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THE DILEMMA OF LEADERSHIP AND NIGERIA'S ECONOMY: A STUDY OF THE EASTERN NIGER DELTA AREA OF NIGERIA

Odeigah, Theresa Nfam

Abstract

Leadership in Nigeria has been characterized by insincerity and lack of vision and this has impacted negatively on Nigeria's economy. Nigerian leaders over the years have failed to adequately fund and develop vital sectors of the economy such as energy, agriculture, tourism, manufacturing and the solid minerals sector. Leaders in Nigeria have also not developed sustainable administrative systems and institutions that can stand the test of time and that cannot be manipulated by self-seeking leaders. The neglect of these vital sectors that would have driven the economy and created job opportunities as well as empowering the teeming population of young people in the Eastern Niger Delta Region is a failure of leadership in Nigeria. Visionary leadership and good governance are geared towards improving the standard of living of the citizenry. Governance in the Eastern Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has been characterized by lack of vision, corruption, impunity, extravagant life style and lack of fiscal discipline. The country is experiencing an economic recession that started in the middle of 2015 from which it is yet to recover. This paper examines critically the leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as an impediment to the growth and development of the economy, using a historic-structural and multidisciplinary approaches. The paper concludes that corruption, lack of vision, impunity, bad governance and extravagant lifestyle have resulted in the poor state of the economy in the Eastern Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

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Keywords: Dilemma, Leadership, Economy, Vision.

Introduction

A nation without visionary leaders and integrity can hardly experience economic stability, which will lead to the growth and development of the nation. Leaders with crystal vision used wisdom and commitment to galvanise the citizens for self-actualisation (Ehusani, 2014). The Eastern Niger Delta is located in the Eastern part of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. It embraces the present day Cross River and Akwa-Ibom state. It is peopled with a multiplicity of ethnic nationalities with various languages. The most populous groups are Efik, Ibibio, Boki and Yala among others (Alagoa, 1980: 56-58). The Eastern Niger Delta economy is a subject that has attracted different perspectives in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The problem of leadership has been a recurrent question in the heart of many people, because of the quest for growth and development of the Eastern Niger Delta area. It has been generally acknowledged that a society devoid of visionary, accountable and credible leaders cannot develop. Good leaders inspire their citizens and create opportunities to foster growth that benefits its citizens (Andrews, 2008, 380-401). However in the Eastern Niger Delta, with its enormous potentials and natural resources, the reverse is the case. Over the years in the Cross River and Akwa-Ibom States, most leaders have been involved in corruption and bad governance which has also led to one of the greatest problems which areas like Uyo, Calabar, Boki and many other communities are experiencing today, such as criminality and poor economic growth (Anochie and Onyinye, 2015, 15-29). History has shown that some leaders that were outstanding in the 1960s in Nigeria were committed and those were the first set of leaders that initially took over power from the Europeans. In other countries leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, George Washington of America, Charles De Gaulle of France and Nelson Mandela of South Africa distinguished themselves and were all committed leaders that determined to save their father's land. These leaders developed their countries and moved them forward economically, socially, culturally and technologically (Dike, 2014).

In Nigeria for example right from the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida who was the president of Nigeria from August 27th, 1985 to 1993, leaders in Nigeria have not shown reasonable commitment to the people and there has not been remarkable improvement in the economy. The leaders had always failed to provide basic infrastructures, develop human capital and the economy. In the Eastern Niger Delta area like other parts of Nigeria, the government is dominated with people who are self-seeking, leading to corruption, bad governance, election rigging and violence (Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Nkah, 2015). The rule of law appears not to be applicable to government officials. The issue of bad leadership could also be attributed to some factors such as the colonial legacy, globalization and neo-colonialism. Other factors would include appointing and electing the wrong leaders into positions of power.

Factors Responsible for Bad Leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta Area

In recent years in the Eastern Niger Delta, the area has been dominated by the problems of insecurity, cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, oil thief, assassinations and other criminal activities among others. The government has also not been able to provide good roads, basic education, and health and there is also a general lack of economic empowerment of the young people in the area. The high level of criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta area can be said to be the result of bad leadership, because over the years, these problems have been increasing insecurity situation in the state (Olu and Temitayo, 2014). The Eastern Niger Delta economy is mainly based on oil and gas exploration which has tremendous negative impact on the environment and the people. Several Federal Government funds allocation to the area as well as the derivation funds, the activities of the Niger Delta Development Commission have not made much impact on the economy of the area because of a leadership that is not accountable, not visionary, not transparent and where there is impunity and no rule of the law (Ogbewere, 2014).

Low level of education is one of the greatest problems affecting our leaders. Some of the leaders do not have formal education,

and some of them that had formal education have questionable certificates, that cannot be verified or investigated because of the reign of impunity. A major factor necessary to improve the Nigerian socio-political conundrum is the acquisition of formal education and credible credentials. Without acquiring good education, it is difficult to give credible leadership positions. Most of the leaders found themselves in leadership positions, through a faculty and perverted electoral process and instead of giving service to the people, they saw it as an opportunity to amass wealth by looting the treasury.

Lack of transparency and accountability by leaders in the Eastern Niger Delta area and other parts of Nigeria has become a common feature of the polity. Because the electoral system can be perverted and manipulated, the leaders that emerge through such process will find it difficult to be transparent and accountable to the people, they are supposed to serve. They will engage in projects that are not based on the needs assessment outcome of the people, but rather these are usually projects through which they defraud the citizenry. Without transparency and accountability leadership the citizens cannot have optimal benefit of democracy (Olayiwole, 2013).

Lack of policy implementation or policy summersault, because of change of leadership has also been the bane of economic growth in the Eastern Niger Delta area. Policies are not formulated with the citizens as the focal point, but rather at the whims and caprices of the leaders. The leaders have not been able to implement policies that promote good governance, nation building and proper infrastructural development in the area, because of the prevalence of corruption in all sectors and this has led to the poor living conditions of the people.

Lack of observance of the law is another factor affecting good governance in the country. The leaders deliberately refuse to obey court orders and judiciary decisions resulting in a reign of impunity. There is a geranial lack of fiscal discipline and failure to obey financial regulations. This has resulted in leaders using state funds for the wrong purpose and not obeying financial orders or regulations (Olayiwole, 2013).

Corruption is a dishonest or fraudulent habit common among those in power, which involve bribery and looting of government funds. Corruption is indeed one of the factors that have eaten deep into the heart of our leaders even though corruption is a national scourge that is all pervading (Igbokwe-Ibeto and Okoye, 2014). Nigeria that is the most populated country in Africa has now been ranked as the highest in corruption by the Transparency international, even other notable organisations that monitor corrupt practices in the world have also faulted Nigeria in this regards. There was a survey that was carried out by Transparency International in 2000 in 90 countries, after which Nigeria was still ranked as the most corrupted country. In 202 Nigeria was the second corrupt country in the world. Corruption is not only in the presidency but it is only among the governors, Local Government Chairmen and even top civil servants. Nigerian National Assembly and states Houses of Assemblies have been seen as a business enterprise for members to get rich. That is part of the reason why Nigerian is passing through and experiencing an economic recession which has trucked the economic activities (Uzochukwu, 2017). The leaders lack the very important attribute of accountability and integrity. Lack of vision, corruption, impunity, extravagant life style and lack of fiscal discipline are some of the problems associated with the leaders. The political class in the Eastern Niger Delta has made corruption an integral part of governance, because they see governance as a means to get rich quick. Some of the politicians have lost touch with their constituencies by living extravagant life styles which have become a big challenge in the society (Fortune Sibanda, 2017).

Over the years funds meant for the development of the area have illegitimately been used for the benefits of the leaders and their families to the detriment of the poor masses. Good and purposeful governance encapsulates freedom of speech, liberty, accountability, transparency and inclusive, but in the Eastern Niger Delta this is lacking (Enoch, 2012).

Another factor that could be said to be responsible for bad leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta is the prolonged period of

military dictatorship in Nigeria. Corruption became much popularised in the country during the period that General Ibrahim Babangida was in the office. The military by its general nature was only accountable to its high command and provide facilities that it felt the people needed and not necessarily what the people had asked for. Most of the facilities provided by the military were poorly executed and were not monitored since the people really never asked for such facilities (Odinkalu, 2010). A good example of gross financial impunity in Nigeria was the massive looting of the treasurer of Delta state through money laundering by the former civilian governor that could not be apprehended by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria, but rather was arrested outside Nigeria through the international police (Dike, 2014).

One of the reasons for bad leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta Area is weak institutions and lack of proper prosecution and trial of corrupt leaders. Even though we have Economic and Financial Crime Commission and Independent Corruption Practices Commission (ICPC), these institutions are weak and not truly independent and so they have not lived up to the expectation of Nigerians, especially in terms of prosecution and trial of high profile Nigerians involved in corruption (Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Nkah, 2015).

Another factor affecting good leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta area is electoral malpractices. This has become a popular phenomenon among politicians and the electorates. It is believed that elections cannot be conducted without rigging, violence and spending extravagantly on their electorates. Most electoral officers have failed in their duties, because rigging during elections have made the wrong leaders to emerge. This gives the room for such politicians to embezzle government funds. Manipulation of votes during elections had resulted in violence leading to death of individuals in the different communities in the Eastern Niger Delta (www.georgehusani.org). Most times communities do not participate in elections because of electoral violence. This has also encouraged cultism among some of the unemployed youth, because the politicians have found the idle

youths useful to encourage violence and rig elections. A good and credible electoral system is therefore a *sine quo non* for good and effective leadership in the Eastern Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

Effects of Bad Governance on the Economy of the Eastern Niger Delta Area

In spite of the richly endowed human and natural resources in the Eastern Niger Delta area, national development is yet to reflect the enormous economic potentials of the area.

Historically, right from inception, the Eastern Niger Delta indigenous economy satisfied the demands of the people, even when the Nigerian economy was controlled by the Colonial Masters and the economy was solely based on agriculture. The indigenous economy was vibrant even before the current diversification of the economy due to exploration of oil and gas in the area. The missing link can then be said to be good leadership, the absence of which has resulted in the area still battling with youth unemployment and criminality (Njoku, 2001).

Poor economic policies planning, wrong implementation and fiscal indiscipline are some of the reasons the Eastern Niger Delta economy has not developed its potentials. Failure of government to encourage full diversification of the economy and the false sense of security brought about by oil money has led to a mono product economy in the area and Nigeria at large. Because of bad governance, there was neglect of the per-colonial economic activities in the area and failure to build on that foundation that would have led to the full economic diversification of the area. The Eastern Niger Delta area that was well known for arable agriculture, producing yam and other tubers as well as fishing among others occupation became mainly an area for importation and trade of foreign imported goods. Instead of creating employment for the teeming youths through agriculture, the area was providing a big market for foreign imported goods thereby creating employment opportunity for the foreign manufacturing countries (Anochie Uzoma. C., and Onyinye .O. Mabemena 2015).

It is often said that everything starts and ends with leadership. This is to emphasise the very important role leadership plays in nation building. The electoral system and its process should be reformed to make it very credible so that the choice of the electorate will ultimately produce their leaders. This will prevent the situation where corrupt politicians subvert the electoral process to emerge as leaders

A good and structured educational system that emphasises entrepreneurship and skill acquisition will ensure that young school leavers are employable. This will enable the youths to make their own contributions to the economic development of the area. This will also reduce to the tendency for young people to be involved in crime and other forms of criminality in the area.

Agriculture which had always been the main stay of Eastern Niger Delta economy should be revived. This has the capacity to employ and engage a lot of unemployed people. Agriculture should be mechanized with new technologies introduced to make it attractive to the people.

Strong and enduring institutions should be put in place to fight corruption. The Nigeria police should be reformed in terms of re-training and welfare issues so as to make the officers and men motivated and well equipped to fight corruption.

The Economic and Financial Crime commission and Independent Corruption practices Commission (ICPC) should be made dependent and shielded from the influence of the executive, legislative and the judiciary arms of government. The judiciary should be pro-active and not cause unnecessary delays in the prosecution of high profile public office holders found to be corrupt.

The immunity clause in the constitution which prevents some public office holders from being prosecuted while in office should be expunged from the constitution. This will increase and engender accountability and transparency on the part of public office holders.

Conclision

This is no gain saying the fact that without good leadership there could be no meaningful development. Economic development of the Eastern Niger Delta area will continue to be a mirage until there is a credible electoral system that will ensures that credible leaders emerge to manage the affairs of the citizenry. An educational skills and revival of agriculture will lead to the economic emancipation of the Eastern Niger Delta area. The reformed judiciary, the Nigerian police and the strengthening of Economic and Financial Crime commission and Independent Corruption practices Commission (ICPC) are all necessary steps in the reformation of the polity of the Eastern Niger Delta and indeed Nigeria is to witness economic emancipation.

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