ASSESSING LEADERSHIP INTERJECTIONS IN NIGERIA'S TURBULENT POLITICAL ECONOMY.

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Abstract
This paper examines leadership decisions/indecisions taken in a bid to solving burgeoning problems occasioned in Nigeria political economy. It assesses the attributes and styles of leaders as it is brought to bear on decision making in a turbulent politico-economy milieu. The paper use qualitative design where data was only obtained from secondary sources including books, journals and internet materials. The paper discovered failure of leadership in assessing and correcting counter-productive decisions taken in turbulent periods. Thus, the paper recommends assessment and correction in decisions or policies by leadership as they bring their managerial attributes to bear on their democratic style.
Key words*: Leadership, interjections, turbulences, political economy, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Leadership constitute an integral management process in human organization. It has huge contributions to the effectiveness of organizations. It acts as inspiring agent in a group and capacity builder and utilizer for the purposes of organizational goals (Weibrich, and Kootz et al 1994)

Leadership is important also in vision and mission creation. It is vision that produces goals and marshal abilities and capabilities from the subordinates towards realizing them (Sharma, Sadana and Kaur, 2011). In this wise, Perthinger (1996) posits of basic but common characteristics that make effective leadership to include; communication, right decision making in particular situation, commitment, concern for staff, integrity and mutual dependence between the leaders, and staff.

In addition, there is internal and external environment from where stimuli emanate to organizations. These environments present veritable sources of contradictions or challenges to the organization and its goals. Thus, leadership comes handy in such situations to mitigate and mediate solutions.

Nigeria has had a great deal of leaders in her democratic experiment since 1999. The tenure of these leaders have been greeted with political and economic turmoils capable of truncating harmony and development. In a brief period from 2011-2023, turbulences have occurred in form of widespread diseases like COVID-19, strikes affecting the health and education sectors and various forms of clashes in the civil space etc.

Consequently, government interjected with programmes aimed at managing the turbulences. Palliatives were administered, negotiations held and court orders issued. Yet discontentment grew, crisis and clashes subsist leaving leadership in a bewildered state. It is in this regard that the paper is set to assess the decisions or indecisions of the leadership on one hand while attributes and styles of leaders as was shown in the management of these turbulences will be assessed on the other hand.

Conceptual Clarification

Leadership:

Leadership has many definitions. It is defined as ability or tactfulness in influencing others to follow or obey. Cole (1993,p52) defines it as "a dynamic process at work in a group whereby one individual over a particular period of time and in a particular organizational context, influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group taskor goals". In expatiation of the definition, Cole (1993) was able to identify embedded but salient features to include; dynamism, opposition to a single man's role performance, influencing others with organizational goals in view and contextual conditions. Robbins (1980) conceives leadership to mean those who have both the ability to influence others and administrative authority. Robbin's definition does not confine the influence to individuals but to administrative authorities. It means, a leader also compels administrative authorities like Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) towards established goals.

Theoretical Framework

The leadership theorists in the like of Handy(1976) and Adair (1968) etc were emphatic about the traits or attributes that qualifies a successful leader. Those attributes include that of skills, knowledge, attitude, charisma etc. Though, these attributes are largely believed to be innate, they can also be acquired. By this submission, leaders should possess the knowledge and right attitude in governance. Knowing the right thing to do and considering responses from the governed is germane for leadership success.

Referencing the style of leadership in conjunction with leadership traits/attributes, autocratic instead of democratic style has been observed. Proponents of style theories are Kurt Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939). Autocratic leaders command and accept compliance (Onah, 2015). They rule with little or no consideration of the led. They are task-centred and not employee or people-centred.They believe in foisting decision/s instead of participatory decisions.

The recent democratic experience under President MuhammeduBuhari presents intriguing leadership experience especially in Nigeria's turbulent times. In the turbulent period of COVID-19 hazard, palliatives in form of food items, cash transfer etc were unevenly distributed and some

diverted for personal benefits. Yet, there was no knowledge of what transpired because, nothing was said or done to correct the wrong. Strikes were poorly handled, clashes especially herdsmen and farmers were explained away with clumsy reasons. Instead, cattle colonies, ruga settlements and resuscitation of grazing reserves were foisted. No dint of democratic flavour was mixed. Leadership of this nature is bound to fail given a people-driven context.

Methodology

The method employed is qualitative in nature. It uses evidences sourced from books, journals and internet. The evidences support, substantiate and buttress various submissions of the paper.

Leadership and COVID-19 in Nigeria

Corona Virus disease also known as Covid-19 first occurred in December, 2019 in China. With rapidity, it spread to other countries of the world including Nigeria. Precisely, on 27th February, 2020, the first Covid-19 case was reported in Lagos, Nigeria (Obiakor, Iheonu and Hezie, 2021). From one person identified with Covid-19, incidences increased steadily to 59,583 and the number of deaths to 873 in October 7, 2020 (Lain and Vishwanath, 2020).

The disease continue to ravage Nigeria cities and towns despite the measures at curbing its menace. At moment, total number of confirmed cases is at 266,675. Out of this figure, 259,953 have been discharged. Active cases are numbered at 3,569. While deaths arising from Covid-19 complications are numbered at 3,155 (NCDC, 2023).

With the noticeable hazards Covid-19 posed to the economy of Nigeria, several measures were taken in order to curtail its ravaging effects. As part of measures taken against Covid-19, a Presidential Task Force was swiftly constituted to initiate decision/s against Covid-19 and advise leadership on policy direction in tackling the disease.

Some of interventionist measures the Task Force introduced were lock-downs, and ban on mass gathering, creation of an agency to oversee testing, confirmation and treatment of Covid-19 cases (ie National Centre for Disease and Control), introduction of palliatives, stimulus packages and involvement of faith-based and humanitarian organizations in encouraging compliance to rules and assisting in the provision of relief materials as much as possible (Okoye and Nwatu, 2022).

The most disappointing and humiliating of the government interjections is distribution of palliatives. The palliatives came in form of food rations, food vouchers and conditional cash transfer targeted at the vulnerable members of the society. Tsuwa and Yandev (2021) aver that the distribution of palliatives was highly politicized in the sense that no template was developed for even distribution among the States hence States that did not vote for president in 2015 general

elections such as Ogun and Ebonyi States were not simply captured in the distribution of conditional cash transfer.

In addition, the distribution of food items to the vulnerable was diverted or hijacked by politicianse.g, in Lagos and Kano etc. In worst cases,food items meant for distribution were rather stored in the Maza-Mazaarea of OjoLGA, Lagos State. It took the breakage of stores during the End Sars protest to uncover the deal and forcefully allocate the items to themselves through survival-of-the-fittest strategy. In River State, rice, grain and noodles were measured and distributed in cups. In Ogun State, top politicians took major share of the distributions etc (Fatoba, 2021).

The looters looted the stores, the diverters diverted what they could, the distributors also under distributed. Everybody did everything without arrest, prosecution or questioning. Leadership simply became inept in the policy it initiated.Knowledge and skills was proved to be absent in superintending government policies in a turbulent period of COVID-19

Leadership and Strikes in Democratic Nigeria:

Strikes have become phenomenal in Nigeria political history. Hardly a government comes without being hard-hit of strikes. Educationsector towers in the experience of strikes among others. The teaching arm at all levels of education including Academic Staff Union of Universities(ASUU) for university, Academic Staff Union of Polytechnic (ASUP) for Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Association Staff Union (COEASU) for Colleges of Education have all passed through the hurdle of strike till today. In early 1992, ASUU went on 9months strike in pursuance of improved funding, condition of service, university autonomy and academic freedom (Anonaba,2015).

Other sister unions, like Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) joined to in the same manner push for the welfare of their numbers. These strikes snowballed into Nigeria new democratic era. ASUU went on strike in 2013 for 5 months, one months in 2017, 3months in 2018 and 9months in 2020. (School software pro, 2023)

ASUP on 15th May 2022 embark on two weeks warning strike among others (Alabi, 2022). In a related development, Nigeria doctors under the aegis of Nigeria Association of Residents Doctors (NARD) declared a strike in April and August 2021 etc. The list continues in the oil sector as well.

What is so disturbing considering the volume of strikes in the economy is the responses or reactions leadership accords the strikes. In the last prolonged strike by ASUU, several failed negotiations characterized the Union and Federal Government. Several times, the strike was rolled over to give government time to concretely address those areas of contention. Apart from being non-challant to the agreement, Federal Government went ahead and registered a break way union-

theCongress of Nigeria University Academics (CONUA) to whittle down the powers and unity of ASUU(Tolu-Kolawole, 2022).

The draconianism did not stop. The Union's 8 months salaries were withheld apart from forcing them to resume work through a court order. In a similar circumstance, National Association ofMedical and Dental Academics (NAMDA) -a break away union from Residents Doctors Association was registered. No work, no pay was also threatened for the doctors.

The situation where government uses it employer-power and her agencies to trample on people rights without due consideration to organizational goal attainment is simply using autocratic leadership style which have over the years produced less productive results (Cole,1993).

Leadership and Clashes in Democratic Nigeria

Clashes have assumed a greater dimension in Nigeria political space. The hitherto persistent communal clashes appear to give way to another dimension of clashes where a body or somebody external to the community attack, destroy lives and property and in most cases kidnapped victims unprovoked. Dominating the 'clashes economy' is Fulani herdsmen, Boko Haram and bandits that employ kidnapping and ransacking as their basic modus operandi.

Benue State, Plateaus state, Niger state apart from North Eastern states of Nigeria etc. have become theatre of clashes perpetrated by the above identified elements. Attacks on Benue Communities were recorded in Agatu, Kwande, Logo, Guma, Gwer west and Makurdi areas (Nongo, 2021).At the moment, the people are still attacked and killed on their farms (Sahara Reporters,2023).

These attacks have produced 1.5 million people scattered in several internally displaced person camps (IDPs) in the state bringing untold hardship on victims and the government as well. In some States in the North and Niger state, its more worrisome. These places are said to be taken over by the extremists who compel villagers to stay only at the expense of taxes they are paying to them (Hassan-Wuyo, 2022)

Leadership decisions on the other hand seems to be political, sectional and sentimental. As ransacking and killing continued, the killers proud themselves with AK 47, moving from the length and breathe of communities unchallenged. The puzzle still lingers, why physical human being with physical unhidden weapons cannot be checked in the midst of their ravaging catastrophes being inflicted.

Sentimental in the sense in which tribalism is seen to be remotely employed. The political leadership headed by a President from Fulani extraction could publicly respond to plea of a group from the 'slained extraction', "I am appealing to you to try to restrain your people. I ask you in the name of God to accommodate your country men" (Adetayo, 2018).

Contradiction still exist in this position maintained by the leadership having known and asserted earlier that the so called 'countrymen' are fall out of Lybian crisis (Nongo,2021).

To cap the sentiment, policies like establishment of cattle colonies, ruga settlements and resuscitation of grazing reserves to settle the invaders and displace the farmer-settlers were conversed. Leadership always focus on the Fulani herders at the expense of crop farmers.

Leadership in this case can best be interpreted as sectional, insensitive to the cry and aspirations of the led and autocratic. Government interjections read or interpreted by citizens as sectional, insensitive and autocratic will always be resisted except for the foisting or coercive forces of the government. Accordingly, Benue people enacted a State anti-grazing prohibition law to counter such bias and autocratic interjections. In a similar manner, Ekiti State and the entire Southern States Governors met and opted for enactment of laws in the respective States to prohibit open grazing in order to encourage ranching of animals (Kabir,2021). Obviously, the interjections in the tumultuous times of clashes rather exacerbate it or tensed-up the polity than palliate it.

Conclusion

Leadership is strategic in managing affairs of countries at turbulent times. Nigeria has been greeted with problems of varying proportion in her new democratic experience. These problems include; COVID-19, strikes from various Trade Unions and sporadic clashes resulting from the dastardly acts of Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and other marauders.

A country with this horrendous experience need appropriate intervention measures by leadership to mitigate or palliate the suffering of the people. However, it is observed that leadership at this time gambled with those measures that did not actually work. Those measures ended up in empowering or favouring the few at the expense of the majority. Moreover, sentimental and sectional politics were seen to have played by leadership instead of interventions devoid of such. No retrospection and reconsideration was made to ensure the workability of such interventions.

Recommendations

Recommendations arising from the papers discoveries are as follows:

1. Government policies meant to benefit the masses should be followed with strict supervision to ensure unbiased and impartial distribution of benefits regardless of voting pattern of electorates.

2. Repressive approach in addressing people's agitation in a democratic environment is not tenable. Trade Unionism is recognized in an employer-employee relationship. This

relationship should be mutually protected one against the other not that the more advantaged represses the less advantaged.

3. Leadership should be seen to be impartial in clashes management. A sectional and partial leadership seen in her stance in clashes situation will always be counter-productive no matter the best of intentions behind leadership decisions. This kind of impartial perception mobilizes support and cooperation from the masses. It helps in dousing ethnic tension in pluralistic society like Nigeria.
4. Short and long-term assessment of government policies should be consistently carried out. This will help in identifying impediments to successful implementation of policies and tackling them accordingly rather than playing deaf and dumb to them.

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