CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP AND FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES ON PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI LED ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA FROM 2015

NDALIMAN ALHAJI HASSAN, Ph. D*
*Dept. of Political Science, Adamawa State University, Mubi, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the factors that necessitated change of leadership in Nigeria in 2015 through the electoral process. The quest for qualitative and right leadership that will resuscitate the nation’s debilitating condition becomes imperative. More so, the electorates are yearning for quick solutions to the socio-economic and security challenges confronting the country from the new leadership. The replacement of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan by President Muhammadu Buhari was a significant milestone in Nigeria’s history. The paper utilized secondary data and qualitative analysis as its methodology. The paper recommends team work between the new leadership and the followership in Nigeria in order to restore sanity to a collapsing nation.

KEYWORDS: Change, Leadership, Administration, Fundamental, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

National leadership in Nigeria has been dominated ever since independence in 1960 by two categories of people, that is, the military and civilians. At independence in 1960, Nigeria had civilians at the helm of affairs before the 1966 military coup d’état. Within the period 1960-1966, the civilian administration at the national and regional levels led by example and laid the foundation for national development. Most of the leaders in the First Republic were people of proven integrity with commendable achievements of honesty, dedication to duty, accountability and desire for nation building. What really dented the image of the First Republic leaders were regionalism, ethnicity and party politics of self-advancement to the detriment of national cohesion (Samson, 2012: 82).

In 1979, a new civilian administration emerged after a successful transition to civil rule piloted by the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. The coming to power of Alhaji Shehu Shagari signalled another era of much anticipated democratic governance in Nigeria. President Shehu Shagari’s personal qualities and attitude was a model of honesty, transparency and dedication to national progress and development. Shehu Shagari’s leadership was marred by party politics of prebendalism and the overwhelming influence of his subordinates in decision making and policy matters (Hassan and Sambo, 2007: 90-91).
By 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became the President of Nigeria after handover of leadership by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo led Nigeria for eight years beginning from 1999-2007. Obasanjo utilized his experience and military background to revamp the nation after years of military rule from 1983-1999. Chief Obasanjo as a leader was decisive, dedicated to duty and had control over his subordinates. The issues that smeared negatively his administration were party politics of compensation and godfatherism, unnecessary trips abroad and reported cases of corruption by his lieutenants (Hassan and Sambo, 2007: 9).

In 2007, there was civilian to civilian transition and Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar’adua emerged as the President. Yar’adua’s administration was forward looking and promising with his posture for fiscal discipline, amnesty for Niger Delta militants, transparency and good governance. Unfortunately, his government was short because of his health condition and demise in 2009.

In January 1966, the military struck and General Aguiyi Ironsi became the Head of State. As a military leader, he was not bereft of dictatorship. The Unification Decree No. 34 promulgated by his government raised concerns across the country. The tension generated by that Decree led to the counter coup of July, 1966 which brought General Yakubu Gowon to power.

The regime of Yakubu Gowon witnessed a period of oil boom and prosperity for Nigeria. Enormous development projects were undertaken in areas of infrastructure and national integration. Gowon’s leadership was dented by his inability to transfer power to civilians, allegations of corruption and ineptitude. It was the weaknesses of Gowon that resulted to the 1975 coup that brought General Murtala Muhammed to power. General Murtala as a leader was dynamic, fast, decisive, patriotic and just. Within the short period of his administration far reaching changes were discernible in the country and his impact was felt abroad. (Wilmot, 2006: 45-46).

General Olusegun Obasanjo assumed the position of Head of State in 1976 after the assassination of Murtala muhammed. Obasajo fulfilled General Mutala’s promise of handover of power to civilians in 1979. Similarity, in 1983, General Muhammadu Buhari became Head of State with the ouster of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in a military coup. Buhari’s administration was keen in revamping a decaying nation. As a military regime his administration was characterized by dictatorship and high-handedness. Even though the
The intention of the government was guided by the need to resuscitate the nation's economy and wipe out indiscipline among Nigerians (Hassan and Musa, 2010: 123-124).

The administration of General Ibrahim Babangida, 1985 – 1993 was a period of drastic economic reforms, deceptions and allegations of corruption. Babangida named himself President which was an indication of a desire to rule and exercise influence. The administration gave emphasis to the military constituency as a placating measure to the detriment of the majority of the civilian population (Hassan and Sambo, 2007: 91).

With the exit of Babangida from power in 1993, an interim government was put in place led by Chief Ernest Shonekan. General Abacha suddenly shelved aside the interim government and became Head of State in November, 1993. Abacha’s leadership was characterized by fiscal discipline, allegations of corruption, disdain for western interference, controlled transition programme, high-handedness and desire for self succession.

General Abacha died in 1998 and General Abdulsalami Abubakar became Head of State. He spearheaded the transition to civil rule programme and handed over power to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in May, 1999.

It is pertinent to state that the leadership posture, behaviour and style of Nigerian leaders are influenced by several factors which includes; the colonial foundation of Nigeria, regionalism, party politics, ethnicity, religion, foreign interest and military constituency. There are two leaders in Nigeria who had tried to overcome some of these influences in order to provide a dynamic, purposeful, fair and just leadership desired by Nigeria. The leaders are General Murtala Muhammad (1975 - 1976) and General Muhammadu Buhari (1983 - 1985). General Murtala on assumption of office was keen in making Nigeria a great country among the comity of nations by pursuing anti-corruption crusade and implementation of pragmatic policies for national development. At the international stage Murtala was adamant in his anti-imperialist posture. Similarly, General Buhari adopted a zero tolerance for mismanagement of resources and pursued policies that could make Nigeria a self-reliant nation (Hassan and Musa, 2010:125).

This paper is divided into six sections. The first part is the introduction. The second section is the conceptual clarification and theoretical framework. Part three deals with the factors that necessitated change of leadership in Nigeria in 2015. The fourth section is on the fundamental challenges on the new administration in Nigeria. The fifth aspect is the conclusion, while the sixth section is the recommendations.
CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leadership is the force that propels the movement of an organization, institution, group or polity in either a negative or positive direction. Leadership provides the focus and trajectory that leads to the success and development of any society whether traditional or modern. According to Certo (2002: 325) “Leadership is the process of directing the behaviour of others toward the accomplishment of some objective”. Similarity, Weihrich and Koontz (1993: 490) posit that “Leadership refers to influence, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals”.

The definitions provided by these scholars are quite similar because they view leadership as a task that is essential for the overall progress of an organization or polity. Leadership necessitates the need for steering the group to achieve set goals, at the same time, it demands collective effort and team work from the followers. Followership refers to the willingness, urge and desire by others to cooperate in the drive toward the accomplishment of an institutional or group mission. In other words, a leader needs followers who are ready and willing to respect his directives, demonstrate loyalty and be ready to make sacrifices for the attainment of set goals. A leader cannot succeed without effective followership that is able and willing to abide by the leader’s directives (Sapru, 2009: 402).

More so, a leader requires certain qualities that are requisite for achieving the right outcome. These qualities are: self – confidence, honesty, integrity, intelligence, drive, desire to lead, relevant knowledge, decisiveness, accountability, inspiration, focused and optimistic (Naidu, 2006: 202). A leader is expected to combine these qualities in order to guide his followers to undertake their roles effectively and judiciously for the attainment of laid down goals and objectives.

There are fundamentally three theories of leadership. They are trait, behavioural and Path-Goal theories. These theories elucidate the characteristics and role of a leader in any given situation. The trait theory emphasizes that leaders are born and not made. That leaders emerge naturally because they are endowed with such qualities as charisma, bravery, integrity, decisiveness and self – confidence. The theory further states that those found to be with these traits should be considered as leaders. Examples are Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King e.t.c (Sapru 2009: 402).

The behavioural theory on the other hand, posits that leaders have certain attitudes that influence the way they perform. That leaders are not born with traits, but their behaviour
is influenced by their upbringing and ecology. The theory emphasizes that leaders behave either in a democratic, autocratic or laissez – faire styles.

A democratic leader gives opportunity for input, delegate’s authority, decision making is collective and leadership is generally based on consultation. The autocratic leader is the opposite of a democratic leader because it focuses on centralization, dictating of rules to be played, unilateral decision making and self – centered. Similarly, the laissez – faire style of leadership grants freedom to subordinates to contribute and decide on the progress and development of the organization at their own level (Naidu, 2006: 204 – 205).

The Path – Goal theory focuses on the role of the leader in serving as guide to followers to enable them perform their duties and responsibilities as desired by the organization. Adequate supervision and motivation are essential for the attainment of set objectives. The theory gives credence to a reward system for the subordinates that will make them work efficiently for the realization of organizational objectives (Sapru, 2009: 413 - 414).

Within the context of this paper the democratic model is adopted as its guide. The democratic model as put forward by Lewis (cited in Sapru, 2009:404)emphasizes that a leader should behave by carrying others along in decision making, provide a level playing ground for all actors in the system, promote good governance and accountability, respect for human rights and providing dividends of democracy to the citizens. These are indeed the expectations of the citizens from their leader.

So also, within the context of this paper change refers to the replacement or substitution of a leader by another leader through the electoral process. The 2015 presidential election led to the emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari as the new leader that replaced Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The former Chief of Army Staff of Nigeria, Martin Luther Agwai contextualized the inevitability of change of leadership in Nigeria in 2015 in the following statement:-

You find out that everything needs change, if that is what the community wants, what the people want, you must give it to them and as such, it becomes inevitable. You can have everything nice, but if you don’t have the right leadership to propel it, it cannot go anywhere. Integrity matters, doing what is good for the larger society and not just what you want to do for a narrow society to please yourself (Akinyemi, 2015: 1, cited in Daily Trust).

This statement indicates that change of leadership becomes imperative when the electorate feel that an existing leader is unable to perform in line with their expectations. So
also, public demands are those pressing socio-economic and security needs of Nigerians which they want the new administration under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari to address as dividends of democracy for their well-being and national development. The public demands includes; improve standard of living, employment generation, eradication of insurgency, revamping of infrastructure, effective management of the petroleum sector, curbing corruption and improving Nigeria’s image abroad.

FACTORS THAT NECESSITATED CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA IN 2015.

The following key factors contributed to the exit of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan from power in 2015:

(i) **Insurgency**: the Boko Haram rebellion which started in the Northeast in 2009 became a colossal security challenge to Nigerians. The administration of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan did not demonstrate the required commitment and dedication toward ending the crisis in spite of the enormous loss of lives, properties and bomb blasts in many parts of the country linked to the group’s activities. The government later began to show determination to combat the menace as a strategy to change public opinion in her favour to win the 2015 election. Barely few days to the presidential election, the polls was postponed. The government acquired new weapons to wrestle with the insurgents and with additional push by the military a lot of successes were achieved within a period of six weeks. The change of focus by the government was an indication of ineptitude and naivety, such a step should have been taken much earlier (Idris, 2015: 22).

The Boko Haram atrocities resulted to thousands of internally displaced people and refugees that besieged neighbouring countries of Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Agony and crippled economic activities dislocated the lives of the people. For instance in January, 2015 Boko Haram attacked Baga town and devastated more than 3,700 structures including houses, schools and market stalls. About 2,500 people were also killed. Similarly, in February 2014 the insurgents went to Izghe town in Borno state and went house to house killing anyone they came across (Adeboye, 2015: 1-2).

So also, in April, 2014 the group abducted nearly 250 school girls in Chibok which generated international condemnation. Again, in November, 2014 the group
attacked the Kano Central Mosque during Friday prayer and killed 120 people. A recent report also indicates that in 2013 and 2014 8,239 people were killed by Boko Haram in Nigeria. The list is endless and Nigerians became dissatisfied with the government’s approach to ending the insurgency and therefore the need for change of leadership (Adeboye, 2015: 2).

(ii) The second factor is economic mismanagement and corruption: - the Jonathan’s administration gave more emphasis to oil importation rather than the repair of refineries. The policy was aimed at placating and compensating politicians and businessmen who supported and contributed to campaign funds during the 2011 elections. This scenario resulted to severe hardship for Nigerians who bore the brunt of fuel price hikes and perennial fuel shortages. In 2011, a remarkable oil subsidy scam was discovered, which demonstrated the Jonathan’s leadership penchant for down playing cases of corruption. The sum of ₦422 billion was to be refunded by oil marketers and trading companies in line with Nuhu Ribadu’s report. Unfortunately, the government did not make efforts to recover the funds (Akinbajo, 2012).

So also, in 2013 the former Central Bank Governor Sanusi Lamido Sanusi alerted the nation that 20 billion dollars of oil revenues was missing and not remitted to the federation account. The leak was embarrassing to the government and which led to the purported suspension of Sanusi from office (Hassan, 2014: 1).

(iii) Maladministration and misplacement of priorities: - the administration of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan had no grip on government departments, agencies and ministries which gave rise to poor coordination of government policies and programmes. For instance, the diplomatic row that ensued between Nigeria and South Africa over the recall of Nigeria’s Ambassador to South Africa due to xenophobic attacks indicates communication gap between the Presidency and the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There were claims and counter claims between the Ministry and Presidency over who gave the recall directive. The situation resulted to the suspension of the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry.

So also, an area of misplacement of priority was the government’s convening of the National Conference in 2014 in which ₦7 billion was expended. The conference was a waste of funds, because there were more pressing issues that needed urgent attention. Similarly, the government engaged ex-militants such as the MEND
and Odu’a People’s Congress to serve as security guards for oil pipelines. The security role granted to them is the sole responsibility of the Police and the Civil Defence Corps. The government gave billions of Naira to the leaders of these groups as allowances and payment for their services. For instance, the leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) Mr. Government Ekpemupolo known as Tompolo was paid ₦1.5 billion monthly by the government (Odemwingie, Joseph and Okhomina, 2015).

FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES ON BUHARI CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

The emergence of General Muhammadu Buhari as the elected President of Nigeria in March, 2015 was a welcome development. The teeming Nigerians that voted for Buhari are obsessed with tremendous expectations of dramatic changes they want his government to effect because of the socio-economic predicaments the nation is encapsulated. During the All Progressives Congress presidential campaign tours, President Buhari pledged to combat corruption, wipe out Boko Haram insurgency, create employment opportunities and revamp the economy. Some of the fundamental challenges are as follows:-

(i) **Improve standard of living**: - Nigerians are yearning for better living condition in terms of access to food, water, health services, shelter education e.t.c at a minimum cost. The economy should be resuscitated to reduce inflation, poverty level and brain drain.

(ii) **Employment generation**: - there is a gargantuan crisis of unemployment in the country. Graduates and school leavers cannot find jobs either in the public or private sectors. Self – employment is also difficult because of inadequate enabling environment. According to Aisha Muhammed, the Special Assistant on Sustainable Development, Central Bank of Nigeria:-

*In Nigeria, there is the issue of youth unemployment. 70% of the 80 million youths in Nigeria are either unemployed or underemployed. We are all witnesses to what happened recently during the Immigration recruitment exercise and this is simply because 70 percent of Nigerian Youths are unemployed* (Cited in Information Nigeria, 2015: 1).

(iii) **Curbing corruption**: - corruption has become endemic in the country and it affects national development as well as the trickle down of resources to the poor. Nigerians
therefore want the new leadership to tackle corruption appropriately by way of stopping areas of leakages and enforce punitive measures for offenders. The new president made war on corruption one of his campaign promises, and there is hope that the administration will deal with the matter decisively. President Buhari also recently reiterated his commitment to recover stolen wealth from the officials of the Jonathan’s administration found wanting of embezzlement (Wakili, 2015: 1).

(iv) **Eradication of Insurgency**: - the Nigerian populace also demands from the new government to bring an end to the Boko Haram insurgency. The security challenge has become a nightmare for Nigerians. The new president from all indications is poised to face the challenges of the crisis by making frantic efforts in that regard. The first and second weeks of his leadership was dedicated to planning and strategizing how to eradicate the Boko Haram menace. The President visited Niger and Chad to collaborate with his counterparts on measures to be adopted in ending the insurgency through the multinational joint task force. So also, the Military Command and Control Centre of the Nigerian Armed Forces has been moved to Maiduguri to facilitate the fight against Boko Haram (Umar, Agba, Hamma and Ismail, 2015).

(v) **Revamping of infrastructure**: - the nation’s social and physical infrastructure needs rehabilitation. Schools, hospitals, roads, electricity, railway, airways, airports, agriculture and industries need to be resuscitated. The rehabilitation of infrastructure is the bedrock of economic development.

(vi) **Effective management of the petroleum sector**: - the new administration needs to have full control of the petroleum industry, because oil directly affects the lives of the people and the economy in general. Oil importation should be stopped and refineries repaired in order to save the nation billions being stolen under the guise of oil subsidy.

(vii) **Improving Nigeria’s image overseas**: - a nation’s image abroad is determined by her domestic outlook. The new leadership needs to revive Nigeria’s image abroad by combating corruption, instituting accountability, promoting national integration, eradication of Boko Haram and cooperating with the international community on issues of human rights and social ju

**CONCLUSION**

It is obvious that the new administration has enormous task of meeting up with the demands of Nigerians. It is also conspicuous that the Buhari’s administration is poised to
salvage the nation in line with public demands and his campaign promises. In that regard, there should be synergy between the new leadership and the followership. Nigerians need to cooperate and exercise patience with the new government in its efforts to revive and undertake reforms that will have long lasting impact on the people. There is decay in the system and revamping the system will require collective contributions of all Nigerians.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The following recommendations are hereby put forward to the new leadership and Nigerians in general for adoption:-

(i) President Buhari should stick to his inaugural statement of

   “I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody”. This principle will go a long way in assisting him to promote good governance, fair play, accountability, rule of law and avoid nepotism, which are the major hindrances to qualitative leadership in Nigeria; and

(ii) The electorate should assist the government by providing constructive advice, avoid impatience and unnecessary castigation of the government, because the task before the new government is that of reviving a collapsing nation.

**REFERENCES**


