



Leadership character: A prerequisite to human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots in Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examined leadership character as a prerequisite to human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots in Nigeria. The study enunciated the qualities of a good leader that impact positively on human resource development and transformation at the grassroots and paves the way to national development and transformation. This write up highlights how leadership character/quality can ginger human resource development and transformation and alleviate the problems of the people at the grassroots. A good leader gives priority attention to the most basic needs of the people and optimizes human resource development among others. The leader governs both wealth and human resources of the nation, and the most important is the human resources. Good leadership never allowed the able bodied citizens to lie idle to the detriment of national development. As it is observed that many skilled Nigerians are not gainfully employed. The good leader creates job opportunities for skilled, semi-skilled or even unskilled peoples according to their abilities thereby transforming human resources to the grassroots. There are some countries that do not have mineral resources, but their leaders have regard for human resource development and transformation. The leaders of such countries trained and developed human beings who later turned and developed their nation. The study suggests periodic leadership training for the new breed of Nigerian leaders on how to develop human resource and transformation at the grassroots.

Keywords: *Leadership character, human resource development, grassroots*

Introduction

Nigeria transitioned to civilian rule in 1999, but before then, it was observed that every now and then, human beings were executed for one pardonable crime or the other, many people die of hunger, because majority of the citizens wallow in the hollow hand of poverty. Illiteracy was prominent for lack of quality schools and educational system. The greatest need in governance is positive, constructive, dynamic, creative, realistic and effective leadership. Newman (1997) observed that leadership character is the most important item in business, industry, government, labour, education and even church



organizations are starving for effective leadership; that gives human resource development priority attention in administration.

For there may be people filling administrative positions, but do not have the interest of the people at heart. It is observed that such leaders are always keen in eliminating or humiliating anybody who challenged or questioned them. They are ready to eliminate their political rivalries, at the corridors of power or dehumanize them to mere garbage. It is observed that after people have suffered deprivation, hunger, lived in abject poverty, oppressed, dehumanized for what is theirs and been marginalized, it is only effective leader who have human regard and respect at heart that can reconcile conflicting issues and abuses with reason and heal old gapping wounds to the grassroots. Adeoti (2005) expressed that one of the most crucial issues that countries recovering from prolonged observable violent conflicts and civil wars and those that have gone through a brutal and oppressive regime, is usually how to deal with the past, heal the painful wounds on individuals and the collective national psyche, reconcile victims perpetrators of heinous criminality, and incubate national memory as a guide against the repetition of such vindictive situations in the future.

In line with Adeoti (2005) there is need for the leaders in the contemporary Nigeria, to thoroughly and seriously examine, evaluate and check areas where the past leaders deviated in their leadership that bred dichotomy, which resulted in the cold wars and open clashes among states, tribes or groups. Such loopholes should be properly scrutinized and tightened up to make room for human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots of Nigerian states. It is observed that democracy is a key element in modern theories of development. It is believed that there is a necessary system of harnessing social energies and resources towards combating inequality, human misery, unemployment, illiteracy, oppression, unhealthy political rivalry, marginalization, infringement upon human right and deprivation.

Diamond (1999) observed that democracy appears in the long run to respond better to the needs of the poor and marginalized, because it enables such groups to organize and mobilize themselves to participate in the political process. In effect, it refers



to a process and practice of harmonizing diverse socio-political interests in the society, by developing human beings, who are the intellectual human resources that will pilot the democratic elements or issues. For the maximization of democratic system of government in any country, human resource development and institutional transformation at the grassroots should be optimally considered. A leader of great worth takes an evaluative procedure in terms of what he/she has in store for the community /country. How he/she would encourage human beings to work hard on themselves for their personal resource development and transformation, then they would be able to transform their nation

Good leadership at the grassroots leads to institutional transformation which is a way of making the impact of democracy felt in every nook and cranny of the rural areas of the nation. Good governance at the grassroots levels means setting goals that will enhance human resource development in all ramifications and improving quality of life in the rural areas. (Ukeje, 2005). It is important to note that it is human beings who will carry out the work of transformation at the grassroots, which is why it is very necessary to pilot human resource development in all areas of human endeavor

Human resource development

Psychologically, human resource development is the process which results from constant interaction and interchange of energy within the individual, the physical environment and all that exist in the ecosystems and the constant fluxes have both qualitative and quantitative impact on human behaviour. Implicitly, through good leadership, growth and development are in the provision of all the things that make human life worth living. It makes the provision for conducive and safety environment to live in; it articulates and realizes full potentialities and life fulfillment. It entails the bettering of human condition in the society, ensuring better performance and excellent quality in all the dimensions of life through institutional transformation at all levels. For example in the tertiary institutions where research for human resource development and transformation is prominent, the administrators (leaders) should ensure that teachers/ lecturers are motivated with financial support to attend conferences locally and internationally to



acquire more new knowledge to enrich the students with more new intellectual skills. The measure of any development strategy is its impacts on human beings who are the mentors of the procession of change, transformation and beneficiaries of such process. Uwalaka (2007/2008) observed that the problems of underdevelopment revolve around the issue of lack of human resource development and national transformation because people are uneducated, unskilled and unhealthy and have limited resources to maximize their own potentialities, and those who may be better qualified to handle development issues (like behavioural scientists- psychologists) are not allowed to come near where the national issues are discussed let alone being at the helm of national issues. It is important to note that societies and economies grow because the human beings they are made up of also grow in all dimensions. Human resource development is an integral of national transformation. If any nation seems to be developing and the citizens dwell in the domains of illiteracy, abject poverty, misery, wants, anxiety, insecurity of life and property, then there is no development. The issue of human resource development and transformation is a fight against all forms of evil that impinge on the life and rights of the citizens, resulting in deprivation and suffering. A good leader fights against all forms of human oppression and suppression, material poverty, socio-moral poverty, intellectual poverty, even spiritual poverty and gears towards complete human resource development and transformation. In concrete terms human resource development and transformation concerns the provision of all essential facilities, safeguarding, protecting human life, rights and dignity. It concerns the provision of formidable security unit at the Federal, State and Local Government levels of the country down to the remotest part of the country. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how leadership character can enhance human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots in Nigeria.

Review of related literature

Since independence Nigeria has encapsulated herself in the vicious circles of crises that have almost truncated all avenues of human resource development and national transformation. It is observed that the wave of crime in the country is alarming and the



level of insecurity great. Lives are lost almost everyday. People are kidnapped, trafficked, dehumanized and murdered in cold blood. All these anomalies precipitated because of bad characters in governance. Winston Churchill in Newman (1997) stated that ‘the empires of the future are the empires of the mind’. This statement may imply that the development and transformation of the nation will be guaranteed by leaders of worth who consider the nation’s human resource development and national transformation at heart.

Newman (1997) enunciated some principles of effective leadership. Of course it is only leaders with good characters who will adhere to the principles utilizing them for human resource development, management and national transformation. The principles include: Vision, discipline, wisdom, courage, humility, decision maker, friendship, and have inspirational power. A good Leader must have vision. A dynamic leadership is always fired by vision which is the key to understanding the need to motivate human resource development and national transformation to the grassroots. Leaders with vision see more and further than others in terms of what is needed and how to go about it. Good and effective leaders have empires in their brains and can easily decipher what is good for the welfare, resource development and transformation of their people. On a very important note imagination that is thinking ahead is one’s dream machine that propels and motivates actions. Leaders with good characters organize special dream times; to operate effectively in their governance, to tap all the natural resources, by gainfully employing all the human resources at their disposal and encouraging new human resources development. Indisputably, a leader who has vision sees that the most invaluable asset in his/her hand is human resource, which should be well organized and taken proper care of, so as to achieve greatness in the administration. However, the tragedy, experienced in the contemporary Nigeria is that human resource development and management abilities are crushed in the hands of bad and greedy leadership. Helen Keller, that wonderful blind and deaf person, (Newman, 1997) said “the greatest tragedy to befall a person is to have sight but lack vision”. Leadership vision must be comprehensive, must be challenging and it must be focused. Leadership vision must be precise, clear and concise. It must be noted that there is nothing that excites and



motivates people like to watch their leaders accomplish something special and worthwhile.

A good leader knows what to do next; and how to bring appropriate and monetary resources to bear on the need at hand. And most importantly knowing how to organize human resources and gear them towards national transformation at the grassroots, thereby making them feel belong and have the opportunity to share in the gains as well as in the loss at the grassroots. An organized and effective leader never allowed lucrative and positive ideas or good suggestions from his/ her followers to go unattended (Newman 1997; Sesay, 2005). A good leader works with goal setting. Thomson (2000) postulated that goals are visions that have feet, with specific measurable steps to achieve. A good leader sets goals that can tone up his/her mental and physical health and those of the followers. Goals generate respect for human right and life and creates avenue for personality and human resource development. Goals help the leader to realize and enjoy the feeling of accomplishment. Goals produce persistence to work for the common good. Goals act as a check and balance on the leader; a good and intelligent leader while setting his/her goals, may set these questions before himself or herself.

- (1) What do I want to do for the good of the common people?
- (2) What can I do to up lift the marginalized at the grass roots?
- (3) What can I do to enhance human resource development and transformation at the grassroots?
- (4) What can I do to create job opportunities for the jobless, to ensure that no able bodied human being is idle?
- (5) Where do I set priority attention in order to achieve success?
- (6) With whom do I want to work and what could I like to share for the common good?
- (7) What is the most important basic need of the people at the grassroots, is it good water supply, rural electrification, access good roads, health care center, school or market?
- (8) To ensure security of life and property in the country?



(9) To provide shelter to the homeless?

Haggain, (1986, in Newman (1997) posited that a good leader thinks how to alleviate the problems of the people at the rural areas (at the grassroots). Such problems as, good access roads, potable and drinkable water, electricity, agricultural development, building, market, good quality schools, health care programme, security and provision of shelter at affordable rate, the provision of these will enhance total human personality development, human resource development and national transformation. It may be obvious that a leader who considers the provision of these needs of the people will be dear to the people.

A good leader must have discipline. Discipline is the basic set of tools that human beings require to solve life's problems. Discipline is mandatory for leaders to be effective in their administration and achieve their set goals and dreams (Peck, 1998). A highly disciplined leadership's focus is what distinguishes those who make things happen from those who watch things happen. People of this caliber make good things happen at the grassroots for common good. It is only a disciplined leadership character that can gainfully manage human- beings for national transformation.

An effective leader must be wise, the personality of a wise leader is the ability to apply knowledge and experience to any given situation to achieve the objectives or set goals. Wise leader knows how to use his knowledge and work on human resource development for national growth and transformation to the grassroots. One of the tests of effective leadership is the ability to recognize a problem at the teething stage before it becomes an emergency. For instance, if the only bridge connecting the river-rine community and the rest of the people of the local government is cracked on the edge, the wise leader's attention is drawn to it for urgent repair and maintenance that would save the rural people from the tension, fear and anxiety associated with impassable bridge. A good leadership character upholds maintenance culture and develops strategies to salvage any deplorable condition of the environment before human beings perish in it. A good leader's concern is all about the welfare, development and growth of human beings and institutional transformation in his constituency/country. Leaders should invest time to exchange ideas



of leadership among themselves, through, seminars, workshop or conferences for good governance at the grassroots such may serve as refresher course among leaders.

In the contemporary society and Nigeria in particular, there is need for periodic training of the new breed of leaders and governors (by behavioural scientist – psychologists) on the issues of leadership character for good governance in human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots. Wise leaders never allowed the able bodied citizens to lie idle to the detriment of the nation. Wise leaders create employment opportunities for the skilled or semi-skilled and unskilled peoples according to their abilities. Onaiyekan (2006) observed that many Nigerian young graduates roam the streets unemployed for years or underemployed, hawking wares and some are vendors, or under network umbrellas selling recharge cards there is something seriously wrong. He lamented that every able bodied hand that lies idle is a loss to the nation and it is a sign of unwise or manipulative governance. It is observed that through wise, good and honest governance at the grassroots, formidable government and leaders who have both human and national development at heart have achieved reputation and recognition in the world. Good leaders of countries like Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong, through good governance and respect for human beings, trained and developed human resources, who later turned and developed their nation. It is said that these countries have no crude oil, hardly any minerals, and little or no land even to farm on. All they can boast of is the number of people who are literate and ready to work and who are put in their positions and areas in the field of their study to work and produce for the nation (Ukeje, 2001). Nwoke (2011) observed that there is human resource diversity among Nigerians, that it only requires a good and wise leader to utilize human resources to tap the Nigeria natural endowed resources; and to achieve this, people must be employed and placed in the areas of their specialization

The greatest contribution wise and good leaders can make to humanity is to use their power in a positive way to help and inspire others who are ready and eager to learn. It must be noted that chance favours prepared mind. It was reported (Daily independence Dec. 9, 2008, p. 13p) that Dubai the gem of the Gulf State, derive only 10% of its great



wealth from oil and the rest comes from, wise and good human management skills of the rulers of its citizens. Without mincing words, there can be no substitute for proper development of human resources. The lack of natural resource can be wisely remedied if the leaders can train the people to be wise and resourceful personalities. It may be obvious that no matter how rich a country is in natural resources if the citizens are not wisely motivated and well managed by wise and honest leaders, little or nothing lucrative will happen. It is only after wisely training, appreciating and managing human skill resource that natural resources like the petroleum will be searched for, extracted and tapped by human resource talents (Wami, 2006).

Newman (1997) observed that more than anything else, followers want to believe that their leaders are wise, ethical and honest. Followers want to reckon their leaders as human beings worthy of emulation. Flaws like corruption and dishonesty seem to occur when the leader loses sight of the fact that leadership position is of a single purpose that is to serve others. A leader who has wisdom demonstrates integrity in all ramifications as he/she delves into the rural areas of his/her administrative territory to alleviate the problems of the people who suffer ailments of marginalization, live in abject poverty, and who suffer deprivation of all types. A leader of integrity reconciles conflicts and abuses by acts of virtue. A wise and good leader proves his/her mettle when he/she is in the mist of the followers. He/she teaches by examples, the importance of honesty, dedication, integrity and devotedness to duty. A good and wise leader as he/she interacts with the people easily understands that people can be changed not by coercion or intimidation but by acts of love and charity. It is important to note that the example the leader sets, both positive and negative, will establish the standards of his/her administration. A good leader who has the interest of his/her people at heart is simple and unassuming, listens with rapt attention to the communities' opinions and views, over issues in discussion, what they may take as their priority need. A leader, who has good listening ear, is a mark of good personality quality.

The leader must have courage which is the quality that enables people to meet danger without giving way to fear. Psychologically courage is the innate strength, vigor,



undaunted spirit and determination to face any danger. It is the strength to venture, persevere and withstand hardships. Whatever the situation a courageous leader will always be at his post with valour. “Courage is three letter word which is ‘yes’ to life not backing down, when adversity is faced. Courage is acting with veiled fear and with determination. Courage is doing what the individual is afraid to do. There can be no courage when the individual is scared”. Eddie Rickenbacker. “Success is never final, and failure is never fatal, its courage that counts” Unknown. “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear” Mark Twain. “One man with courage is a majority” Courage is required to wade through the ocean of difficulties encountered in governance. It is required of the leader to say yes or no to some delicate issues. Courage is required to meet out disciplinary actions on offenders no matter whose horse goared. A courageous leader masters the inner strength to surmount certain insurmountable obstacles in governance; especially if others had condoned them. Failure may come but one can turn a failure into a success, only if one could learn from it. Good leaders grow by learning from their mistakes or other leaders’ failures. For instance, some of the new generation state governors and local government chairmen in Nigeria seem to be learning a lot from the mistakes and failures of their predecessors; and courage is required to stand up to the truth and condemn the limitation or some nefarious behaviours of the past leaders and strongly guard against such mistakes . Followers also need courage to say no to certain issues that may not be for the good of humanity; which the leader might want to implement in the administration. Followers must muster the courage and ask, where is our nation heading to? Why the political instability, why poverty in the midst of affluence? Why the down turn in our economy? Why the insecurity? Why dehumanization of people? Why bad roads all over the country? Why do we lack maintenance culture? Why are the Nigerians suffering in the midst of plenty?

Humility is an important characteristic in the life of any good leader. One of the surest evidence of greatness is the humane quality of the leader. Newman (1997, Sesay, 2005) observed that a humble person can neither be put down nor exalted. A humble leader is intelligent in handling issues of importance. A humble leader in his/her



unassuming behaviour moves the citizen to develop their innate human potentialities for individual transformation and participate in community development. A humble and honest leader can be tactful and can easily attract philanthropists to assist his/her government; and he/she uses any financial help that comes to him/her for human resource development and transformation at the grassroots. Humility seen in the leader makes the citizen have confidence and trust in their leader. A humble leader attracts the attention of all, including the disables. Schur and Kruse (2000) observed that when a humble leader speaks his/her words sink into the heart of the feeble ones. A humble leader can easily effect social changes for the good of other people, by working out possibilities. Bauman (2000) and Barrera (2000) observed that social support is an exchange of resource, such as emotional comfort or material goods between two individuals where the provider intends the resources to enhance the well-being of the recipient. A humble leader when dealing with the common people at the grassroots could get the best of the community by empathizing with the citizens in their needs or desires especially with regard to what will enhance their human resource development and transformation.

For a good leader to get to the grassroots in his/her governance has to organize the decision-making process. Effective leaders constantly work at making decisions simple. A good leader who wants to do well in his/her administration should know that there are certain rules or guidelines to follow, to make the right decision for the common good. A good leader does not rush decision-making because of pressures from people. A wise and responsible leader takes time to clarify the issues for which decision will be taken such a leader gathers the facts and weighs the prons and cons of the issues and then take decision (Newman, 1997). A good leader is a person of action and deals with challenges. A person of action must be matured in leadership art and responsibility, because once a decision is made, the leader moves forward and faces the next challenge. One of the tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem and act immediately to solve it, before it becomes emergency. For example if the community needed good water supply, a good leader decides without delay to provide good source of water supply to the community. Duffy and Atwater (2001) observed that leadership is meant to provide and



cater for the needs of the people, in such areas that enhance the living condition. Eaves (2001) observed that when the necessary amenities are provided with the environment free from strife and stress, prevention and intervention of some disease can be easily achieved. So a responsible leader who takes good decision for the common good can prevent a lot of future problems.

Success in life depends upon the support and help of other good people. No one makes it alone. My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me” (Henry Ford in Newman, 1997). For human resource development and transformation at the grassroots, the leader needs good people who will make positive things happens at the areas as planned. Leaders set the goals to be achieved in the areas of their administration, but without some honest people those goals will not be attained. It is observed that successful relationship is based on mutual respect. A good leader as he/she recognizes his/her self worth should also acclaim the self worth of friends and other people in his/her territory. However, without mincing words, one of the great problems people in the modern society are facing is the scarcity of genuine and honest friends. For good governance, the leader should see his/her followers as friends, because friendship is not only doing something for someone, but it is caring for someone which is what every person needs. A good leader makes he, or she likeable. An effective leader does not expect every one to be perfect; he/she much expect individual differences and human limitations and accommodate them. He/she must also cultivate the virtue of patience when dealing with people, bearing in mind that human beings are complex beings. The leader in order to wade through the ocean of complexities in governance must develop the virtue of mutual attraction, a charismatic quality which pulls people to the leader, through the leader’s characters, manner of approach and other mannerisms. In line with others, the good leader who wants to achieve the set goals at the grassroots must develop commitment skill. The skill of commitment entails that the leader should be a man or a women of his/her word, who stands by it. As a leader his/her commitment is to fight for the good of the people by looking for a way of solving their individual and collective problems at the grassroots. The development of genuine openness is another important skill required of a



leader. A leader who is truly open to his group or co-workers always achieves the set goals or objectives at the grassroots. There may be risk in complete openness but the reward of openness is great. An inspired leader values and appreciates others' efforts and achievement in their assigned tasks.

Leadership involves not only knowing where the leader is going, but also how to effectively work with people. In working together with people, the leader needs warmth, enthusiasm and sensitivity; these will make the leader earn the loyalty of the team or group. For development and transformation at the grassroots, the leader needs the support and loyalty of the group. Newman (1997, Duffy & Wong, 2003) observed that the loyalty of the leader's group is priceless. Loyalty is only given by the followers. Any leader who does what captures the interest of the common people wins the game. At the grassroots the good leader helps people to be resourceful and successful in their endeavours. The leader provides training in different skills to enhance human resource development, poverty alleviation; encourage extra courses and study for those who can, to enhance national growth, development and transformation. "Good leaders can at times spend their own personal resources to alleviate the deplorable conditions of the poor masses at the grassroots. The effective leader striving for human resource development and national transformation at all levels should provide the best possible working environment knowing very well that environment determines people's attitudes and attitudes determines altitude of performance. The better the working environment, the living condition and the physical surrounding and the social amenities they enjoy, the better they feel to belong. A leader, worthy of the name can meet and encourage people personally, share their interests and their dislikes. The common smiles, the thanks and the gestures of kindness go million miles to ginger and motivate the recipients. Leaders should know that praises, appreciation, kind gestures and recognition are powerful motivators and animators in the live of human beings at the grassroots.

To develop human resources and transform the nation at the grassroots and achieve success, the leader must be ready to learn new leadership skills. The development of leadership skills to understand human beings and their problems is a continuous process.



As there are different leadership characters, styles and abilities to understand and deal with human beings so also different leadership skills to embark on social issues of human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots. It may be safe to say that leaders should be perpetual learners. Effective leaders learn to be leaders who know how to tackle social issues and problems at the grass roots for the good of humanity.

To succeed in human resource development and national transformation to the grassroots, leaders in the contemporary society need to study the techniques of successful leaders of old who fought tooth and nail for the emancipation of their continents like (Zik of Africa, Kwame Nkrumah, Awolowo and others) and established both national and human growth and development at the grassroots. For instance the University of Nigeria Nsukka which is one of the first generation citadels of higher learning in Nigeria is the brain child of Dr. Nnamdi Benjamin Azikiwe, whose motor in founding this institution is to restore the dignity of man (the dignity of human beings). So it is important for the new generation leaders to emulate successful leaders of old. Psychologically inspired leaders act as role models and evoke the highest level of commitment and competence possible from the people. It is evident that in all fora of governance, human resource development and transformation should take precedence because human resources pave the way to national growth and transformation.

Implications of the study

By implication, leadership character is a very important item to be considered when choosing or voting for a person who takes leadership mantle in any given society or any organization. For example, in any social system or parastatals, if the leader is not a person of good character, such social system or structure will not survive. It is only men or women of good character who can effect positive changes that will enhance human resource development and transformation in their administration. It is only leaders who have human 'hearts and faces' that will consider human resource development at the grassroots. Any nation that is always suffering from economic crunch, depression and is classified as perpetual undeveloped country, the leaders are not honest they are bad



characters, they are bad people and they are criminals. It is only good people with good characters that make good things happen.

In conclusion, leadership character is a very important item for human resource development and national transformation for good and effective leadership in the contemporary Nigeria, human resource development at the grassroots should be given priority attention. Getting to the grassroots and paying attention people's needs and problems should be the key concerns of any good leader. In line with this, reconciling conflicting issues with reasons, healing previously wounded individuals and groups will certainly make people feel better. For good governance at the grassroots, the leader must be clean in his/her dealing with the common people and have their interest at heart. An effective leader creates job opportunities for able bodied groups, help farmers with farm implements and fertilizers for their farm works. Also building market for business people and farmers to sell their produce. A good leader makes human resource development and transformation a key goal of major concerns at the grassroots and should adopt maintenance culture of the existing and abandoned projects and save much cost for common good. Building of hospitals and equipping them with basic drugs and other essentials is mandatory. Good quality educational system is a priority at the grassroots. This will enhance human resource development and national transformation at the grassroots.

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