

Effective Leadership and the Quest for Environmental Sustainability in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The African continent is undeniably blessed with immense resources that spans from natural to human. The remarkably blessed natural resources and the unique environment accounts for the abundance of food and raw materials that keep the various industries around the world operational. In other words, Africa and its numerous natural resources cannot be undermined in the world's food-chain and supplies of raw materials that keep industrial world functional. This beautiful horizon of Africa's natural environment remains the home of various species of unique animals and plants. However, in recent times, the rich African environment and natural resources have been under threats by various human activities and natural disaster such as Gas flaring, Deforestation, flood, wild fire, hunting, oil explorations etc. These human and natural disaster have put the African continent and indeed its beautiful natural environment at the threshold of near collapse, unproductivity, risk of extinction of unique plants and animals and of course other unimaginable problems, if not properly handled. Leadership crisis and indeed poor leadership in Africa have not only contributed to the socio-political and cultural problems in Africa, but to the environmental crisis and mismanagement of various resources that can aid the progress of Africa. This paper affirms that effective leadership remains a propitious tool of environmental sustainability in Africa.

Keywords: Leadership, Effective leadership, Environmental sustainability in Africa

1. Introduction

Leadership remains essentially pivotal to the progressive development of any society. It makes good the saying that the rise and fall of any society is largely dependent on leadership. The progressive development and sustainability of societies also largely depends on effective leadership, as leaders can be affirmed to be the change agent of societies.

Africa, as a populous black continent, blessed with numerous human and natural resources has been largely plagued with the problem of poor, ineffective leadership.

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African is often negatively characterized by corrupt leadership, administrative ineptitude, mismanagement of funds, ethno-religious crisis, socio-cultural cum political conflicts and many other civil unrest, that disrupt the peaceful co-existence of citizens around the nation-states and indeed the continent. These negative peculiarities that stems from leadership crisis, has largely led to the deterioration of Africa's competitiveness with other continents of the world. The productivity and indeed progressivity of African countries is immensely truncated by the poor leadership and rancorous crisis that had largely been visible in many countries of Africa.

Leadership crisis in Africa and its hydra-headed effects, is made visible in all strata, and spheres of social existence. It is also uniquely visible in the environmental problems that have threatened the African continent. Industrialization which in itself is a beneficial development of the modern era, has largely been managed poorly thus boomeranging in negative shades. The problems of gas flaring, oil spillage etc, has largely beclouded the benefits of an industrial society, and hence affects the human society and environment negatively. Deforestation, hunting, flood and other environmental challenges has immensely threatened the African continent in a detrimental manner.

One cannot but hold, that the effective management and sustainability of our environment, is largely dependent on effective leadership and management. Africa therefore requires effective leaders, to pilot the affairs of the human society and environment towards profoundly productivity and development.

2. Leadership Crisis in Africa

The word leadership has remained popular amongst various authors and has been x-rayed from various standpoints with distinct interpretations. Generally, the word leadership is derived from the phrase "to lead" which implies to direct and influence people towards a desired path. Leadership is the act of influencing, controlling and directing people towards the actualization and achievement of specific goals and objectives.

Myles Munroe defines leadership as the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by a passion, generated by a vision, produced by a conviction ignited by a purpose (54).

For Njoku, leadership is the 'ability to lead and coordinate people effectively for the realization of the common good" (Njoku 2019). Onah conceives it as a concerted effort of individuals with the authority and responsibility to plan, organize, coordinate, lead and control activities of others, with the intent of achieving specific organizational goals. (Onah, 2021)

It is a truism that leadership is an essential tool of organizational progress, purposeful achievement and sustainable development. Good and effective leadership can lead to the progressive development and common good of a nation. The attainment of meaningful reform and objective is largely dependent on leadership. (Kauzya and Balogun, 2018).

Africa however, has persistently experienced poor leadership that has affected its development adversely. It is a truism, that many African countries are laden with leadership crisis that are variously depicted through ineffective leadership, corruption, ethno-

centricism, mismanagement of funds etc. Sadly these persistent leadership problems has catalyzed into the hydra-headed problems of insecurity, ethno-religious crisis, poor infrastructural development, economic down-turns and many other issues that adversely affect the country and the development of the nation-state.

Africa, despite its numerous natural and human resources, has consistently been likened to a land of intense abject poverty, a land characterized by high rate and infant mortality, a land of poor infrastructural development, a war prone zone, characterized by ethno-religious conflicts, insecurity and perpetual coup de ta. Africa remains the continent facing some of the most complex economic, political and social challenges in the globalized world...citizen's expectations are broadly unfulfilled...Leadership has far too often become a tool of disservice to the majority of Africans (Landry Signe, 2022)

One wonders what could be the possible cause of this negative irony. Sadly, the retrogressive nature of Africa, and indeed many African countries can truly be traced to leadership failure. Mba observes that: more than five decades after independence, African states remain in a vicious cycle of conflict, stunted development and finally characterized by all indices of destructive governance, this time not as a result of colonial invasion, but by the character of its leader-power polities, endemic corruption, clientilism and politics of patronage (Mba,2013)

It is no gainsaying the fact, that one of the major challenges of Africa is immense corruption in leadership, many African leaders could be said to be largely corrupt.

It is indeed worrisome that most political leaders in Africa are involved in massive corruption and misappropriation of public funds. In most cases, public funds that are specifically marked for the development of the common good of citizens are largely used to satisfy the personal gains of these political leaders. "It is observed that in the last three decades Africa has lost between \$597 billion and \$ 1.4 trillion to illicit financial flow" (Sultan, 2014). This is largely a product of corrupt practices.

It is immensely problematic and disturbing to affirms, that most political leaders in Africa place their personal interest and gains above the general interest of citizens. In this regard, egocentricism becomes another cluck in the wheel of progress and Africa's sustainable development. Egocentricism remains one derailing factor that distort effective leadership and governance. One cannot but note that leadership in many African nations, are bedeviled with the contestation of the leader's ego and personal interest, with that of the state. In most cases, many African leaders extol their personal gains and that of their families and friends, thus suppressing and denigrating the interest of the citizens. This accounts for why funds meant for infrastructural development are often diverted to serve individual ends. 'African leaders have actually been at the centre of persistent corruption, have aided illicit financial outflows and capital flight, frustrated local ingenuity and led states as their personal property' (Japhace, 2015). Ogbu reports President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria as asserting, that many African leaders constitute the problem of the Africa continent, as most of them place their ego above the interest of the people they lead (Ogbu, 2012).

Ethnocentrism can be identified as another element that distort effective leadership in Africa. It is disheartening to note that African leadership is largely characterized and influenced by ethno-religious colouration and association. Most African leaders are prone to tilting to their ethnic affiliations, thus favouring and paying more allegiance to their

ethnic/religious groups, than to the central government which they are expected to be in charge of. This explains why most African leaders, favour their ethnic affiliation and people of their ethno-religious groups more than others. It also explains why certain infrastructural asset which could be largely beneficial to the populace are monopolized and cited in certain ethnic geographical zone, which the leader emanates from.

Sadly, many African leaders still live with ethnocentric mindset and operate with what Asouzu calls the 'Maxim of the nearer the better, the safer'. This mindset believes strongly, that it is better to relate with people of a common ethnic origin and it is safer to do so. Ultimately, this ethnocentric mindset, is largely antithetical to the progressive development of any society.

Suffice it to affirm, that leadership that is negatively ethnocentric has the propensity of polarizing the nation-state within ethnic lines. This polarity often catalyzes a consistent struggle for hegemony and supremacy. In this light, some ethno-religious groups are likely to see themselves as being supreme and better than others, thus resulting in an unhealthy tension in the polity.

Ineffective leadership and governance has the capacity of propelling civil unrest, insecurity economic down turn and poverty. Many African countries are burdened with the challenges of insecurity and ethno-religious conflict. This can implicitly be traced to bad governance and ineffective leadership. There is no gainsaying that fact, that many African countries are faced with numerous economic problems, as their economies are in a state of comatose, or near collapse. This could be largely attributed to leadership failure and mismanagement of public funds. These and many more challenges can be attributed to leadership failure and crisis in Africa. Grey mills affirms thus:

'Africa's poverty is not because of lack of capital, access to world markets, technical experts, or the unfair global economic system, it is rather because African leader have made choices and decided to keep the continent in abject poverty'(6). Mba reiterate this, when he affirms, that the fundamental cause of African under-development and conflict lies in the vicious leadership in the continent (Mba, 2013)

Suffice it to state, that the primary essence of leadership is the protection of lives, properties, and the common interest of the generality, thus leading the people to safety, growth and prosperity. Japhace and Edward observes that "power does not belong to leaders but to people and that the role of leaders is not to rule but lead their people into prosperity, freedom, equity and development" (Japhace, 2015). Leadership in Africa must be goal oriented, people centered and targeted at the ultimate development of the nation-states, and indeed the continent.

3. Environmental Challenges in Africa

Africa as a continent is tremendously rich in natural resources ranging from greenish virgin land, natural gas, water body, oil, mineral, to massive forest and wildlife. It plays host to large proportion of the world's natural resources-renewable and non-renewable. United Nations reports affirms that:

Africa is home to some 30 percent of the world's mineral reserves, eight percent of the world's natural gas and 12 percent of the World's oil reserves. The continent has 40 percent of the world's gold and up to 90 percent of its chromium and platinum. The largest

reserves of cobalt, channels, platinum and uranium in the world are in Africa. It holds 65 percent of the world's arable lands and ten percent of the planet's internal renewable fresh water source.

Africa is undoubtedly endowed with immense Natural resources. Natural Resources undoubtedly contributes significantly to the capital growth and wealth creation of most countries in Africa. Importantly, over 70 percent of citizens in African countries depend largely on their forest and woodland for survival, as land remains a non-negotiable asset and socio-cultural resource and heritage.

While it is laudable to affirm the tremendous endowment of Africa's natural resources, it is however disheartening to note that much of it, can hardly be transformed to wealth creation that benefits the citizens directly. In other words Africa's tremendous natural resources are not properly utilized to the optimal benefit of citizens. As earlier pointed in this paper, the challenge of leadership in Africa is again problematic in this instance, as corrupt leadership distort the proper utilization of the resources. Many corrupt African leaders monopolize the wealth created through the natural resources embedded in African continent. For instance Africa loses an estimated USD 195 billion annually of its natural capital through illicit financial flows, illegal mining, illegal logging, the illegal trade in wildlife, unregulated fishing and environmental degradation and loss" (UN Document, 2022).

One cannot but assert, that the continuous unsustainable exploitation and abuse of nature and its tremendous resources in Africa is a precipice for environmental disaster. Africa's natural environment has been largely raped, abused, mismanaged and continually destroyed. Africa is currently faced with several environmental challenges such as land degradation, deforestation, bush burning, destruction of the wild life, bio diversity loss, vulnerability to climate change, flood etc.

While modernization and industrialization accounts for some of the reasons for the destructions of the natural environment, many Africans consciously but unintentionally engage in activities that destroys the green vegetation and natural environment of Africa. For instance the destruction of the forest and wildlife without any protection of such is largely unacceptable and detrimental to humans and non-human animals. The continuous flaring of gas is not only detrimental to health, but to the environment. Illegal oil refining and mining are also activities that destroy our environment.

Again, various natural disaster contributes to the challenges of our environment. Floods and fire outbreaks have significantly destroyed Africa's natural environment, and will continually do so, if adequate measures and policies are not put in place to stem the tide. The activities of many oil refining companies through oil spillage and the illegal refineries and mining sites, contribute a whole lot to the continual destruction of the African soil. It is disheartening to note, that oil spillage on the land and water body, contributes to the destruction of plant and animal. Many activities that destroy the natural habitat are largely human and constitute the problem of our natural environment.

Africa's natural environment has been immensely plundered by uncontrolled human activities and natural disaster. This has remained detrimental to both human and non-human animal, and indeed to the entire eco-system. These devastating occurrences if unchecked will snowball into the problems of food shortage, outbreak of diseases, water

scarcity, poverty, economic down turn, conflict, civil unrest and the displacement of people from their ancestral homes, thereby leading to an unprecedented problem of migration. Grant x-rays the implication of this natural disaster and other environmental challenges on many African Continent. He observes that in Nigeria for instance, “a sea level rise of one meter could displace 6.3 million people in Lagos alone and change the spatial distribution and density of both formal and informal urban settlements (Grant, 2015).

The problems of draught, air pollution and water pollution cannot be undermined, as it contributes to some of the environmental problems of Africa. The gravity of these problems, is that it has direct effects and implications on people’s health. Many Africans are faced with various diseases and ailment due to lack of clean water and numerous environmental pollution they are prone to. Walker observes that “Africa is the continent that contributes the least to the earth’s environmental challenge, yet it is the most vulnerable to its impact. (Walker, 2022)

The impact of climate change and other environmental changes is largely felt on the health of many in Africa.

It is disheartening to note, that environmental challenges in Africa largely catalyzes immense health challenges. In other words, the two are largely interwoven. Clay observes that:

“Half of Africa’s almost 450 million inhabitants have no access to health services, while two thirds lack safe drinking water...environmentally-related disease compromise the continents productivity, making it more difficult to generate revenue to fight the environmental health problem (Clay, 2022).

It is no gainsaying the fact, that Africa’s environmental challenges is largely hydra-headed, with multiple effects on poverty, diseases, civil unrest, rapid population growth, poor environmental management, corrupt government policies, infant mortality and other dangerous effects on citizens.

One open secret remains that poor leadership in Africa stands tall as a major factor in the deplorable state of African Environment. In tackling this, effective leadership must become therefore a major priority of the African continent.

4. Effective Leadership as a Panacea for Sustainable Environmental Development in Africa

Africa as a land profoundly blessed and endowed with immense natural and human resources can truly take its rightful place in the world’s competitiveness when its leadership crisis are adequately addressed. The myriad of challenges faced by Africa is not unconnected to poor leadership, but truly interwoven in the web of its leadership failure. In the light of this therefore effective leadership remains essentially propitious to tackling the knotty environmental challenges in Africa.

Effective leadership can be x-rayed to be an altruistic, selfless and purpose-oriented leadership and governance, that is targeted at achieving certain goals and objectives that translates to fulfillment of the common good of the citizens. In other words, this can be examined as good Governance and leadership that is people oriented, with the primary responsibility of ensuring the common interest and wellbeing of the generality of citizens.

Effective leaders are those who are inspirational role models of virtue and ethical and moral leadership (Nicolaidis, 2019) An effective leader is further viewed as one who is educated, knowledgeable, honest, trustworthy, fair in all manners, persevering and sociable in nature (Adedoyin, 2016).

Leadership in this sense must be propelled by vision of contributing meaningfully to the wealth creation, protection and investment of the nation's resources toward the improvement of the lives of citizens. In this regard therefore, African leaders must rise beyond egocentrism and personal interest. They must essentially uphold the interest of the citizens above and beyond their private interest and gains. Africa leaders must appoint people with a high level of altruism and good disposition towards the protection and restoration of confidence of citizens and ultimately ensuring the progressive development of their society.

Leadership in Africa must rise beyond the baggage of corruption and illicit practices that are detrimental to the progress of the society. Corruption in leadership must be nipped on the board and leadership must be devoid of such. There must be a distinction between state/public funds and the private funds of leaders. In this sense, resources meant for the people must exhaustively be used for the development of the society and the betterment of the lives of citizens.

The transcendence of leadership beyond corruption must be achieved through a thorough screening process that elects people of impeccable character with good intentions and antecedent. Fundamentally African leadership must go beyond the rhetoric of corrupt practices. Leadership in Africa, must be people oriented, and targeted at building a common wealth that will be beneficial to the hoi poloi and the sustainable development of African nations.

In doing this therefore, egocentrism, ethnocentrism and the politics of favoritism, must be jettisoned and the essentials of equity, justice, fairness and equality before the law enthroned. Africa must ensure a proper building and strengthening of systems and institutions whose operations go beyond individuals. Strong institutions make a smooth, proper running of governance. Therefore, African leadership must strengthen her institutions and place everyone equal before the law. African leaders must develop effective policies that are people focused and which can impact favorably on the society.

Suffice it to affirm, that effective leadership is fundamentally necessary and an indispensable tool of sustainable development in Africa. Effectiveness in leadership can immensely address the environmental challenges in Africa. The numerous environmental challenges in Africa requires good governance and people-oriented leadership. Proper policies must be put in place to tackle the continuous destruction and misuse of the natural environment. Policies that will enhance the preservation of our wildlife and other natural resources must also be enacted and enforced.

One cannot but affirm, that corruption free leadership in African will largely enhance wealth creation, investment, productivity and sustainable development. Where this is achieved, illicit flow or transfer of public funds for private gains will be eliminated and funds meant for the public will be utilized satisfactorily for infrastructural development in Africa. Accountability in leadership is an essential factor which cannot be undermined in Africa. African leaders must be transparently accountable to its citizens. The true essence of social contract must be respected as leaders must see their citizens as

major stakeholders in the progress of the state. Landry observes that ‘Accountable leadership can positively transform Africa into an economically, politically and socially competitive region in the globalized economy, while fulfilling citizen’s expectations’ (Landry, 2022).

Effective leadership and governance remains a necessary condition for environmental sustainability in Africa. The sustainable development of African nations is largely dependent on good leadership. Hence where this is achieved, there is bound to be economic recovery and sustainable development, infrastructural development, good security system, peaceful co-existence of citizens, as well as environmental sustainability and productivity.

5. Conclusion

In concluding this paper, suffice it to affirm, that Africa has been immensely affected with diverse environmental challenges. These challenges remain detrimental to the growth, progress and development of the continent, if not properly handled. Africa plays essential role in the progress of the world and the preservation of wild life and diverse species of various non-human animals. Africa’s natural environment contributes immensely to the provision of man’s needs and indeed the progress of nations around the world. The preservation of this natural environment and eco-system is not only of utmost importance, but urgent. The sustainable economic, infrastructural, and socio-political development of African countries and indeed African continent, is largely dependent on its leadership. Africa requires effective leadership and good governance in other to address the myriad challenges that confront the continent. African leaders must be altruistically conscious and determined to drive the common good of the populace. Good governance must be consciously dispensed and public funds properly utilized for the development of the various nation-state and continent at large. One cannot but affirm that leadership in Africa, must drive good policies that will protect the natural environment and enhance productivity. Proper policies that will protect the natural environment, and enhance effective productivity of natural resources must be encouraged. Human exploitative activities that plunder, denigrate and destroy the natural environment must be adequately addressed. In this regards illegal mining, illicit oil exploration, deforestation, destruction of wild life and other human activities that are immensely detrimental to the natural environment must be curbed, while proper measures must be put in place to address non-human activities that also destroy our environment. The prosperous and progressive development of Africa and indeed African nations is largely dependent on effective leadership and good governance.

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