



NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE ROLE OF THE CREATIVE WRITER

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria has remained a developing nation for over fifty-eight years of independence despite her abundant natural and human resources. Lack of good governance had been her greatest challenge. An analysis of Nigeria's myriad leaders revealed selfish, mediocre, opportunistic and tribal leaders. From Tafawa Balewa 1960 till date the story has been the same. This is evident in all sectors of her national life: rising unemployment profile, poverty, corruption, agitations, insecurity and the like. This situation has compelled us to find out what has actually gone wrong and to proffer the way forward for the entrenchment of good governance in Nigeria. To put in proper perspectives, the paper highlighted a brief historical and political evolution of Nigerian state and her challenges to sustainable development. The paper revealed that, leadership failure remains Nigeria's major development challenge right from the founding fathers. Based on this fact, the paper recommended that, to achieve the desired leadership and sustainable development, Nigeria needs to have visionary, patriotic, transparent, God-fearing and accountable leaders at all levels of governance and that creative writers have a strategic role to play in institutionalizing good governance which is a panacea for development.*

KEYWORDS: Good Governance, Creative Writer, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In order to appreciate and lay bare foundation for clear understanding of Nigeria's development challenges today, we have chosen first to examine in brief the historical evolution of Nigeria as a nation state and her tortuous efforts at nation building from independence till date. We have gone further to reveal the national development plans marshaled in by both the previous and present regimes (both civilian and military) towards Nigeria's sustainable growth and development.

Nigeria came into being as a British Colony in 1914 through the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates for the purpose of facilitating colonial administration. This development which is described or seen by many as a marriage of inconvenience has serious conflictual implications on the people as it brought together over 250 ethnic groups under one government each with its vision and ambition. It is this "forced unity" that has proved and is still proving difficult at genuine national integration and unity in Nigeria today.

Furthermore, the series of state creation after political independence (12 states in 1967, 19 in 1976, 21 in 1987, 30 in 1991 and currently 36 states and FCT in 1996) further polarized people. Therefore, the major efforts employed by various post-colonial governments to



address the contending issues have suffered monumental failure. As a result of this failure, the various national and ethnic groups continue to maintain separate identities. Rather than lead to reduction in ethnic and regional sentiments, state creation is escalating them and sharpening the divides. As at today, the Nigerian nation is under a constant ferocious seize by ethnic, religious and regional groups. In the recent past for example, groups like Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), all regionally based have emerged with clear secessionist agenda. Pockets of tribal and inter-religious conflicts have also been witnessed. For instance, Ife/Modakeke, Ijaw/Itsekiri/Urhobo, Tiv/Jukun, Jukun/Kuteb, Fulani/Kuteb, Fulani/Tiv, Aguleri/Umuleri, religious and ethnic violence in Kaduna, Kano, Jos are among others. There has also been a religious movement known as the Boko Haram especially in the North-East of Nigeria which repudiates all forms of Western education and civilization. This group has engaged in armed-struggle to overthrow the Nigerian state to pave way for government in accordance with Islamic dictates. These conflicts constitute a major challenge to the development of Nigeria as they disrupt the process of production and divert resources from development purposes to servicing conflicts, crisis or the uprisings. They also inflict human suffering, death and destruction and as such patriotism is weakened and commitment to national ideals and true nationhood is lost.

Since independence in 1960, successive regimes in Nigeria both civilian and military have demonstrated considerable and appreciable interest towards the upliftment of the living standard of the citizenry and national progress but to no avail. For instance, many National Development plans and other policies and programmes have been mapped towards the country's development. There have been first, second, third, and fourth National Development plans from 1962-1970, 1971-1974, 1975-1980 and from 1981-1985 respectively. Others include Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), 1986-1989, Three-Year National Rolling Plan 1990-1992 among others. However, these plans did not fare well due partly to lack of political will, interest, commitment and corruption, coupled with conflicts in objectives between and within states in the context of federalism.

In year 2010, the federal government under president Goodluck Jonathan turned to vision 20-20-20 whose strategic plan is to launch Nigeria into a path of strong, sustained and rapid growth so that by the year 2020, Nigeria will be among the 20 largest economies in the world which will be able to consolidate her leadership role in Africa and establish herself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena. However, eight years after the vision, not much seemed to have been achieved. Other attempts at National cohesion and integration include the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973, Unity Schools, Federal Character Commission (FCC), Inter-Religious Council (IRC) and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nation General Assembly. The movement of the Federal Capital Territory from Lagos to Abuja was also another attempt by government to further unite Nigerians.

Many researchers of Nigeria's political history since independence therefore agree that the problem of Nigeria is leadership failure. For example, in his epistolary thoughts on Nigeria's endemic problem as captured in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe asserts that, the most challenging issue in Nigeria's history is traceable to the leadership question. He stresses unequivocally that, "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true



leadership” (1). They posit that failed leadership is more than other speculative and assumed problems of development of Nigeria. It is the tragedy of the Nigerian nation which explains its crawling posture at fifty-eight years of political independence. This is not to say however, that Nigeria as a nation can never be transformed from its present level of leadership failure and other indices militating against her development. Achebe believes that “Nigeria is not beyond change. That Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and vision”. He maintains that, “the citizens can bring the desired change in the country if they are enlightened to lead the way in their discovery and to create an atmosphere to their emergence” (2). What then is the place or role of a creative or literary writer in this challenge? In other words, what does the creative writer do in the face of this reality? Should he fold his arms and watch the agony and the torment of the people under the arbitrary rule of the Nigerian leaders continue unabated? This discourse seeks to reinforce the all-time debate on the role or place of the creative writer in the national development process in a developing and dysfunctional state of Nigeria. The discourse is re-cast from a more far-reaching pragmatic and contemporaneous dimension as dictated by the unfolding national challenges that task our collective survival and existence as a nation.

Conceptual Framework

To avoid ambiguity and misconception of terms, there is the need for a general understanding of the central conceptual direction that shall provide the relevant road-map to navigate into our literacy voyage. These central concepts are: **Good Governance, Creative Writer, and Sustainable Development.**

Generally, governance refers to the management of society by the people or leaders. It is the arrangement that determines how public actions are carried out from the perspectives of maintaining a country’s constitutional values. Governance is also seen as a set of values, policies and institutions through which the country manages economic, political and as well social processes at different levels on the basis of interaction among the government, civil societies and private sector. Chaza defines governance as “the capacity to establish and sustain workable relations between individual actors in order to promote collective goals” (122). The challenge to all societies is to create a system of governance that promotes supports and sustain human development.

Good governance defies a monolithic definition that has a universal acceptability. This is because scholars from different disciplines have understood it differently and have made attempts to define it based on their social orientation. However, the plethora of the definitions gives us a panoramic or holistic view of what the concept entails.

Good governance refers to the tradition and institutions by which an authority in a country is exercised through a country’s economic, political and social institutions. It can also be referred to as the exercise of economic, political administrative authority to manage well a country’s affairs at all levels. From the foregoing discourse, it can be deduced that good governance includes all the principles necessary for the consolidation of democratic adherence to the rule of law, management-participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, consistency and fairness. Good governance by implication is when leaders can carry out the activities mentioned above for the good of all the citizens. Good governance is integral to economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, quality of education and sustainable development.



In his discussion on good leadership, Lee Kuan Yev cautions that:

We need good people to have good government. However good the system of government, bad leaders will bring harm to their people. On the other hand, I have seen several societies well governed in spite of poor system of government because good strong leaders were in charge (22).

This means that, it is not the system that makes good governance but leaders. People all over the world are demanding for good governance which has become a universal and presently acceptable value in the world today.

Creative Writer

A creative writer is seen as one who writes books, stories among others out of his imagination especially as a job. Creative writing is a work of art from the writers' imaginative thoughts or feelings. It is also referred to any writing with the creativity of the mind.

Adenuga Folake defines creative writing as the:

Work of art born out of the writer's imagination...a fictional but written form of literature that could come from any of the three genres of literature-prose, poetry and drama. It could be a product of a writer's imagination on a given situation in the society (225).

Here, the writer creates through his imagination befitting themes, characters, setting, times and events. A creative writer's responsibility is to entertain, to instruct, to edify, to persuade, to arouse and incite. Through creative writing, human beings communicate their vision of reality in concrete terms. Creative writing is described as the transcript of society because it keeps records of life of the society in all ramifications.

Sustainable Development

To sustain is to continue, maintain, endure or last for a long time. Development according to Obikeze and Anthony means improving existing ways of doing things to make the processes efficient and more prudent than before (16). The term development is therefore used here in the general sense of when someone or something grows or changes into a more advanced stage. Sustainable development therefore means a development that is continuous on going. Adeboye defines sustainable development as "development that allows the present generations to meet their own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (152). From these definitions, development can be considered as an effort or attempt made by humans to ensure proficiency and enhancement in the quality of an individual or society. Development is measured by the type of infrastructures put in place to enhance higher level of living in the social, psychological, economic, and political life of the people. This is the context within which we are going to anchor our discussion of the concept of sustainable development in this paper.

The Role of the Creative Writer in Enthroning Good Governance

The creative or literary writer can rise to challenge of repositioning the nation's leadership problems by providing constructive alternatives of moving the society forward in the right



direction. He can do this in many ways. Firstly, he can he can reform the individual psyche to awaken in them the need to change their situation and contribute to good governance for national development. The failure of Nigeria leadership to establish and entrench true federalism, the rule of law, justice and fairness as well as unity and enduring political structures has made the Nigerian creative writer to consistently condemn the leaders at the expense of projecting hope in their writings. This should however, not continue to be the case if Nigeria must develop. The Nigeria creative writer can change leaders into better humans and create hope for the country be it on leadership failure, matters of security or issues of national development with the view to changing Nigeria for better. He should equip the readers or leaders with wisdom and courage to face and to fight against nonchalant activities. This he can do by using his art to recreate new and acceptable vision for Nigeria.

It is also the social responsibility or function of the writer to confront injustice and to speak in one accord even in the face of threat and insecurity to his life. William Shakespeare reminds us that the pen is always mightier than the sword. In so far the writer many not literarily speaking take up the sword against the enemies of the state (bad leaders), he has the responsibility of using his creative talent to charter the course of a better and prosperous society.

A creative writer should not present biased views. He should state facts as they are (what is right and wrong). He should urge readers to recognize reality of life, the nature of the world. It is the writer's job to make the reader a better thinker. He should offer alternate perspectives on issues that will cause the reader to think in ways that they have not thought before. In other words, the writer should inspire readers without obscuring the seamy side of things or even the distress in the world from a positive point of view. He should show the reader the world as it is, how it should be, what is right and what is wrong and the possibility of a new world.

Our literary icons have emphasized the relevance or role of a creative writer in moving the society forward. Achebe maintains that the main concern of the creative writer is to expose and attack injustice all over the world, particularly within his own society (52). At another forum he says that the writer's duty is to create social awareness and awaken the people in the society where few people hold power and economy while the majority suffers exploitation and oppression. He also sees the writer as an interpreter, spokesman and defender of the society and dignity in his society (45), and further advises that in order to be relevant the writer should not avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa (82). In the same vein, Soyinka maintains that the creative writer should be committed to the restoration of justice and human society (55). Lewis Nkosi, corroborates these statements when he stresses that:

A creative writer's commitment should be art to the world, and as such, he should not dissociate himself from the decadent environment by the adaptation of the self-distancing attitude. He should try to achieve a better future for his people through writing. His responsibility is to make his readers more aware of their environment and the attendant problems (70).

By reading the creative works of the writer, it is hoped that positive change can be brought about and the leader's orientations and performance could be redirected and improved upon. That is, if the mind of the leaders or readers is affected positively by the power of literature,



this can put in them the right response to their leadership challenges by utilizing human and national resources for the betterment of the society. The development of the individual which the function of literature can therefore contribute positively in the development of the nation.

In addition, the language of the creative writer in communicating with the people should be simple and clear enough to facilitate comprehension. In the face of misrule; the creative writer should motivate, mobilize, and organize the masses to resist the oppressive system. He should create characters that assume the leadership of the protest mission and by reading this; the readers will be conscientised enough to emulate the actions by putting it in practical terms in similar situation. In other words, the creative writer should use positive examples to direct readers to the proper mode of behaviour. He should also continue to uphold moral principle.

Since literature is about society, the creative writer should portray the world view of the people in his fictional world-their culture, fears, anxieties, joy, sadness and despair among others and by this token, the leader would be in a better position to lead the well. It could be observed that most crises bothering on leadership in our society today are related to ignorance of the culture of the led by the leader.

The creative writer should also create situations in the world that reflect inquisitiveness, inventiveness, honesty, patriotism, equity, justice and hard work. They should be situations or events that try to restore the dignity and self-realization of Nigerians. That is, the issues portrayed should be progressive and such that can rekindle the patriotic and nationalist spirit. Most Nigerian writers have shown lack of commitment for true nationhood and allowed personal ambition to override national consideration. Writings that have emerged since independence are largely characterized by advancing or projecting ethnic sectional, self-servicing and self-glorifying agenda at the expense of a collective vision of one Nigeria and one people with a common identity. As such, the concept and practice of true citizenry is replaced with consciousness of indigene ship and exclusionary politics of non-indigene ship. Rather there should be effective engagement in robust national issues that confront humanity, issues of destiny and survival. In fact, the pillars of good governance and national unity are the developments of national consciousness which can bring together the diverse ethnic and religious groups as well as the various social classes.

Furthermore, the writer should excite and ignite the mind and intellect of the leaders to embark on policies and programmes that have direct bearing on the lives of the people and are also acceptable at across the broad spectrum of the society thereby providing the necessary road map for national cohesion, peace, security and development.

CONCLUSION

Although Nigeria has immense mineral and human resources to develop fully, it has never been well governed since independence in 1960 because according to Achebe, “good, strong leaders have never been in charge” (1). It has been managed by leaders who are selfish, corrupt and incapable. An analysis of Nigerians leaders revealed selfish, mediocre, tribal leaders. Nigeria’s major leadership challenges is tribalism, insecurity, national integration, revenue allocation, and minority question among others are attributed to British colonial activities which put together the over 250 ethno-linguistic, religio-political and socio-economic units to form what today the most populated Black Country in the world. The effect



of these problems on Nigeria's body politics is the absence of a patriotic and nationalistic leadership which can turn its fortunes around. The fact that a creative writer can help to enthrone the needed leadership towards Nigeria sustainable development as discussed in this work cannot be overemphasized given his strategic role in enhancing societal development and growth. This paper therefore concludes that, despite all the odds Nigeria can be great if the desired leadership is put in place by the people.

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