

AN ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA'S 4<sup>TH</sup>  
REPUBLIC: 2015-2021

Dr. OGEREGBE Michael Godraised Oriewu

[michaelogerebe@gmail.com](mailto:michaelogerebe@gmail.com)

07062483802, 07084291633

Centre for Leadership and Complex Military Operations,  
Directorate of Leakages and Collaboration, Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna

&

Dr SHEHU Fatima Liberty

[fatimashuhu1@unimaid.edu.ng](mailto:fatimashuhu1@unimaid.edu.ng)

Department of Political Science,  
University of Maiduguri, Borno State

**Abstract**

*The Quality of leadership affects the pace of development in any country; therefore, the aim of this study is to expose the relationship between leadership and governance in Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> republic from 2015 to 2021. The study adopts a survey and descriptive research design. Findings from the study showed that Leadership is centered on achieving goal(s), irrespective of the goal, national goals must be achieved. It entails building capacity that drives the attainment of the goal, inspiring and motivating the group to believe in the authenticity of the goal, taking superb decisions and communicating effectively to the team about the decision and situation. The study therefore concludes the period was characterized by woes and leadership failures, ineptitudes and lack of capacity to pursue a vision for national development. The change and fight against corruption that should have been the mantra is actually the opposite of the period and development status of the nation. All the indices for development have been met on the negative scale, hyper insecurity, unemployment, human right violation, neglect for the rule of law, political impunity etc. Given this, the paper recommends that a lot should be done moving forward as leadership is a challenge for the smooth national development plans.*

**Keywords: Leadership, Capacity, Development, Fourth Republic**

**INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is at the heart of public sector governance, and it is vital to the overall development of a nation as well as the welfare of the citizens (Deloitte Global Series, 2012). This is because the primary responsibility of leadership is the protection of life and property and the delivery of good governance to the people through social and economic development by improving education,

health care, security, the economy and the general infrastructure among others. Thus, the real dividend of democracy is the freedom of choice that the system offers (Ezonbi, Wuam & Jonah, 2021).

Nigeria's fourth Republic is characterized by its choice for democratic system of governance. Beginning in 1999, it has now existed for more than two decades marking it the longest continuously enduring epoch in Nigeria's political history. Perhaps the major highlight of this period spans from 2015 to 2021 under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. Muhammadu Buhari, of an opposition party (All Progressive Congress) during this period defeated a sitting president in office, thereby privileging the country was privileged to witness the first time that an opposition party will win the presidency and turn the former ruling PDP into an opposition party to the elected President Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressive Congress (APC). Despite this euphoria this period was characterized by heightened leadership and development challenge; unplanned and unreasonable policies, foreign debt increase, insecurity, unemployment, national divide by creation of socio ethnic fault line, high cost of living, reduced standard of living, disregard of the rule of law, public fund embezzlement, diversion and stealing etc. At the center of this issue is national security which is a premise for national economic growth and development of any nation. According to Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013), security is the pillar upon which every meaningful development could be achieved and sustained. It is on this premise this paper tries to analyze the impacts and failures of leadership and the development of Nigeria under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.

Nyerere (1969) wrote that: "There must be something wrong in a society where one man, however hard working or clever he may be, can acquire as a great 'reward' a thousand of what his fellows can acquire between them." In similar vein, in a country like Nigeria, we have a situation of an

‘affluent society’ as described by Azikiwe (1980, 124). According to the sage, an affluent society is where there are few very rich and very many very poor. How can the leadership of this country help to create an abundant society which is characterized by: “abundant food, abundant shelter, abundant clothing, abundant necessities of life and abundant amenities, within a reasonable cost and within the reach of many?” Where the management of national resources is entrusted in the hands of parasites and kleptomaniacs, there will be no need for rocket science to make a logical conclusion for pessimism and hopelessness in terms of achieving the targeted objectives and better results. No economy has ever grown to the age of maturity if the fundamental body structures of development parameters are under the tutelage of misguided personalities because bad leadership and economic development are inversely related just as poor management and development are not mutually exclusive. Evidence of that is Nigeria. Nigeria has all the financial and material resources to be an economic powerhouse not only in Africa but the rest of the world. However, the leadership environment in Nigeria has become a money-making venture and an avenue for easy stealing of national wealth with political protection. Beyond political rhetoric, the Nigeria’s economic backwardness is as a result of bad leadership.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Nigeria’s longest period of continuous democratic rule began in 1999 with the establishment of the Fourth Republic. Under President Muhammadu Buhari’s government, the years 2015–2021 were historic since they saw the first opposition party beat a sitting president in an election. Public expectations for revolutionary leadership and national growth increased as a result of this shift (Babalola, 2018; Borger, 2015). However, developmental indices and actual findings point to a sharp discrepancy between these aspirations and the current state of the country vis-à-vis the contribution of party system to development (Abdulkadir, 2022).

Nigeria had abundant material and human resources, but the time was marked by worsening political and socioeconomic problems. These include severe economic challenges like rising foreign debt, inflation, and unemployment (Ohuocha & Mayowa, 2016; Holodny, 2016); increased insecurity from terrorism, kidnapping, and communal conflicts (International Crisis Group, 2018; Punch, 2018); and serious governance failures demonstrated by political impunity, disdain for the rule of law, and perceived institutionalized corruption (Ojoye, 2016, Ojoye, 2017; Onochie, 2017). According to academics who have long maintained that leadership quality is the main factor influencing national development, effective leadership guarantees security, political stability, efficient resource allocation, and adherence to democratic principles (Achebe, 2012; Fayemi, 2009; Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013).

As a result, a crucial issue emerges: there seems to be a significant gap between the developmental results observed in Nigeria between 2015 and 2021 and the theoretical requirements of democratic leadership. The Nigerian experience during this time was characterized by regressive trends in important human development indicators and a worsening of the very issues that credible leadership should address, despite the fact that democratic governance theoretically promises development through accountability, transparency, and citizen welfare (Deloitte Global Series, 2012; Ezonbi et al., 2021). Therefore, the primary issue this paper evaluates is the clear failure of Nigeria's Fourth Republic's leadership to convert democratic governance into real national development between 2015 and 2021, which led to increased socioeconomic vulnerabilities and a worsening of the political and security environment.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Leadership

Leadership is the exercise of power or influence in social collectivities such as groups, organizations, communities or nation. Olugbade (1987) sees leadership as both a research area and a practical skill encompassing the ability of an individual or organization to "lead" or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations to a better situation or achieve a goal. Leadership can either be understood as a pattern of behavior or a personal quality. As a pattern of behavior, leadership is the influence exerted by an individual or group over a large body to organize or direct its efforts towards the achievement of desired goals. As a personal attitude, leadership refers to the character traits which enable the leader to exert influence over others. Northouse (2004) identified four common themes in the way leadership now tends to be conceived. He said leadership is a process, it involves influence, it occurs in a group context and it involves goal attainment. Northouse thus, defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. A more collective concept of leadership arises out of a review by Gary Yukl. Yukl (2006) defines leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. However, for this paper, leadership talks about the capacity to take up and influence responsibility on people in order to achieve a goal. Schmidt (1972) says, the relation of leadership arises only where a group follows an individual from free choice and not under command or coercion and, secondly, not in response to blind drives but on positive and more or less national grounds.

## **The Concept of Development**

The term development is generally conceived as the improvement and the sustainability of quality of life. According to Maryann *et al* (2014) development can be defined as a collection of activities that expand capacities to realize the potential of individuals, firms or communities who contribute to the advancement of society through the responsible production of goods and services. According to Amartya Sen (1999) development can be measured by the degree of freedom acquired by citizens of a country. He argues that human development is about the expansion of citizens' capabilities. Development is also defined as the sustained, concerted actions of policy makers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area.

From the above definitions we can conclude that the ultimate result of development is greater prosperity and higher quality of life; however, these goals can only be realized through sustained innovation, activities that lower transaction costs through responsive regulation, better infrastructure and increased education and opportunities for more fruitful exchange. Thus, for government to be effective in creating economic development there is a need for performance and impact measurement systems that are able to provide decision support for strategic investments. In all cases, it has become clearer that good governance, sound infrastructure, education and manpower development, adequate investment, technology and market availability, security of lives and properties, institutional qualities and the like, their availabilities and accessibilities are the necessary condition for achieving sound, stable and sustainable economic development in any human society.

## **National Development**

According to Seers (1969), the questions to ask about a country's development are: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of underdevelopment. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if per capita income doubled. From the above, development therefore means the welfare, equality and sustainability of the people at large. Thus, the meaning of development is one that makes people the target or end of development. According to Gboyega (2003), development is an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Chrisman (1984) supports this view by seeing development as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well-being of the people is generated through strong partnership. For this work, development is purely people centered and economical; it reflects the living conditions of the people in Nigeria during the study period.

## **NEXUS BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT**

The quality of development engendered in any country is an invariable function of the quality of leadership operating the governance of the country. The East Asian Model demonstrates this nexus. The World Bank in its 1993 document, *The East Asian Miracle* presented the remarkable developmental feats recorded by the Asian Tigers in both economic and social spheres as the paradigm for successful development that can be emulated by Third World Countries. The position of the World Bank on the development of East Asia sparked a plethora of literature on the phenomenon of development in that region. One of the most insightful pieces of research which

unravels the nuances of development in the region is Beatrice Weder's *Model, Myth, or Miracle: Reassessing the Role of Government in the East Asian Experience*.

This work specifically expresses that East Asian government provided a favorable institutional framework which made development possible. Enumerating the characteristics of the said institutional frameworks, the author discusses five government based institutional factors that instigated development in East Asia. These factors are private-public cooperation (established robust mechanisms that encouraged synergy between the Private and the Public realms); bureaucracy (prerequisite for development has to do with the provision of a competent, efficient and highly motivated workforce where technocrats are obliged independence from political interference in carrying out their duties); and the rule of law (an important institutional requisite for development). Although there is no correlative data on corruption and economic growth in East Asia as claimed by the author, the effectiveness of the Public-Private sector engagements, the candor of bureaucracy and the implementation of the rule of law are indisputable evidence of the extermination of corruption in the region. Another factor mentioned is political stability (measured by government promotion of indicators such as civil liberties, political rights, press freedom, low electoral uncertainty etc.).

Achebe (2012) identifies the problem of Nigeria as leadership. What this imply is that leaders are the engines of national development. Credible leadership produce security, political stability and national development. When the right leader is in government, he or she will manage conflict effectively and allocate resources efficiently and ensure equality and equity. Thus leadership and national development are implicitly related and mutually compatible. A good leadership would entail that the rule of law becomes highly imperative; the promotion and enjoyment of fundamental

freedom become indispensable; and accountability, transparency and due process must be the guiding principles in the conduct of public affairs (Gilbert & Ubani, 2015).

### **The Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Fayemi (2009) rightly observed that the standard of living in Nigeria is deteriorating on a daily basis as high unemployment, inflation, civil strife, poverty, corruption, disease, malnutrition, illiteracy, insecurity of lives and property, among others appeared to be the only legacy the state is capable of passing from one generation to the other. This bad or poor leadership puts Nigeria and its huge population people into political and economic impasse. It is rather unbelievable that since the return of democracy in 1999, the country could not consolidate the democratization process to achieve good governance and usher Nigerians into the land of goodies. In most parts of the country today, millions of human inhabitants share water from the same source with animals; water infested with bacteria and viruses. Nigeria is poorly governed, hence her failure to rise to the height of its potentials.

After the transition from former President Good luck Jonathan to President Buhari, the early signs of governance challenges began to emerge with the late appointment of ministers and much later with the failing health of the President. From a rights-based perspective, the fight against corruption was marred by arbitrary detention and non-adherence to judicial pronouncements primarily with the detention of the former NSA on charges of misappropriating more than \$2 billion meant for arms procurement (Onochie, 2016). But it was not only with the detention of the NSA chief that the rule of law became a pertinent concern. There was also the arbitrary exercise of executive power, sometimes through the Department of State Services (DSS), in the illegal detention of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and a foremost Shi'a Muslim cleric (Ibrahim El Zakzaky) (Ojoye, 2017). Moreover, towards the 2019 general

elections, the suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria (Walter Onnoghen) based on an ex parte order issued by the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) also raised concerns on the adherence by the government to the rule of law. The security challenges that plagued the Jonathan administration with the abduction of the Chibok girls emerged in the Buhari-led administration with the sporadic attacks of Boko Haram on military instalments and the abduction of the girls from Dapchi (Amaza, 2018).

Moreover, the military invasion of the south-east following fresh agitations for Biafra after the arrest and arbitration detention of the IPOB leader by the Buhari-led administration while fuelling questions on democratic governance, raised human rights concerns (Egbejule & Anyadike, 2016). The crisis between farmer and herdsmen communities raised similar questions and drew agitations from ethnic groups within states in the north-central and southern region, where the Buhari-led administration was sometimes accused of ethnic bias (Adubi, 2018; Amaza, 2018; Ibukun & Olorunbi, 2018; Alagbe, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2018). The proposal of cattle colonies was also perceived as a means of ethnic domination by the Hausa/Fulani population and heavily resisted in some states, mostly in the north-central and southeastern region. On the economic front, the removal of the fuel subsidy in 2016, although beneficial to national income (Oluwagbemi, 2016), was telling on household incomes with the attendant consequence of increase in the prices of local transportation and food items. Moreover, the removal of the currency peg by the Central Bank of Nigeria saw the Naira plunge 30 per cent against the dollar (Oluocha & Mayowa, 2016; Holodny, 2016). The multiplier effect of this decision was a series of economic challenges particularly for business owners and private individuals.

Also, in Nigeria, the achievement of desired level of internal security particularly from 2015 -2022 was elusive. The above period witnessed the proliferation of different militia groups that posed

serious security threats to the Nigerian government. Then, there is also kidnapping which has assumed alarming dimension, opening up opportunities and avenues for dangerous revenue degeneration, bus and highway kidnaps, home and school kidnap, train kidnap etc. This happened from the North-West to the East and then North Central.

Another major security challenge in Nigeria which has adversely affected the Nigerian economy is the activities of Boko Haram group, a controversial Nigerian Militant Islamist group that seeks the imposition of Sharia law in the northern states of Nigeria. However, it is pertinent to state that under the Buhari-led administration, there was improvement with security in the north-east, particularly with regard to reclaiming erstwhile Boko Haram-controlled areas and protecting displaced populations (Borger, 2016; Oluwagbemi, 2016). Although the counter-insurgency measures against Boko Haram did not deter sporadic attacks from the sect, it countered some of the sect's notable gains. Although, in comparative terms with the Jonathan administration, the Buhari-led government did not prominently feature women in his cabinet, the Buhari-led administration gave a notable boost to youth participation in governance through the Not Too Young to Run Act (Tukur, 2018; Babalola, 2018). The establishment of the Nigerian Diaspora Commission (NDC) was also a notable move towards enhancing the participation of the diaspora in governance (Erezi, 2018; Umoru, 2017; Oluwagbemi, 2017). However, the refusal to sign the Digital Rights and Freedom Bill was perceived as an affront on human rights in the digital age due to the role digital technologies play in fostering participatory politics (Busari, 2019; Ekwealor, 2019; Aginam, 2019).

### **Challenges of Development in Nigeria**

The imposition of policies, lack of adequate human resources or capital to implement these plans/policies, corruption and lack of credible leadership are the major challenges to Nigeria's

development. Most national development problems in Nigeria arises as a result of poor implementation of policies and subsequently lack of adequate and reliable human resources. Records from United Nations Development Programme 2014 report reveals that Nigeria ranked number 152 out of 187 countries in Human development, which is average quality of life and standard of living. The report puts Nigeria's Human Development Index at 0.381 which is below the prescribed level. Thus, in such instances, there is absence of continuity in policies when the tenures of specific governments come to an end. The report also captures that although corruption is a global issue, Nigeria as a country is caught in the web of corruption. Often times, funds which are set aside for implementing policies are usually syphoned to the detriment of the entire nation. In addition, lack of credible leadership which can recognize and articulate the specific needs of the people also pose a challenge to development.

Dike (2010) observed that most of the so-called leaders do not actually understand that leadership entails assuming responsibilities for certain important issues. There is lack of accountability and transparency of public affairs managements in the nation (Gberevbie, Shodipo & Oviasogie, 2013). This therefore explains reasons for numerous abandoned projects found in these developing nations.

## **RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION**

The years 2015-2021 to Nigerians should have been the year that ended leadership mismanagement to bring years of hope, the future of which, from the past, has raised optimism, skepticism and pessimism. The Fourth Republic indeed has outlived the preceding era of military dictatorship and short-lived democratic governance. What this, in principle, exemplifies is that there is a sustained commitment towards maintaining democracy as the structure through which the governance is advanced. There is also a commitment towards ensuring that the democratic

landscape is not compromised through electoral dissatisfactions. As to the effective functioning of this landscape, there are of course challenges. However, there are pertinent lessons that need to be curated for development to move. These scope in study has shown that the period was characterized by woes and leadership failures, ineptitudes and lack of capacity to pursue a vision for national development. The change and fight against corruption that should have been the mantra is actually the opposite of the period and development status of the nation. The indices for development have been met on the negative scale and still counting, hyper insecurity, unemployment, human right violation, neglect for the rule of law, political impunity etc. All these indices and many more are to be looked into and properly put in place, there is a lot to be done moving forward as leadership is a challenge for the smooth national development plans.

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