GOOD LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The challenge of sustainable development focuses on how today's needs can be met without diminishing the capacity of future generations to meet their own. An effective utilization of available resources, human and non-human, is therefore a *sine qua non* for sustainable development. However, at the heart of the success of the efforts for sustainable development is good leadership. Leadership is not the private preserve of a few charismatic men or women; rather it is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. Leadership is so powerful and important that it gives direction, pace and energy to the citizenry. It empowers them and above all, owes them a sense of accountability. Focusing on Nigeria, this paper examines the link between leadership, accountability and sustainable development. It argues that the major threat to her sustainable developmental efforts is traceable to poor leadership manifesting in corruption, weak value base and the absence of accountability. and concludes that until good leadership is guaranteed, Nigeria will continue to experience stunted economic growth and sustainable development.

Keywords: Accountability, leadership, sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

Development is concerned with improving the well-being of people. Raising living standards and improving education, health and equality of opportunity are among the essential components of economic development goal. Ensuring political and civil rights is a broader development goal. Economic growth is an essential means for enhancing development, but in itself is a highly imperfect proxy for progress. There have been divergent views on what constitutes development but, increasingly, there appears to be a growing consensus that development is not guaranteed by simple infrastructural development or rise in a nation's GDP or other index. Using economic indices such as the Gross National Product, reduction in the level of inflation, reduction in budget deficit and so on, without a positive impact on the masses, amounts to an empty concept. Abudu [1] noted that part of the problem of productive development in Africa is that even when such objectives are claimed to have been fulfilled, they do not yield any improvement on the citizens' quality of life.

Gaining importance and currency is the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development is defined as balancing of human needs with the protection of the natural environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also in the indefinite future [3]. However, at the heart of the success of the efforts for sustainable development is good leadership. Leadership is not the private preserve of a few charismatic men or women; rather it is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. Leadership is so powerful and important that it gives direction, pace and energy to the citizenry; empowers them and above all, owes them a sense of accountability. Focusing on Nigeria, this paper examines the link between leadership, accountability and sustainable development.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

A. Sustainable development

Sustainable Development is commonly defined as economic and social development that meets the needs of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Since the mid 1970s, sustainable development has emerged as the preferred way of dealing with the rapid degradation of the natural environment. The first global meeting on this issue, the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, focused mainly on the environmental issues, such as pollution and waste that were most evident in the wealthy nations, and associated with industrial development and a

rapid growth in consumption. Much less attention was given to the needs of lower income countries of the developing world (commonly referred to as the South, because of their geographical position) for stronger and more stable economies, as well as environmental improvement. Although the need to combine development and environment goals was becoming evident, more emphasis was placed on the "limits to growth" arising from shortages in resources such as metals and fossil fuels.

The new concern for what later became labeled as sustainable development is evident in the Cocoyoc Declaration of 1974, which addressed the issue of how to respect the "inner limit" of satisfying fundamental human needs within the "outer limits" of the earth's carrying capacity. But it was the World Conservation Strategy of 1980 that launched sustainable development into the international policy arena, stressing the importance of integrating environmental protection and conservation values into the development process. The Brundtland Commission then paved the way for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), otherwise known as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This conference approved a set of five agreements [6].

The Brundtland Commission's definition, while widely used, provides little guidance of how to implement sustainable development. The absence of a clear definition has allowed some to claim that they are practicing sustainable development, while essentially retaining their earlier approaches. Part of the problem lies in the confusion that surrounds what is actually "sustained" by "sustainable development". Although the term "sustainable" is most widely used to refer to the maintenance of ecological systems and resources, it has also been applied to the economic, social, and even cultural spheres. The notion of sustainable development has gained a broader political usage; here, it embodies a concern for taking a broad view of what human welfare entails and for balancing the goals of economic efficiency, social development and environmental protection. Sustainable development also underscores the importance of taking a longer term perspective about consequences of today's activities, and of global cooperation among countries to reach viable solutions. Sustainable development is the parallel consideration of healthy environment and human well being. This includes issues of population, climate, economic prosperity, energy, natural resources use, waste management, biodiversity, watershed protection, technology, agriculture and so on. All these pieces are part of the sustainable society puzzle because they are basic ingredients of everyday life [6].

B. Leadership

There has been a number of theories and definitions of leadership. The earliest of these states that leaders are born, not made [2]. This is a well-worn phrase but which retained currency for a long time and which could still gain some support. This theory, at times called the trait theory, seeks to find universal personality traits that good leaders have to some extent in greater quantity than others. True enough, it is possible to inherit leadership qualities arising from one's genealogy but this alone does not explain the success or failure of people who find themselves in leadership situation. A major weakness of this theory is that it ignores the circumstances and the environment in which the leader operates. The behavioural theory of leadership concentrates on styles and this led to prescriptions for an ideal leadership style. However, further research indicated that a good leadership style is contingent on a number of other external factors and the complexity of the leadership process cannot be revealed without considering the dynamic relation and interaction between the leader and the followers [2], [9].

A positional power holder is often erroneously conceived to mean the same thing as a leader. While a position power consists of the power bases that arise from the post that people hold in a social system, a leader may wield same power and much more. A leader has a vision which provides direction for others to achieve a goal. A person of position power holds a short term perspective and sticks to the status quo but a leader showcases long term perspectives and challenges the status quo [14]. In light of the above, leadership simply entails charting a course and influencing others to follow.

C. Accountability

Olowu [10] defines accountability as the requirement that those who hold public trust account for the use of that trust to the citizens or their representatives. The concept underscores the obligation of an office holder to fulfill the expectations of his office. It is understood to be a measure for the results of an office holder's actions. Public accountability is a *sine qua non* for any regime that would refrain from corruption and ensure public service delivery to the citizenry.

III. INTERPLAY OF LEADERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development involves meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A commitment to meet the needs of present and future generations has various implications.

According to Babawale [4], sustainable development suggests an enduring, remarkable, non-terminal improvement in the quality of life, standard of living and life chances of people. Such development must be capable of surviving generations over a prolonged period of time and it favours a progressive curve in human development encompassing enhanced creativity, for increased productivity. According to Dalal-Clayton [6], meeting the needs of the present means satisfying:

1) economic needs—including access to an adequate livelihood or productive assets; also economic security when unemployed, ill, disabled or otherwise unable to secure a livelihood,

2) social, cultural, and health needs—including a shelter which is healthy, safe, affordable, and secure, within a neighbourhood with provision for piped water, drainage, transport, health care, education, child development, and protection from environmental hazards. Services must meet the specific needs of children and of adults responsible for children (mostly women). Achieving this implies a more equitable distribution of income between nations and, in most cases, within nations, and,

3) political needs—including freedom to participate in national and local politics and in decisions regarding the management and development of one's home and neighbourhood, within a broader framework that ensures respect for civil and political rights and the implementation of environmental legislation.

In a similar vein, Adewole [3] suggests that the field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into four constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability and political sustainability.

Meeting such needs without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs means:

1) minimizing use or waste of non-renewable resources—including minimizing the consumption of fossil fuels and substituting with renewable sources where feasible. Also, minimizing the waste of scarce mineral resources (by reducing use, re-using, recycling, and reclaiming);

2) sustainable use of renewable resources—including using freshwater, soils, and forests in ways that ensure a natural rate of recharge; and,

3) keeping within the absorptive capacity of local and global sinks for wastes—including the capacity of rivers to break down biodegradable wastes as well as the capacity of global environ-mental systems, such as climate, to absorb greenhouse gases.

The aim of sustainable development is thus to optimize the realization of a society's many different social, environmental, and economic objectives at one and the same time. Preferably, this should be achieved through an adaptive process of integration, but more usually it will require bargains (trade-offs) struck amongst the different interest groups concerned. Critical to this process is the recognition that different perspectives on environment and development are both inevitable and legitimate. There could be, for example, very different environmental priorities between leaders, regions and other sectoral groups or stakeholders.

However, over and above the objectives to be achieved with the available resources and ability to meet sustainable development, good leadership plays a central role in the process. The function of leadership is a universal phenomenon. In every human grouping across societies, it has been found that some members are privileged to decide the fate of others and direct the progress of the group. In the words of Udegbe [13] these individuals (the leaders), act in several ways and exhibit several behaviors, which have been variously defined as leadership. Leadership is a privilege to have the responsibility to direct the actions of others in carrying out the purposes of the group, at varying levels of authority and with accountability for both successful and failed endeavors. Leadership also can define 'a dynamic relationship hinged on the personal characteristics of the leader and followers, as well as the environment. In other words, leadership entails charting a course and influencing others to follow [14]. It is implied from these definitions that leadership is the quality of a head to make followers work together to achieve a specific goal. It includes guiding, directing, controlling, organizing and delegating of authority and so on. By good leadership, we do not mean the man who just gets the most satisfactory result as being the man with the most brilliant single mind, but rather the man who can best coordinate the brains and talents of his associates. It goes further to include the man who is able to inculcate the positive culture of transparency, accountability and selflessness. That positive culture makes the difference and explains the leader who can ensure sustainable development for any society. Since leadership, especially under democracy is a consensus, it requires the elected leaders being accountable to the people who are the owners of the mandate given and who should be the beneficiaries of developmental efforts and results. This therefore brings to the fore the fact that elected officials are under obligation to be accountable to the electorates. To

Laxmikanth [7], the concept of accountability connotes the obligation of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their performance and the manner in which they have exercised powers conferred on them. Its main aim is to check wrong and arbitrary actions and increase efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes.

A leader anticipates future events just as he is in firm grasp of the moment. This interplay is a critical element of sustainable development. The big question is, how well have African and Nigerian leaders fared?

According to Nwagbara [8], African leaders are yet to provide good governance (leadership) necessary for effective and meaningful development. The importance of good leadership in this regard cannot be overemphasized. The concept of good leadership encompasses general values and basic freedoms that include accountability, transparency and competence. Unfortunately, good governance is still a far cry in Africa: Corruption, lack of accountability, lack of transparency and others have been a thorn in the flesh of African political development. Effective leadership entails recognition of the limitations of a single individual to understand and control what is happening in the society. The willingness to delegate power and responsibility to competent citizens is one of the essential attributes of good leadership. More importantly, the choice of good leaders and subsequently the subordinates, determines to a great extent how such leaders and subordinates will be committed to the achievement of national interests as against sectional and private interests. Nigeria has been seen as a failed state in these processes of choice of leaders at whatever level of governance, and this failure accounts for the poor level of her developmental efforts [8], [11].

At the level of leadership in public organizations in Nigeria, the situation is not different from what obtains at the national level. Leadership, manifesting in lack of accountability and transparency has become the cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabrics of public organizations and which has impacted negatively on sustainable development. Preceding this is the mode of selection and appointment of such leaders. Factors such as federal character system, quota system, nepotism, god-fatherism, party membership and loyalty among others are the basis for consideration at the expense of skills, competence and merit. These partisan considerations coupled with corruption then produce leaders who have no sense of vision, mission and development.

Revelations from the recent probes of the power and energy sectors are serious pointers in the weak chain of poor accountability and transparency of certain leaders over the years. The probes revealed national leaders who expended several billions of naira on various projects who were unwilling to come out and explain to the masses what such expenditure achieved. They also revealed leaders who are not accountable for their actions and deeds when state's resources are involved. A good explanation will be found in the issue of corruption and weak moral chain and poor understanding of what the demands of leadership entail.

Taking a look at democratic leadership under the context of Nigeria, at the end of Obasanjo's administration which marks the beginning of the present fourth republic, the country parades a resume of low life expectancy, high maternal mortality, political vendetta, vicious god-fatherism, poor infrastructural facilities, epileptic power and energy supply, ethnic crises, abduction and restlessness especially in the Niger delta among others. While Nigeria proudly ranked the 48th richest country in the world in 1979, by the 1990s it had sunk into a cesspool of poverty and attained the rank of 13th poorest nation of the world [5]. A lot of paradox could explain this. One is the economic wealth of which the nation prided itself with a whooping per capita income of US$1000 in 1980 but which shrunk to a shameful US$310 by 1990. We can see another contradiction in the nation's agricultural sector which employed about 70% of her labour force in the 1970s but barely absorbs 2.4% by 1980. The problem is traceable to leadership either during the military or democratic dispensation. Today, the nation's income is principally from crude oil but the level of devastation and degradation leading to poverty in the Niger delta is an indication of lack of planning for a sustainable development. Also, the level of poverty in the land despite the huge endowment of natural resources is a pointer to the fact that development is not forthcoming, talk-less of sustainable development.

A further careful assessment of all the sectors of the Nigeria economy under different national leadership over the years will reveal cans of worms and a great extent to which past and present leaders have succeeded in waste of the nation's resources, which otherwise would have been expended on development for this generation and future generations. This conclusion is amply supported by Babaale (2008), [4] who said that 'apparently, there have been deficits in the national leadership in Nigeria either from the intellectual, moral, ideological or other points of view'. He continues, 'in my view, the weakest link in the chain of development efforts remains the weak value base which adversely affects both our individual and collective attempts at development, including those of the leaders who are either born, selected,

rigged into positions of leadership or assume the leadership of the country through the barrel of the gun'. Babawale (2008) [4] once asserted that 'the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership'. Evidence of bad leadership and politics of the belly that abound at all levels of government in Nigeria are confirmation of the above assertion.

IV. CONCLUSION

The agenda that sustainable development espouses is broad, so the efforts to achieve it must also be brought and promoted within a culture of discipline, leadership, accountability, national interest and transparency. From the issues raised in this paper, it may be difficult for sustainable development to be enhanced in Nigeria if the hydra-headed demon of bad leadership and poor accountability are not tamed and brought under control. This paper therefore recommends that it is essential that Nigerian leaders develop a sense of strong moral and ethical principles, and imbibe the spirit of understanding of the fundamentals of leadership as a willingness to serve and not an opportunity to enrich pockets. Secondly, Political office holders should ensure that funds meant for public use are judiciously used as such and meticulously accounted for to keep the records straight for the future. Finally, the availability of natural and human resources, the formulation of public policies and adoption of the best type of government may not produce any sustainable development if leadership is not made the centre of focus. Nigerian leaders should be willing to think in term of national interest over and above their personal interests; they must also be willing to see themselves as owing the citizenry a sense of accountability. To move forward and to guarantee sustainable development, the nation needs a new breed of leaders who are sensitive, patriotic, and accountable.

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