic hardships, poverty and wars it is those leaders who are competent, dedicated, visionary who are able to pull their nations and peoples from such troubles and economic misery.
- Such leaders also show selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, transparency and strong leadership and are committed to democracy, rule of law, freedoms and human rights in their dealings with the people” (Editor Business, Education & Opinion).

Africa has suffered greatly from lack of effective leadership. If there is anything like a curse on Africa certainly leadership issues rank the top. Please note:

- Africa is richly blessed with resources. It commands 50% of the global gold deposit, diamonds and chromium, 90% of the cobalt, 40% of the potential world's hydroelectric power, 65% of the manganese, millions of acres of arable land (Yaw Sappor), huge deposit of crude oil and natural gas, etc.
- "The continent is home to some of the world's biggest and longest rivers and lakes. There are rivers like the Nile, Congo, Niger, Zambezi, Senegal, Gambia, Benue, Limpopo, Volta, Kasai, Ubangi, Bomu and Orange. There are lakes like Victoria, Albert, Kivu, Tanganyika, Malawi, Kyoga, Chad, Edward, Nyasa and Turkana. The value of these rivers and lakes to agriculture, transportation, manufacturing, commerce, power generation and household cannot be overemphasised" (The ZimDiaspora)..
- "Timber is abundant in Gabon, DCR, Congo, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. There are rich soils in Nigeria, DCR, Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Liberia, Senegal, Malawi, and South Africa".
- "The continent is also home to some of the beautiful natural wonders of the world. There are animals, Victoria waterfalls, pyramids and a host of others which are a source of tourism".
- Despite this remarkable levels and varieties of natural wealth, African countries and peoples rank the world's most impoverished and humiliated.
- "Besides there are architects, engineers of all kinds, medical doctors, planners, bankers, technicians, scientists, industrialists and investors with the qualifications, expertise and rich experience to help develop these resources. On top of all these the technology needed to convert these natural resources into finished goods exists everywhere in the world and can be bought or borrowed".
- "Although it is true that colonialism and Western imperialism did not leave ... Africa in general, in good shape, the condition has been made immeasurably worse by internal factors" such as misguided leadership, lack of vision and imagination, rape and plunder of natural resources, systemic corruption, capital flight, economic mismanagement, senseless civil wars, political tyranny, flagrant violations of human rights and military vandalism, among others".

A typical example of leadership curse on Africa is the difference in approach between Europe and Africa on the utilisation of profits from slave trade in the 1400s and beyond. "While Europe invested profits from the trade in laying the foundation of a powerful economic empire, African kings and traders were content with wearing used caps and admiring themselves in worthless mirrors while swigging adulterated brandy bought with the freedom of their kinsmen. Virtually all the items imported during the nefarious business were for consumption or weapons for waging wars. A slave ship's manifest published in 1665 listed items carried for sale to Africans as old hats, caps, salt, swords, knives, axe-heads, hammers, belts, sheepskin gloves, bracelets, iron jugs and even "cats to catch their mice" (Tunde Obadina).

Nigeria – a living example of leadership curse

Nigeria provides a more current example of leadership curse on Africa. Nigeria gained independence in 1960; thanks to the efforts of the nationalists and patriots like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Alhaji Tafawa Belewa. The country is blessed with Petroleum, tin, columbite, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, zinc,

natural gas, etc., and enormous wealth creating power as the fifth largest supplier of oil in the world and the 6th largest supplier of natural liquefied gas on earth.

The country's history has been marked by economic stagnation, declining welfare, and social instability. Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Brazil, among others, with which Nigeria was at par in developmental terms a few decades ago, either have attained the status of developed nations or have long been recognised as truly emerging economies of the world. But Nigeria, the largest black nation on earth:

- remains a typical Third World nation: buffeted by mass hunger, poverty, crime, corruption, environmental degradation, massive unemployment, disease, primitive state of basic infrastructure, etc.
- with vast amount of arable land is regrettably unable to feed itself and has been involved in importation of food for the past 40 years (Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture, Mr. Gbenga Makanjuola).
- the prevailing conditions have led to brain drain and mass voluntary economic slavery into Europe, USA and Asia of a new generation of Nigerian citizens and professionals. At best, some may describe themselves as economic and intellectual refugees.

History is repeating itself before our very eyes. As is the case today, the slave trading of our ancestors in the 1400s and beyond was driven largely by African rulers, traders and a military aristocracy who all grew wealthy from the sufferings and humiliation of their fellow citizens. "European slave traders saw the advantages of helping African kings and chiefs realise their desire to acquire western culture, if not for themselves then for their children.... They were obsessed with the variety of goods available through the trade. Locally produced equivalents of some merchandise, like cloth and jewellery, existed but greater satisfaction and prestige was got from having imported varieties. The man with a warehouse full with goods from abroad was a powerful figure in the community, able to buy favours and influence with his ill-gotten wealth" (Tunde Obadina).

"In some respects Africans are now more vulnerable to theories of black inferiority than they were during colonialism. Under colonialism they could dream that with liberation would come the opportunity to prove their worth. But actions of the African leaders have made the theory of African dependency persistent" (Yaw Sappor).

The corner stone of leadership

Leadership involves at least 14 effective leadership behaviours: supporting, consulting, delegating, recognizing, rewarding, motivating, managing conflicts and team building, developing, clarifying, planning and organizing , problem solving, informing, monitoring, representing, and networking.

- *"Successful leaders have the intrinsic ability to have others in a group to accept and follow their directives or command. This ability takes a strong, dominant extrovert personality and oodles of charisma. Studies have shown that these are psychological and character traits that the person who emerges into adulthood from adolescence will demonstrate for the rest of their life".*
- *"The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been", Henry Kissinger once said.*
- *In the words of Margaret Thatcher, "Being a leader is like being a lady, if you have to go around telling people you are one, you aren't".*

Some people argue that leaders are born with the necessary qualities which, when honed through nurture brings about success. Others share the view that leadership, like many other similar characteristics, can be learned and developed through life. Whether leaders are born or made, there is the undeniable truth that Africa's biggest problem today lies with lack or availability of born or made leaders. The leaderships of Africa are so removed from the people that they are looked upon as foreigners. "They are driven by self-interest, so excessive that their peoples' interests are forgotten -- hardly different from the colonial masters" (John Hayford). Why is leadership the major problem with Africa?

The importance of leadership has since the origin of man been recognised. For example the scripture dating back more than 2000 years states "Without leadership a nation falls". It goes further to prescribe the conditions for effective leadership:

"A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife, cool and collected, accessible, and hospitable. He must know what he's talking about, not be overfond of wine, not pushy but gentle, not thin-skinned, not money-hungry. He must handle his own affairs well, attentive to his own children and having their respect. Outsiders must think well of him, or else the Devil will figure out a way to lure him into his trap".

The devil has truly figured out ways to lure African leaders into his trap – perhaps the root of the African leadership curse. There are many instances where African citizens with "most impeccable credentials and a track record of personal integrity and credibility become so inept or/and squander their credibility so quickly once they emerge at the helms of affairs in the public domain" (Aina).

The good news is that this curse can be broken. There is much to learn today about leadership from a living legend such as President Mandela. President Nelson Mandela is one of the most respected and revered leaders of our time, a role model to presidents and clergy and the darling of the common man. US Ambassador Joseph observes that President Mandela's influence came from: (a) the power of his personality, (b) the elegance of his humanity, (c) the loftiness of his ideals, (d) the wisdom of his judgement, (e) the calmness of his temperament and (f) the power of his commitment to the well being of others. Therefore President Mandela, a world citizen with fully coded genes of African origin, has demonstrated that Africans are born with leadership qualities and can make great leaders if and when they choose to.

President Khama of Botswana and his predecessors are also an encouraging reference point in Africa. They have committed themselves to building the social and economic infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, roads, harbours, airports, rail lines, telecommunication, silos and irrigation facilities. Today the people of Botswana enjoy one of the highest standards of living in Africa (Editor Business, Education & Opinion).

Qualities to/not to look for in a true leader

The major problems of Africa are largely to do with failure to formulate and effectively implement sound economic, agricultural, infrastructural, educational, health and environmental policies. The varying characteristics of the African leaderships explain the sources of the failure:

- Leaders are out of touch with the needs and sufferings of their people.
- The seat of power has been occupied for too long by individuals short of ideas and solutions to deal with the economic and social problems facing their people.

- Leaderships are preoccupied with how to preserve their existence rather than the existence of their people.
- Leaderships are more interested in voting themselves into power than the responsibilities that go with the votes.
- Leaderships exist based on tribal, party, religion and regional alliances and loyalty of the security forces rather than their own economic and social records.
- Leaderships accept no opposing views and remain accountable to themselves.
- Leaderships worship and reward corruption rather than fight it.
- Leaderships destroy the educational systems of their countries and sponsor their children to top schools in Europe, USA, South Africa, etc.
- Leaderships destroy refuse to finance the health infrastructure needs of their countries and then travel overseas for medical treatment when sick.
- Leaders put the interest of their former colonial masters and big multinational corporations ahead of their own people.
- Leaders are preoccupied “with how to enrich themselves and prolong their rule” by engaging in “short term ill conceived, vote buying, cosmetic policies and programmes that increase poverty and turn the people into slaves”.

Research, based on studies of men and women who shaped history over time (politics and business), identifies characteristics of successful leadership as follows:

- Adaptability – Ability to adapt and incorporate new information and new challenges.
- Charisma – This lies in the personality of a leader and is the “energy, vision and charm of a person which when communicated to others inspires loyalty, enthusiasm and a willingness to go that extra mile”.
- Communicator – Ability to communicate with a variety of organisations, groups and individuals, hold their attention and get them to act on what is communicated clearly and unambiguously.
- Embraces responsibility – A leader must demonstrate full understanding of the weight of their duties and willingness to take responsibility for success and failure. No room for transfer of blame for failure.
- Altruistic – A leader puts the needs of others ahead of his, leads by example and is perceived to be fair and even handed in all actions and decisions.
- Enthusiastic – Shows excitement for the job or responsibilities and because enthusiasm is contagious people will follow.
- Knowledgeable – Possess sound working and up-to-date knowledge of all aspect of the organisation and responsibilities for the purpose of providing guidance and advice and understanding the challenges the organisation and staff face. Great leaders don’t have to be technicians but know how to get the best out of specialist working for them. When Henry Ford set out to manufacture an automobile, he was

asked during a press conference in his office why he thought he could be successful in making cars. After all, someone said, “You are not an engineer.” His reply was, “No I am not an engineer, but if I pressed this button under my desk, some of the best engineers in the world will walk through that door.”

- Organised – Leadership often comes with enormous amount of information to collect, interpret and utilise. A leader must therefore be highly organised and structured in the way his/her responsibilities are carried out.
- Consistent – “A good leader is a solid and stable rock which staff can revolve around and refer to while working towards goals”. A leader must therefore be consistent in their approach to responsibilities. Favouritism, mood swings and open dislike are avoided.
- Diplomacy – leadership is not a popularity contest but about carrying out what needs to be done – pleasant or otherwise. Diplomacy and tact are crucial in developing and sustaining supportive relationships and developing team members. Often leadership has to do with “balancing the needs of one group against the needs of another and keeping both groups happy”.
- Role model – A leader must be a role model for followers or subordinates. They must uphold the highest personal and professional standards if they expect respect and support from the followers or staff.
- Emotional intelligence – Daniel Goleman highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence after studying a number of successful leaders. He argues that while the qualities traditionally associated with leadership are crucial, they are insufficient. He identified emotional intelligence as highly relevant and includes the following elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social awareness.
- Social intelligence – According to Ambassador Joseph, this refers to the ability to recognise and protect the dignity of difference. He argues that leaders with social intelligence “are the ones who are most convincing in persuading other s that diversity need not divide; that pluralism rightly understood and rightly practiced is a benefit not a burden; that the fear of difference is a fear of the future”.
- Spiritual intelligence – This refers to “the ability to cope with the unexplored, the unexamined and the unknown; the capacity to transcend the reality we see and to imagine alternative possibilities; and the ability to step back, renew oneself and to find meaning and purpose in our existence (Ambassador Joseph). Spiritual intelligence reminds a leader and would be leaders that they have a role to play as agents of reconciliation and forgiveness. Among the greatest strengths of President Mandela was his ability to “alloy his strong beliefs with patience, charm, self-discipline and an ability to forgive”. He learned the language and history of his oppressors (Afrikaans) in order to understand their culture and concerns.
- Purveyor of hope – In the modern world full of challenges ranging from economic meltdown to terrorism, famine, disease and wars, every county needs leaders who can project hope; “leaders who can look beyond what they see and imagine alternative possibilities. Hope is the ability to look beyond the evidence and to see something deeper and different”.
- Recognition of others’ contributions – A leader looks for and acknowledges the best in his political opponents and enemies. It enriches a leader’s wisdom and places a leader on higher moral ground. It is on record that President Mandela saw in Botha (the architect of apartheid in South Africa) a reflection of qualities he wished to see in himself. Botha was a tough leader, a man clear in his principles, honest

in his own way. “And yet Nelson Mandela, who has described apartheid as the second-worst crime of the 20th century after the Holocaust, responded to the news of the death of his former jailer not only with a message of condolence to his family, but expressing his recognition of the contribution Botha had made to peace”.

Perhaps you are beginning to think through, evaluate and appreciate the quality of leadership that has led to years of endless poverty, humiliation and slavery of generations of Africans. The truth is that most of our leaders lack credibility and integrity. The basis for judging the credibility of African leaders should include: reconstruction of the state, rebuilt citizenship, renewed social contract, reconstructed society and reclaimed and rebuilt integrated and inclusive economy (Tade Aina). There is the need for a “new leadership in the continent capable of delivering the people out of poverty, diseases, wars, famine, economic meltdown, political paralysis and insecurity” – the Obamas.

In this new millennium, “ we need leaders who will not collude and connive with Swiss Banks and banks in Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Austria, France, Britain, Jersey Island, US and a host of offshore banks in the Caribbean and the Pacific to cheat their poor countries.”

Editor
Business, Education & Opinion

“The years of leadership incompetence, weak, ineffective, totalitarian and corrupt government as seen in DRC, Uganda, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Congo, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe must give way to strong, effective, corruption free and solution driven government as seen in Botswana” (ibid).

This is where Openmind Foundation comes in. Our mission is to assist the Nigerian Nation to enjoy the products of democracy: free and vibrant press, free and fair election, transparent governance, respect for human rights, accountability, economic prosperity, an enterprising civil society, rule of law, and freedom of religion, thought and speech democracy: through the following strategies:

1. Preparing grounds for the election of responsible, patriotic, competent and agenda driven politicians into power by educating at least 50% of the eligible Nigerian electorates:
 - (a) The workings and limitations of a presidential system of government
 - (b) The power of a citizen through a single vote
 - (c) The dangers and limitations of voting on tribal, religious, and corrupt basis
 - (d) The art of effective selection and ejection of political leaders
 - (e) The endless possibilities for Nigeria and the role of effective leadership
2. Massive nationwide campaign aimed at facilitating hope, reconciliation and unity particularly among the three main Nigerian tribes Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. The campaign is to drive home to the Nigerian people and tribes that “what unites the people and tribes of Nigeria is greater than what divides them”.
3. A massive educational and behaviour modification campaign aimed at drawing attention to the ills of the Nigerian society and geared toward a mass rejection of those vices. This will operate under the “SAYNO AND SEE” campaign slogan and through School Clubs, Soap-Opera, etc.

In all these agendas, you have a role to play. Do something amazing and surprise yourself – join Openmind Foundation and make a difference in the quality of governance and standards of living of our people.

“We must vote for candidates on merits rather than party and tribal affiliation, for this is what has made Europe, America, Japan, Korea what they are today. We have been told that Africa is poor while our leaders receive several billions of dollars annually. We must ask them to tell us how those billions of dollars have been utilised. We must not rest until Africa becomes a continent for all her citizens not just a few. We must not rest until the continent becomes free from leadership incompetence, corrupt, weak, ineffective and despotic rule. At this critical moment in world economic crises Africans cannot afford the same old faces, the same old ideas, the same old politics, the incompetence, the corruption, the nepotism and we cannot afford to remain poor in the abundance of natural resources”.

Editor
Business, Education & Opinion