

THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

PRESENTATION OF HIS EXCELLENCY, Dr. IBRAHIM SHEHU SHEMA, CON, FNIM EXECUTIVE GOVERNOR, KATSINA STATE, AT THE OCCASION OF THE NIGERIA LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE GUEST SPEAKER'S FORUM AT JUPITER HALL, FOUR POINTS BY SHERATON ONIRU, VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS ON MONDAY, AUGUST 19TH, 2013.

It is usually being said that the bane of Nigeria's progress and development has always been ascribed to problems of leadership or to wit challenges of leadership. Therefore, if this be a fact of our National life, then it behoves on all of us to try to fathom what leadership is; what are its qualities, characteristics and values? How does this relate to political leadership in the Nation? It should also be ours to strive to find out what are the challenges associated with this concept as to be the overriding factor that should propel Nigeria or its constituent parts (States) to the desired and aspired goals of development and progress.

First of all, let me begin by identifying what our concepts and terms are, as well as limitations within which we wish to situate this paper. This is to enable an informed level of discussion on the issue at hand.

The basic concepts requiring clarifications and elucidation are therefore restricted but not limited to the terms, political leadership and challenges. The challenges, though, would be those ascribed to political Leadership.

To all intents and purposes Leadership is that quality or traits by which a person is recognized to possess to steer or lead a certain group of persons or organization or entity towards a desired direction as to attain or achieve a desired objective(s). It is that trait which to some is viewed as inherently been born with, acquired through tutelage, traditionally bestowed, charismatically thrust upon or religiously/spiritually conferred upon. To some "Leadership is an art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the attainment of the organizational goals by harnessing the people's zeal and confidence." [Orifa: 2013].

According to Wikipedia, that free on-line depository of knowledge, Leadership is described "as a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task". Other in-depth definitions and theories abound in politics, management, social psychology and other dimensions, all attributing leadership to characteristics of a person organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal. It is further considered by some schools of thought that Leadership is first felt at the family level with the father as Head and leader of the family.

Political leadership will mean in our consideration a leader within the political realm – i.e. any given recognized legal entity, Nation, State or Local administrative area leading and steering the affairs of such recognized entities through recognized institutions or social systems.

According to Max Weber Leadership in a Political System is spearheaded by three types of Leaders: - Bureaucratic, Charismatic and Traditional; that leadership in a political system “operates under a transactional or transformational Political Leadership models”. That, “transactional political Leaders use their knowledge or legal authority to achieve results, while on the other hand, transformational Leaders utilize their personal charisma to achieve their objectives.” There are other theories and considerations of what Leadership or Political Leadership is, that are value laden, as Western, Eastern, or management/politically based.

There is also need from the onset to set the tune of the paper and the terms with a view to differentiate Leadership and Management. Leadership within this school of thought is viewed within the scope of a leader who provide direction while implementing drawn up plans and leading people to achieve desired results/objectives within a politically recognized legal area of authority, while Management Leadership is that Leadership within a limited enterprise or organization who coordinate, direct and manage such enterprise or organization efficiently and effectively to attain desired goals within set frame of controls, processes or procedures.

The term challenge is hereby associated with problem or task considered critical that require action/attention to solve and to achieve the desired objectives or goals.

The basic challenges of Political Leadership in Nigeria or Katsina State within the context of this paper would therefore be classified into these broad areas:-

- i) aspiring to political leadership;
- ii) assumption to office;
- iii) challenges of governance;
- iv) succession – bequeathing a successor or the challenge of legacy;
- v) nurturing political leaders in Nigeria.

Challenge of aspiring to Political Leadership

The first basic challenge would be to access political office. Processes and challenges on this entailed a lot of investment in the political realm, passing through the political party selection processes of party registration, primary elections, party recognition/endorsement, electioneering campaigns, elections and winning of elections, swearing-in into office and consequently assumption to position of political leadership.

As for me, I would respectfully state that the process of my long road to Political Leadership began when I was called upon to serve in the Government of the late President, Alh. Umaru Musa Yar’adua, while he was the Governor of Katsina State. I was invited to serve as his first Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice during his first term of Office as the Governor of Katsina State from 1999 – 2003.

However before that public office, I have held leadership positions as a legal practitioner, when we established the Shema, Oscar, Delunowo and Co legal practice. From that partnership I was later to become a Managing Director at Machine Tools Company Limited, a machine tools company here in Lagos serving series of manufacturing companies' needs; then moved into Agro business and commodities marketing. With the flourishing of these businesses, to meet my yearnings of business undertaking, I was into Banks' equipment supplies, where my company supply Banks' Strong room doors, bankers' seats, note counting and sorting machines as well as computer parts sales and service.

With this background in the business world, I later went back my profession into full practice, opening my own law firm of Shema S. Ibrahim and Co, with offices in Lagos and Kaduna. The firm was into general practice, with specialisation in International corporate and aviation law. The essence of all these highlights Chairman of the Occasion Sir, is to underscore my experience and leadership in the management of men and materials.

Returning to the political realm, that first political position held, which also entailed being a member of the State Executive Council, the highest policy making organ of the State, was so to say the beginning of my processes into the Political Leadership terrain.

Challenges faced during the period were on the establishment of rule of law as basic tenets that should be subscribed for in the determination of all state and political matters. You will recall that, the period, 1999 was a period of return to politics under full democratic dispensation after along interregnum of Military rule. A period we were to institute respect and obeisance to the rule of law, observance to due process and acceptance of Court Judgments against institutions of State. We all knew that prior to this period, observance to the breach were the order of the day.

Other challenges faced during that period was on the relationship of the Executive arm (as the Government) with other arms of Government, i.e. the Legislature and the Judiciary. We were faced with the dilemma of granting full independence to these arms as enshrined in the Constitution. As the Chief Law Officer of the State, during that period, the State Government, as representative by the Executive Arm had fully institutionalized the independence of these arms in the administration of their finances, amongst others.

Upon completion of my first term of office and duty as the Honourable Attorney General/Commissioner for Justice, my Governor and Late President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alh. Umaru Musa Yar'adua invited me to serve for the second term of his Administration on my post. However, I politely declined and being a democrat that he was, my Governor accepted my wish and intention to go back and reinvigorate my law firm, which was in abeyance while I was holding public office.

During this period, that I was to take care of my law firm, I became more politically involved, as I was nominated and represented my State as a Delegate and Member at the National Political Reform Conference in Abuja in 2006.

Upon completion of that national assignment I was again nominated by my Party at the state level and was elected as the Deputy National Chairman, North. At that vantage National position in Party, I was entrusted with the challenge of reconciling opposing camps of our Party in Anambra State. That is, the burgeoning Anambra crisis continued to fester as to affect the continued stability of the Party not only in the State but in the whole of the South East Region.

While at the National Headquarters, I led the reconciliation of Party crises in Benue, Gombe, Imo, Oyo, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Rivers and Delta States. The amicable and peaceful resolution of these crises within the Party led to my recognition and appointment by the Party hierarchy as Chairman of its standing committee, the PDP National Disciplinary Committee. It was under this Committee, that I was charged with responsibility of mediating the party crisis between the then Vice President, Alh. Atiku Abubakar and thje Adamawa State chapter of the Party. Such challenges in political conflict resolutions have afforded me with learning opportunities on management of political conflicts.

It was from this position that I was further nominated and represented my State as a Delegate and Member at the National Political Reform Conference in Abuja in 2006. Upon completion of that National assignment, once again duty beckons I was nominated as my Party's Flag bearer for the gubernatorial elections in 2006 and with Allah's benevolence, I won and become elected as Governor and was sworn in on the 29th May, 2007.

CHALLENGES OF GOVERNANCE

My first major challenge upon being sworn in as Governor was not on the formation of a Government or Council as one would have expected and assumed. But, the major challenge was to harness the massive yearnings and aspirations and demands of the people which I saw during my electioneering campaign. At all points, during my campaign, I saw the varied potentials the State harbors needing to be harnessed to develop the State.

On harnessing the myriad demands and requests from the people for Government to provide services and projects, I established a Bottom to Top Approach Development Template through Community Development Committees (CDC) at each of the Local Government levels. Its membership comprises all stakeholders in the Local Government Areas irrespective of political, religious or other affiliations. It collated and filtered all requests from Communities sectorally for Government's intervention. A Central State Coordinating Committee was also constituted to coordinate these activities and interaction.

It may interest you to know that since the inception of this Administration, from 2007 - date all the development projects we implemented in respect of roads network, Water Supply,

Education, Health, Rural Electrification, Agriculture and other Social and economic intervention measures and programmes are extracted from the collated and codified demands of the people as enunciated in each of the respective Local Governments' CDC Booklet. This has served as our foundation, setting stage for the laudable developmental projects and programmes we have executed and which has transformed Katsina State to what it is today.

The other challenge I faced was the choice to either complete all outstanding projects inherited and left behind by my predecessor or to abandon them and commence head long my own projects or select some and leave some. What I did therefore as a deliberate policy was to complete all outstanding and ongoing projects left behind by my predecessor. In this respect the ongoing State University projects, the Maternity and Children Hospital, the Schools and Hospitals expansion pilot Projects, the Katsina Airport Project and host of others were fully funded, completed and commissioned. Indeed the State University project was commissioned by the Late President and named after him, also the Maternity and Child Hospital was completed, commissioned and named after the wife of the Late President, as Turai Umar Yar' adua Maternal and Child Hospital. The Airport project now ferries domestic and international passengers. It was posthumously named after the Late President by the Federal Government.

Upon completing all the outstanding and ongoing projects, and arising from the realization of citizens as the first issue of governance, Government plunged head long by setting out educational, health and development policies that are in accordance to the yearnings of the people. Education was then made free at all levels by my Administration. We constructed and renovated schools to make them conducive for learning; Government also introduced the payment of all final year Examination fees (WAEC, NECO, NABTEB, etc); thus freeing parents from this onerous economic strain. On the Health front, Government not only provided and improved Health infrastructure in Hospitals but further sustained the policy of free Health care services and delivery especially in the five core areas of the free Ante Natal Care, free treatment to children under five years and accident victims within the first forty eight hours, free malaria treatment as well as free renal treatment to all victims of Kidney failure. Government also ensured the supply of subsidized drugs to all its Hospitals. In the implementation of these free education and Health policies in Katsina State, no distinction is shown between an indigene and non-indigene or a PDP member or other party members in the state, as all students of public institutions are treated as one, so also free treatment in all public health facilities.

To sustain interpersonal relationship amongst the various ethnic groups residing in the State, Government recognizes the need for government to build bridges with these communities as to interface and maintain peaceful relationship for community inclusiveness and oneness in the society. In this regard therefore the Office of Senior Special Assistant on Diplomacy and Society Relations was created and charged with amongst others, coordination and liaison with all other ethnic groups on a common platform. This has endeared and engendered peace in Katsina State, resulting in the unbroken peace being experienced in the State.

Katsina State operates an open door policy on religious issues; expanding channels of communication, interaction and interrelationship with members of all religious groups and sects within the State. This has created an atmosphere of ambience giving platform for religious leaders of all persuasions to meet with Government and its officials at all levels on all issues. This open door policy has provided the enabling environment to address issues of mutual concern which have the tendency to disrupt the peaceful equilibrium in the State. I have therefore encouraged and supported nurturing of the centrifugal forces of Unity as against the centripetal forces in the Society.

In Health, it is usually stated that Health is defined as the absence of disease; we can therefore relate peace as not only on the basis of absence of violence but the realization for unity of the disparate groups – be they political, ethnic or religious under one umbrella. This is nurtured and promoted under requisite leadership with openness and cooperative relationship.

Agencies of Government which complement, sustain and support the maintenance of peace in the State all imbibed the culture of tolerance, peaceful resolution of dispute and according due consideration for the rights of citizens of the State under the rule of Law. The various security Agencies in the State also have a well coordinated and complimentary approach to maintenance of peace; which we have noted have endured with success.

Our efforts in the maintenance of peace and strengthening institutions and structures of Government and Civil societies are well known. In this respect Government has maintained a manifested transparent management of resources, accountability in expending public funds, fairness and even-handedness in the execution and provision of infrastructural development projects across the State. Youths engaged in vocational training and public sector works are being paid allowances as periodically required. All these I believe are Leadership challenges which are equally faced and addressed through good governance.

On the international front, being a Limitrophe State (i.e. a State sharing International Boundary), I have maintained fraternal and cordial relationship with our international neighbours in the Republic of Niger. Thus States (Departments) of Maradi and Zinder in the neighboring Republic upon which we share mutual issues of concern, such are classified and resolved Bilaterally thereby ensuring Katsina State portion of Nigeria's international Boundary beings adjudged as one of the most peaceful in the Federation. To cap on this recognition distinguished Chairman of the Occasion, may wish to note that the Republic of Niger recently conferred on me its second highest National Honours Award, the Grand Officer de l'ordre du Niger (GOONN) (i.e. the equivalent of our GCON).

THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGES

On this challenge, even though I have not yet reached that bridge, as to cross it and proffer my experience and lessons learnt, I do still believe I can postulate on this and the way forward.

There is no success without a successor and for that it is our responsibility to ensure who succeeds the political leadership when we leave. It is indeed our moral responsibility to ensure such succession succeed. In striving to do so, we know and do believe that ultimately it is the Almighty Allah that gives power to whom He so Wills.

Tied to the challenge of succession is to my mind first of all the ***Challenge of Legacy***. What Legacy does one wish to leave behind to be remembered for? This I believe should be in the mind of all political leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions in Nigeria. Our quest to leave a Legacy should enable us to enthrone transparent and accountable leadership such that one do not fear leaving office or enthroning a chosen heir apparent.

However as political office deals with Institutions, it is therefore necessary that we arrange to have a successor to steer the ship of state to safe landing. One would naturally not be happy to see the ship of state aground or rudderless. It is thus within this context that the need for successor becomes relevant and germane.

The **Challenge to Succession** usually arises in our continued effort to ensure sustainability and continuity of our policies, which is to bequeath to who would build upon what one has started. It is therefore the responsibility of Political Leaders to ensure that the issue of successor is duly addressed, defined and conducted with all relevant stakeholders as to ensure the process succeed. As we operate within a democratic dispensation, the major challenge is to ensure the succession process is undertaken within the democratic process both at the Party level and through the general elections. Therefore Short-circuiting the process or what we call in the Nigeria parlance to ‘short cut’ the process would only temporarily give solution but in the long run such short circuited action eventually fails.

It should also be noted that the political Leadership succession process is not attained through the legislative option but through consultation, confidence building and acceptability by all concerned.

Even though succession in the political realm is not easy as to done seamlessly as in the organized private sector, industrial enterprises or the Civil Service, still there is need for the political class to institutionalize succession process within the political system of the Nation through systematic effort of tutelage, mentoring, tutoring or what I can call process schooling; that is potentials that are expected to assume political Leadership be tutored through holding lower rung political or elective posts/offices. Through this the learning process, experience would be acquired on the job and the process fully institutionalized and supported to ensure that Political Leadership would be competently and qualitatively regenerated for its continued relevance in the Nigerian Political Arena, as well as to continue to serve the people and Society. In other liberal democracies such processes have been the trend and the practice.

Indeed, as Adegoroye paraphrased by Mekwunye, JI (2010; P.25) postulates in respect of succession in the Civil Service, he said that “the ability of the Public Service to continue to serve

competently depends on its capacity to regenerate itself on a sustainable basis through a pool of personnel in the right mix of ages, skills and competencies and by instilling a viable succession management process to align future needs of the service with the aspirations of Employees”. (Mekwunye; 2010). In this wise, we can then substitute “Public Service” with the Political class and “employees” with the larger citizens of the Nation.

Chairman of the Occasion Sir, Distinguished Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, as you might have listened so far, the challenges of Political Leadership in Katsina State and nay Nigeria are quite varied and myriad in nature. The basic and fundamental ones, as I enumerated above are in terms of entry into the Political Leadership spectrum, being elected to a position of elective office on nominated/selected to serve as a political Leader; others are challenge of Governance, challenges of Legacy and succession. Yet other challenges, which I may call environmental challenges relate to issues of balancing the Local Government equation i.e representation of appointments, (the Federal Character principle at the State level). Issues of security, which I have highlighted that, the challenge is to be proactive. Other challenges are on balancing the issues of religion – through demands of the Ulaama and of maintaining equilibrium of relationship with the other arms of Government, the Judiciary and the Legislature; as well as with the Practitioners of the Fourth Estate of the Realm – i.e. the Press.

I therefore wish Mr. Chairman of the Occasion Sir, to conclude that he challenges of Political Leadership can be adequately met through ensuring synergy of action, taking due cognizance to meet the broad yearnings of citizens of the State, maintain a government of inclusiveness, balancing the forces of the State on a template of accountability and transparency to ensure peaceful coexistence and delivery of dividends of democracy to the people, irrespective of any affiliations or connotations, but simply as citizens of the State or the Nigerian Nation.

While thanking you once again for finding me fit to deliver this short address, I wish to most sincerely thank you for your kind attention.

Thank you all and God Bless.

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