



Building Transformational Leadership in Nigeria: An Urgent Call for Action



By

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Introduction

Leadership has been recognised as one of the most important variables that affect or determine the performance of any organisation, institution or nation. As such, many scholars have attributed the success or failure of any establishment, organisation or country to the nature and character of their leadership. Thus, it is leadership that makes countries great and also belittles the image of countries in the comity of nations.

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The desired form of leadership in all civilised societies is the kind of leadership that commands followership, works with the citizens to identify the needed changes, creates a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executes the change in line with committed citizens of the country. This is what is termed ‘transformational leadership’.

Many countries such as Turkey and Singapore have witnessed exceptional transformational leadership under Kemal Mustafa Ataturk and Lee Kuan Yew respectively. Even in Africa, Tanzania (under Julius Nyerere), Ivory Coast (under Félix Houphouët-Boigny), Ghana (under Kwame Nkrumah and Jerry Rawlings), South Africa (under Nelson Mandela)

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and a few other countries have all witnessed selfless and quality leadership.

However, in Nigeria, the quality of leadership since independence has left much to be desired. Leadership in Nigeria is largely determined by mundane considerations such as the ethnic and religious orientations and leanings of the aspiring leader. Leaders who have the capabilities to transform the country are, in most cases, prevented from having the opportunity to lead due to these mundane considerations. Thus, Nigeria continues in its cycle of socio-political backwardness and economic underdevelopment. No wonder, Chinua Achebe's famous dictum is that the trouble with Nigeria is solely and squarely a failure of leadership.

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Interrogating the concept of 'leadership' and 'transformational leadership'

Apparently, the concept of leadership is taken seriously across the globe because leadership excellence determines the performance of any organisation and country. There is no universal definition of leadership. The concept is defined in different ways by different authors. However, certain aggregates - 'influence on others', 'teamwork', 'achievement of goals and objectives' - are common in many of the definitions. According to Myles Munroe, leadership is the ability to lead others by influence. Thus, leadership connotes the capacity to influence, inspire, rally, move, mobilise, direct, encourage, motivate, induce and activate others to pursue a common goal or purpose while maintaining commitment, momentum, confidence and courage.

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Central to what leadership entails is to produce good feelings in those being led in a way that their aspirations, interests and concerns are respected. Leadership is an act in which the leader must grapple with both strategic and tactical issues and problems, attending to both internal and external forces and always keeping their eyes on the prize, which is the welfare and happiness of the followers. This implies that a leader should represent selflessness and demonstrate deep commitment to his status while guiding the followers.

While a good leader possesses most of the qualities described above, a transformational leader possesses much more. Transformational leadership entails leadership that controls the situation by conveying a clear vision of the country's goals, a marked passion for the work or task to be done, and an ability to make the rest of the citizenry feel recharged and energised. It connotes a leadership style that can inspire positive changes in those who follow.

Transformational leaders are generally energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate. Not only are these leaders concerned and involved in the process, but they are also focused on helping every member of the country or group succeed as well. Evidences show that countries led by transformational leaders have higher levels of performance and satisfaction than countries that do not have such leaders. This is because transformational leaders hold positive expectations for the citizens, believing that they can do their best. As a result, they inspire, empower, and stimulate citizens to exceed normal levels of performance. There are four components to transformational leadership. These include:

- Idealized Influence - the leader serves as an ideal role model for followers; the leader "walks the talk," and is admired for this.
- Inspirational Motivation - Transformational leaders can inspire and motivate followers.

This and the first point are what constitute the transformational leader's charisma.

- **Individualized Consideration** - Transformational leaders demonstrate genuine concern for the needs and feelings of followers. This personal attention to followers is a critical element in bringing out their very best efforts.
- **Intellectual Stimulation** - the leader challenges followers to be innovative and creative. A common misunderstanding is that transformational leaders are "soft," but the truth is that they continuously challenge followers to higher levels of performance.

The situation in Nigeria

The situation in Nigeria today is apparently that of lousy governance and this, unfortunately, is a reflection of failed leadership. The myriads of economic and security challenges bedeviling the country presently are a function of failed leadership.

Since independence in 1960, it has been a story of one political crisis to the other, from economic recession to depression or stagnation, and from one security threat to the other. Leadership that is worth the name should have taken proactive actions to avert some of these challenges or at least, provide lasting solutions to them when they occur. Unfortunately, this appears not to be the case in Nigeria, as news of the consistent and sustained killing of people across the country, particularly along the middle belt region decorates the pages of newspapers almost on a daily basis. Thousands of lives have been lost, properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed, and millions of people have been displaced, yet the leadership in Nigeria has no clue as to how to end the menace. The economy has not fared better either.

The Nigerian economy still suffers from self-inflicted crisis orchestrated by corruption, embezzlement, misappropriation and mismanagement of public funds by government officials while the leadership looks on helplessly. In most cases, it is the leadership that perpetuates these acts.

The country is fast sliding into anarchy, and the leadership only pays lip service to the situation without any concrete efforts to nip the insidious situation in the bud. Ultimately, the leadership has lost the ideals of what is supposed to be their primary obligation - protecting and defending its citizens from internal and external aggression. It has ruined the concerns of the led and replaced it with selfishness, avarice and nonchalance.

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Need for transformational leadership in Nigeria: Policy recommendations

- Enthronement of transformational leadership in Nigeria starts with changing the attitude of leaders and potential leaders by broadening their mindset through training and skills development to understanding the requisites for leadership and adopting them to solve national problems.
- Thus, there is a need for the country to establish leadership training schools and institutions where potential leaders are trained, groomed, developed and equipped for effective leadership if Nigeria anticipates benefiting from the dividends of transformational leadership.

- Nigeria should develop and implement a leadership training framework stipulating processes of impacting or inculcating the traits of transformational leadership in both subsisting and potential leaders of the country.
- This framework should be adopted and used in establishing training schools and institutions as leadership training guide targeted at creating positive change in leaders. This will promote attitudinal reorientation and change, which will eliminate the inherent negative tendencies of lousy leadership in the country.
- In addition to training as a tool for producing transformational leadership, stringent punishment for defaulters is essential. Promulgating laws to regulate and guard against non-implementation of acquired transformational skills is recommended. The essence will be to get leaders to account for lousy leadership even while they are still in office.
- Therefore, the ‘immunity clause’ should be expunged from the constitution of Nigeria.
- Various institutions and regulations guiding leadership in the country should be strengthened to prevent them from serving as puppets or the interests of few. They should be granted absolute autonomy to discourage biased adjudication.
- The current electoral process should be reviewed to ensure that credible leaders are elected into leadership positions across the country. The process should be restructured to prioritise factoring the disposition of potential leaders as a selection requirement.
- The country should develop a National Youth Development Plan to prepare and empower the youth for future transformational leadership of the country. This should be done through a long and short-term strategy targeted at attitudinal reorientation of the youth to guarantee future transformational leadership.

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