

Character of Leadership and National Development in Contemporary Nigerian Society

By

Celestine Ochu Udeh

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
udehcelestine555@gmail.com, Tel. +2348066614370,

Queen Eyikorogha

Department of Political Science, Federal University Otuoke, Baylesa State.
eyikoroghaqq@fuotuokey.edu.ng, . +2348130100199

Paul Nwaforagu Ekoyo

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
nwaforagu@gmail.com, +234708 892 3476

Chidi Paul Madu

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
madupc@yahoo.com, +234802 222 5070

&

Izuchukwu Fortunetus Oguwuike

Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
fortuneoguwuike@gmail.com, +234706 209 8330

Abstract

The effective management and utilization of available resources to improve living conditions of the citizens and other myriad needs of the nation remained the pre-occupation of every responsive government. However, this has been undermined by character of leadership in the contemporary Nigerian society in form of corruption, embezzlement etc. In view of this, the study therefore seeks to unravel character of leadership and the puzzling nature of corruption and bad governance as being detrimental to national development of Nigeria. To understand the character of leadership in the contemporary Nigerian society, the study is anchored on the Marxian theory of Post-colonial state as its analytical framework. Furthermore, it adopted documentary method and used descriptive analysis of secondary sources of data. The study revealed that character of leadership in the contemporary Nigerian society, which manifests in form of corruption; embezzlement etc. resulted to the abandonment of projects in the country, thus undermining national development. Therefore, recommended amongst other things a leadership monitoring body for checkmating misconduct and misappropriation of public funds.

Keywords: Corruption, Embezzlement, Leadership-qualities, National-development, Unemployment

Introduction

The world over, effective management and utilization of available resources to improve the living conditions of the citizenry and other myriad needs of the nation has remained the pre-occupation of every responsive government in the society. This can be achieved through effective and efficient leadership. The leadership which will ensure scarce resources (that is



natural, human and material resources) are effectively, equitably and judiciously harnessed and distributed; utilized and sustained to ensure national development (Asaju, Arome, & Mukaila, 2014).

In view of this, leadership which is synonymous with good governance has been viewed as veritable tools for national development. Therefore, the term leadership simply referred to as the action of leading a group of people in any kind of setting, with the objective of achieving a profitable end (Usman, Bazza & Andow, 2018). It is also a process in which a leader indulges in various activities in order to achieve certain objectives. Leadership has always been an issue of general concern because of the impact of leadership on the led and the society as a whole (Onichakwe, 2018). Similarly, leadership is a term that describes the act of influencing, inspiring, guiding and encouraging members of an organization to accomplish determines goals. Therefore, the growth and development of any nation is dependent upon the quality, integrity and sincerity of her leaders. Additionally, the improvement of the living conditions of the citizens' welfare and the promotion of the collective good of the society on one end, and also the overall development of a nation cannot be realized in the absence of effective and good leadership.

Thus, character of leadership in the post-colonial state of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, which is obviously made manifest in form of corruption, embezzlement, selfishness amongst others have remained a serious impediment or a founding pillar for the obvious systemic underdevelopment of the continent, with particular reference to Nigeria whose leadership is obviously built upon corruption and bad governance. This is the premise upon which Ake (1995) having considered the interface between character of leadership in the contemporary Nigeria and the task of achieving the much needed national development, therefore contends that *'most African states are not developing due to leadership failure'*. The aforementioned assertion by Ake seems true in the face of the very fact many African countries wallows in underdevelopment politically, economically and otherwise even in the midst of their abundant natural resources.

Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study sets to examine how the character of leadership manifested in form of corruption, selfishness, embezzlement amongst others undermines national development in Nigeria. In achieving this, the study begins with the stratification of leadership and national development in Nigeria, conceptual clarifications, theoretical underpinnings of leadership and national development; leadership deficit as well as the challenges of national development in Nigeria amongst others.

Conceptual Discourse

Generally, there is no consensus amongst scholars on the universal meaning of the concept of development. This is so because of the ambiguous and complex nature of the concept, which has made it problematic to advance or delve into its precise meaning. In concordance with the above, Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) opined that development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism, thus making it difficult to arrive at a generally acceptable definition as other concepts.

Therefore, leadership according to Nwachukwu and Njoku (cited in Onichakwe, 2018) is viewed as a social, influencing process for the attainment of goals. In concurrence to this definition, Onwuchekwa (2006), believes that "leadership is the process of influencing group





activities towards goal setting and goal achievement”. The concept of leadership has been discussed extensively with numerous definitions. Some theorists have defined the concept of Leadership as the exercise of influence, as particular behavior, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as the focus of groups processes, as a differential role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions (Onichakwe, 2018). For the purpose of this paper, leadership is the action of leading a group of people in this case Nigerians or an organization.

National Development

On the other hand, the term national development is a concept that describes government plan to improve the social and economic status of her nation (Onichakwe, 2018). Development on one hand according to the former UN Secretary is growth plus change; it includes changes in institutional, social and administrative structure as well as behavior and attitudes of people including sometimes the people's custom and beliefs (Ubani, 2012). On the other hand, the word “nation” is defined by Kalu (2014) as a community of people who feel that they belong together in the double sense that they share deeply significant elements of a common heritage and they have a destiny for the future. He further noted that national development involves an activity that affects the nation; a people of common heritage as a whole, of all and not a part. As a matter of fact, national development is usually not segregated from any part of a nation but encompasses plans or programs targeted at achieving sustainable improvement in both material and spiritual life of a nation, which must be realized in ways consistent with the protection of human dignity (Onichakwe, 2018).

Theoretical Underpinning

For the purpose of understanding how the character of leadership in contemporary Nigerian society undermines national development, the Marxian theory of Post-colonial state propounded by Hamza Alavi was chosen as a framework of analysis for this study. The theory was further popularized by the emerging political economic scholars such as Ake (1981), Idode (1989) (Mbah & Obiagu, 2019). Accordingly, John Soul in his writing explicitly highlighted three dominant assumptions of the theory in the contemporary African states as follows:

- The post-colonial African state was created by the metropolitan bourgeoisie, because of that it needs an administrative apparatus it could control. While, the local administrative state is in turn controlled by the indigenous population.
- The post-colonial state has a specific role in promoting and manipulating the indigenous policies (politics and economic).
- In post-colonial societies political hegemony (leaders) must be maintained by the African state once it assumes political power (Keller, 1991, p. 138).

In furtherance, it is emphasized that post-colonial states like Nigeria appears as the most precious value desirable to possess due to the weak nature of its members to politics. Therefore, creating an impression that access to state power is the quickest and easiest means for religious, family and ethnic patronage on one hand; while access to state power is seen as an instrument of amassing wealth and survival strategy for those who control the state power. In the light of this, state power becomes the most lucrative desire of leaders as an instrument of power and wealth against the interest of the citizenry whom they are expected to serve.





The above situation becomes so worrisome; and raises the question of why African leaders use state power for personal aggrandizement instead of the general good of the people and national development. However, the answer to this question is never far-fetched from the assumption of scholars, that access to state power is not only seen as the quickest means to wealth but an instrument of becoming too powerful even above the state that conferred the power on them (Mbah & Obiagu, 2019). Again, Ake argued that the contemporary African states are predominated by element of class domination, who sees its acceptance to the dominant political class as an opportunity of exhibiting its individualistic corrupt character as against the primary purpose of leadership which entails dedication and selfless service, and service delivery to the society who confidently elected or selected them into such positions (Keller, 1991).

In credence to the assumptions of the above scholars, other scholars within the background of consequences of bad leadership argued that no development can thrive under such a hostile environment due to bad leadership and governance, but may instead create more social vices and social unrest as currently experienced in Nigeria.

Leadership and National Development

The issue of leadership is well and widely discussed across the globe due to its indisputable role in driving success and development in an organization, firm or state. Based on this, leadership like other social concepts has dominated both social and political discourse on one hand, and also dominated several volumes of scholarly articles on the other (Ogunode, Abereola & Olowe (2018). They Further contend that this is sue has been regularly discussed on different forum because, the success or failure, collapse or survival, progress or retrogression of a business, organization and even a state depends largely on the leadership of such establishment. The concept appears to mean different things to different people. For instance, according to Jacob & Jacques (cited in Ogunode, Abereola & Olowe, 2018, p. 145) conceived “leadership as a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve collective purpose”.

Similarly, Roger (2012) argued that “leadership is showing the way and helping or inducing others to pursue it. This entails envisioning a desirable future, promoting a clear purpose or mission, supportive values and intelligent strategies, empowering and engaging all those concerned”. Therefore, judging from the above meanings, one may be seeing a leader as someone who must be intelligent, purposeful and a visionary, who not only coordinates, manages and directs others, but also depends on others for optimal goal achieving end. To buttress this point, Udeh, Odey, Obiagu, Ekoyo and Onele (2021) argued that the led are often ignorant and unable to see beyond his limit of economic motivation but depending on the one who is leading, helping, persuading, convincing him to see the brighter future, and implores him to endure the pains he is bound to suffer in the process of getting to his goal oriented end. They further contend that, a leader therefore needs a kind of intellectual sagacity and wisdom to do the right needed conviction that can keep the led coordinated and resourceful through empowering the people.

However, apart from the managerial aspect of leadership as obviously highlighted above, another important aspect of leadership is the aspect of no reward, which many do not like to embrace. Leadership in this regard is a vocation and selfless venture, and calls for understanding,





patience, endurance and hard work. Akin to this, Jeb (cited Ogunode, Abereola & Olowe, 2018, p. 146) asserts that:

Leadership is hard work. It requires loads of self-discipline and sacrifice from time to time, you'll have your heart broken (sic) and your ego injured; there will be disappointment, mistakes and failure. Sometimes you will hurt good people- not because of ill intentions but because you are human and not perfect.

Thus, lack of understanding of the leadership in this direction is often responsible for struggle for leadership positions across the globe, particularly in Nigeria and Africa, even to the extent of making it a do or die affair by imploring various unethical means and manner to secure leadership position. And thereafter using it as not only an avenue to quickly enrich themselves, but also an avenue for family and ethno-religious patronage with resultant failure of leadership.

Therefore, a leader provides vision for the people he leads and communicates that vision to them in the best language they understand and also task and help them to succeed, upon this he is said to be successful. Furthermore, leaders according to Pierce and Newstrom (cited in Ogunode, Abereola & Olowe, 2018, p. 146) are "persons who are capable of taking ambiguous situations, interpreting these situations, and framing for the followers an understanding of the situation and what needs to be done to move forward". They further contend that the conventional parameter to measure the success of a leader is based on the success of the led. In consonance with the above, Ogunode, Abereola and Olowe (2018, p. 146) maintained that:

As a leader, if your team succeeds, you succeed. If your team fails, you fail. So, it follows that your job is to help your people succeed. Through leading, managing and coaching, you must create an environment in which they can develop their skills, leverage their talents and win. You must remove roadblocks so that they can get the job done. You need them more than they need you. Anything that you do to impede their success hurts you.

Similarly, apart from the aforementioned characteristics of good leaders, also Aguwa and Ehiodo (cited Onichakwe, 2018, p. 78-79) postulated that:

Good leaders therefore are expected to possess some distinguishing qualities such as high intelligence, which enables him to be able to analyze and understand some issues and take good decision without delay. Such leaders should be hard working so as to serve as good example to others.

They further contend that the "leader should be tolerant, accommodating, honest, firm and resourceful".

On the other hand, the concept of national development is multidimensional in nature, but viewed by Ekundayo (2015) as the collective socio-economic, political and technological advancement of a country. Similarly, national development can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011). This which can be achieved through development planning described as the country's collection of strategies (policies, plans, programs, and projects etc.) mapped out for the purpose of achieving future developments of all kinds. National development is a holistic type of country's development based on her needs,



which varies from country to country. The term national development comprehensively includes all aspects of life of citizens and nations.

It holistically includes full-growth and expansion of industries, agriculture, education, social, and cultural institutions and is best defined as an all-round and balanced development of different facets of the nation such as political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and material amongst others (Bawa, n.d). Thus, the diagram below further explains the holistic nature of national development as it cut across all walks of life of citizens and nations.

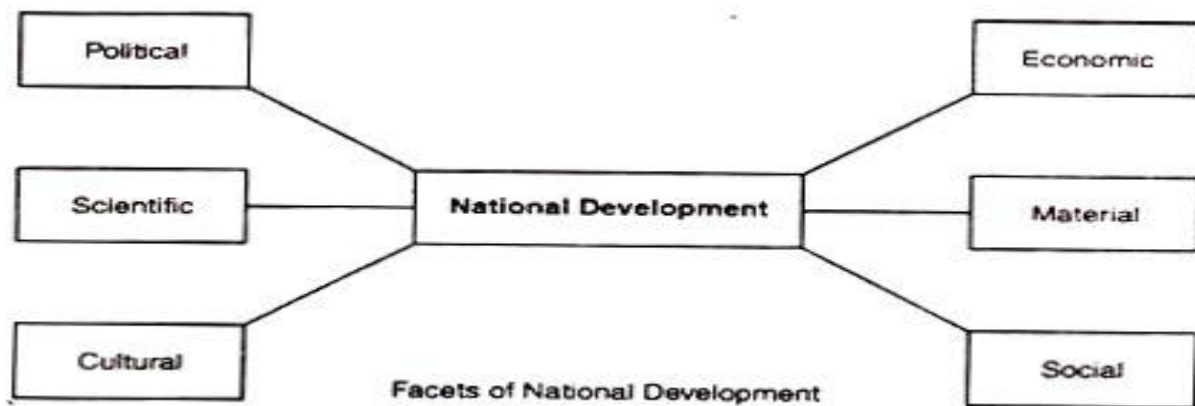


Fig. 1 Components of National Development

Source: Bawa, B. (n.d). <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/society/national-development-meaning-and-problems/76824>

Similarly, for any development to be described as national, it must be holistic and all-round to balance all aspects of life of the nation and citizens in general. In view of this, Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) noted that for a country to honorably achieve its national development there must be certain pre-requisites in place, which include socio-political development, economic stability, good governance and leadership amongst others. This is so because national development cannot be realistic but illusory in uncertain political and economic environment. Therefore, it is the pride of any government of a nation to attain a certain degree of development (national development) upon which its citizens would be entirely free from poverty and any kind of social unrest.

Thus, Nigeria’s national development is conceptualized as an overall development in all sectors, and citizenries’ welfare. Unfortunately, Nigeria since independence has been battling with the problems of national development despite its rich human, material and natural resources at her disposal. Regards to this, Nigeria, through various successive governments has embarked on various development policies, plans, programs and projects, in her quest to improve the material well-being and welfare of the citizens, and achieve national developments of the country. The following are the various notable development programs embarked upon by the various successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960.

Table 1 Nigerian Developmental Programmes/Strategies since 1960 till date



S/N	Title/Programes	Government	Year
1	First National Dept. Plan	Tafawa Balewa	1962-1968
2	Second National Dept. Plan	Yakubu Gowon	1970-1974
3	Third National Dept. Plan	Yakubu Gowon	1975-1980
4	Fourth National Dept. Plan	Muhammadu Buhari	1981-1985
5	Vision 2010/Vision 2020	Olusegun Obasanjo	2000

Source: Sanusi (2012)

The table above shows the popular development plans, programs and strategies embarked upon by the various Nigerian government for the purpose of achieving substantial national development in the country since after independence in 1960.

The first National Development Plan between 1962 and 1968 was formulated by Tafawa Balewa Government as a two-year development policy, with the core objectives of developing the health care system, education and creating more employment opportunities as well as improving access to other social opportunities in the country. Furthermore, the first national development plan was designed to keep the economy in the right shape, accelerating growth of agricultural and industrial sectors as well as training of high-level and middle-level manpower in the society (Sanusi, 2012). According to Ekundayo (2015), the plan failed completely because 50% of the required resources were to be sourced from outside the country, thus making it expensive and problematic to be realized, whereas, only about 14% out of the proposed 50% was received. Other contributing factors were anchored on poor leadership and governance that characterized the first republic; political instability that led to the emergence of the military into the political landscape of Nigeria, which brought the first republic into an abrupt end and, thus led to the unfortunate Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970 (Ekundayo, 2015).

In the same vein, the second National Development Plan between 1971 and 1974) was formulated by the successive Military Government of General Yakubu Gowon, with defined core five points objectives viz: building a free and democratic society; building a just and egalitarian society; building a united, strong and self-reliant economy; building a great and dynamic economy; and a hand full of bright opportunities for citizenry (Ekundayo, 2015, p. 48; and Onah, 2006). Furthermore, on the platform of addressing the prevailing poverty situation and food security in the country, the administration introduced many more programs such as the Import Substitution Strategy; the National Accelerated Food Production Program; and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank to enable the realization of the objectives of the national development plan.

However, with all these programmes in place, the country is still regarded according to (Ekundayo, 2015); and Eneh (2009) as the worse nation with import dependency and food insecurity challenges in Africa in particular and the world in general. Furthermore, none of the five aforementioned plans or policy thrust of the Second National Development Plan in 1971 under this administration was achieved due to character of leadership manifested in form of corruption, embezzlement, self-fish interest of the ruling class (Eneh, 2009). The above situation validly confirmed the popular philosophy by late Professor Chinua Achebe, that the complex problem of Nigeria is anchored on leadership deficit. And former President Olusegun Obasanjo





argued that “leadership deficit in Nigeria had robbed the country of its meaningful development; thus become a clog on the nation’s wheel of progress” (Asaju, Arome, & Mukaila, 2014, p. 118). Character of leadership has not only prominently remained a thorn on the flesh as long as national development is concerned in the country; but also undermining the country’s integrity in the international arena.

The above scenario paints a picture of the fate of subsequent development plans and development strategies in the country as none can be said to have succeeded in its implementation and the issue of poverty, unemployment and lack of overall development has persisted over time. Thus, almost all the development plans and development strategies has failed to assist the country in its bid for national development and the situation has remained the same till date.

Leadership Deficit and Challenges of National Development in Nigeria

In juxtaposing the present development of the Nigerian state and some neighboring countries of Africa, one may take an affirmative stand that the country is lacking behind in the process of national development. This is so, particularly when judging with the verifiable indicators of national development such as employment rate, stable exchange rate, political and economic stability amongst others. For instance, according to Oghuvbu and Chidiozie (2018), the core and major features of an underdeveloped nation is often measured by its unequal foreign exchange rate, inflation, debt from Western countries amongst others. These are all identifiable features of the present state of Nigeria, which not only has hindered its national development, but also has made the country to trade on persistent dependence on importation. Thus, resulting in the underdevelopment of the country as obviously measured are the presence of poor roads, high rate of youth unemployment, epileptic power supply, comatose education sector leading to brain drain, as many Nigerian youths are travelling out of the country to get better education, political immaturity, lust for power and intolerance of both opposition and criticism (Oghuvbu & Chidiozie, 2018, p. 9).

These were made possible as a result of the obvious leadership deficit in the country which has manifested in form of corruption, embezzlement amongst others. This has also led to the abandonment of national projects such as the Ajaokuta Steel Company in Kogi State, Bendel Cement company in Edo state, and Delta Steel Company, Aladja amongst other production companies in the country (Oghuvbu & Chidiozie, 2018). Worrisomely, these are projects that if put to proper use will not only elevate the country to the path of development, but will also create thousands of jobs for the teeming unemployed youths in the country. All of these have not only undermined national development but have generated a high level of insecurity as the idle youths have found vocation in illegal ventures and other vices.

Infrastructural and Industrial Deficits

According to Okoli, Nebeife, and Izang. (2020) infrastructural deficits include the collapse of the fundamental and basic social amenities and public facilities, which are meant to be provided by every responsive government for its citizens. This is because such facilities and amenities are capitally induced projects highly beyond the capacity of private individuals to provide, but have been abandoned by the government due lack of leadership will. These are empirically made obvious in the near extinction of railways, as well as the colossal dilapidation





of road networks, public schools, health and water facilities (Okoli, Nebeife, & Izang.,2020), with public power being at its lowest ebb of less than 5.000 MW generation capacity alongside intractable distribution and transmission challenges in the country. Similarly, the Nigerian industrial sector appears to have been abandoned in the same way, alongside that of the Nigerian textile industry, steel rolling mill, rubber, woods, cement, fertilizer, ceramics and publishing industries that were vibrant and internationally competitive between 1970s and 1980s. However, its current operational capacities are in a pitiable state due to high cost of production. With this narrative, it is glaring that good and quality leadership cannot be overemphasized as the basis for the growth and successful development of any organization be it industry, state or nation.

Heightened Unemployment

It is no longer new that Nigeria's unemployment is on geometric increase, particularly since the return of democracy in 1999, but what seems to be new is its adverse implication manifested in the current state security dilemma in the country. This is because the state of unemployment in the country has not only forced the youths to streets, but also has compelled them to stage war against the state. Consequently, the non-engagement of the multitude of the country's youths in gainful employment has led to dire collateral consequences, including youth bulge, youth restiveness, and other associated social vices and crimes. The prevalence of these existential situations in the country not only undermines development, but speaks ill of the success of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Brain-Drain/Human Capital Depreciation

The social, economic and political effects of leadership deficit in Nigeria is quite alarming, this is obviously glare or measured according Okoli, Nebeife, and Izang.(2020, p. 155) who arguably traced the current and persistent mass exodus of Nigerian best brain for better livelihood opportunities outside the shores of the country. They firmly asserted that:

This brain-drain syndrome critically affects the country's human resource development index as Nigerian professionals in diverse fields especially health and education sectors daily exit the country for Europe, America and Canada among other developed countries in search of greener pasture. About 5,405 Nigerian trained doctors and nurses currently work with the British National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom. This has aggravated Nigeria's physician-patient ratio from 1:4000 to 1:5000, negating the WHO's recommended standard of 1:600.

Therefore, the irony of the situation is that Nigeria incidentally ranks so highly in terms of western patronage of international medical, educational and tourism. This has therefore directly or indirectly contributed to the development of other countries where these specialists migrate to while accounting for the persistent human capital underdevelopment of the country.

Prevalence of Corruption





Corruption in Nigeria has remained a perennial issue in the country's process of development. This has reflected in the persistent ranking of the country as one of the most corrupt countries of the world by Transparency International, a German registered voluntary association known for anti-corruption and crime prevention. It is corruption that has led to numerous abandoned projects in the country as the bulk of the money meant for project execution is being diverted to private individual pockets instead of its being used for the execution such projects. Thereby, leaving the country in the mess, particularly in terms of unemployment. Furthermore, it fuels bad governance, erodes public confidence, undermines public service delivery and entrenches square pegs in round holes in leadership positions; it is a major impediment to good governance (Onichakwe, 2018). This therefore is a very big problem to national development. It is like a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerians society (Onichakwe, 2018). Today, an average Nigerian is corrupt and there is corruption in virtually every aspect of Nigerian life. Based on this, things are no longer done based on merit; rather it is based on ascription. Our administrators change their minds on important national issues, whenever they are enticed or bribed. There is no due process inmost of what we do in the society. Contracts will be awarded and the contractors will collect money and abandon the projects, and claim to be "untouchables" because they have political god-father (Onichakwe, 2018).

Hence, judging from the above discussion on leadership deficit and challenges of national development, with use of few indicators of infrastructural and industrial deficits, heightened unemployment, brain-drain/human capital depreciation, prevalence of incidence of corruption amongst others. One may affirm that there is an obvious interface between the character of leadership and national development and that the character of leadership in the contemporary Nigerian state is a manifestation of the festering rate of corruption, selfishness, embezzlement and economic mismanagement all of which undermines national development.

Conclusion

Factors responsible for the fast developing of many western countries like Dubai, China, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia amongst others, can be greatly summarized within the ambit of good leadership and governance; both which have the capacity of bringing about all-round development in the country such as agricultural sector, a system of mass qualitative education, development of indigenous industries, export oriented strategy, existence of efficient bureaucracy, human resources development, research and development as the bedrock for technological advancement, encouragement of a dynamic private sector working in co-operation with the government towards a society-wide vision of development, institutional capacity building, good governance through policy consistency and continuity; and political stability in the country. Therefore, a country is classified as developed when the above sectors of the county are developed on one end; and when it is able to provide adequate and qualitative life for her citizenry via leadership commitment and implementation of policies capable of promoting good-will; and dislodging corruption, self-fishiness amongst others in the society on the other end.

Unfortunately, Nigeria since independence in 1960 has been confronted greatly with the challenge of good leadership and governance in spite of its great leaders in all walks of life.





Leaders who are truly uncompromising, committed, nationalists, visionaries and development conscious. The leadership challenge in the country is the obvious reason for the failure of all the development plans, strategies and programs due to lack of continuity, commitment, proper implementation of policies; and follow-up afterwards, which manifests in corruption, embezzlement, self-fishiness, unethical standard in the society. It is therefore, the wish of this paper that a leadership monitoring body that should serve as a check form is conduct and misappropriation of public funds be established while a commensurate punishment should be meted to those found guilty so as to serve as deterrence to others.

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Brief Bio-data of the Authors

Udeh, Celestine Ochu is a Ph.D student in the department of political science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He holds B.Sc. Ed. (Education Political Science) and M.sc. Political Science (International Relations) 2017 UNN. Phone no. 08066614370. Email address: udehcelestine555@gmail.com

Eyikorogha Queen is a Ph.D student in the department of Political Science, University of Port-Hacourt, Rivers State. She holds B.sc. Political Science, Imo state University and M.sc Political Science (Public Administration) Uni Port. Phone no. 08130100199. Email address: eyikoroghaqq@gmail.com

Ekoyo, Paul Nwaforagu is a Ph.D student, Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He holds B.sc. Ed (Education Political Science) and M.sc. Political Science (International Relations) Phone no. 07088923476. Email address: nwaforagu@gmail.com

Madu, Chidi Paul is a Ph.D student, of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He holds B.sc. and M.Sc. in Political Science (International Relations) Phone no. 08022225070. Email address: madupc@yahoo.com

Oguwuike, Izuchukwu Fortunetus is a Ph.D student, University of Nigeria Nsukka. He holds, B.sc. and M.sc. political Science (International Relations). Phone no. 07062098330. Email: fortuneoguwuike@gmail.com