

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

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As Nigerians we often imagine the problems of Nigeria are so great they're insurmountable. The truth is, we really don't have problems; we have management challenges. We fail to plan, we're not systematic. It's what's producing unemployment and the frustration and angst in young men and women. It's why things are not working. Our management system is antiquated and not fit for purpose.

Our problems are not insurmountable, we just need to take another look at our management of people and resources. The Lagos trailer gridlock is a simple logistics challenge as well as a supply chain management issue for example. It's clearly inefficient to use trailers to evacuate the quantity of fuel we consume from the ports. We should use cargo rail and create secondary depots all over the country. The trains will take the fuel to secondary depots. This way we eliminate trailers queuing on bridges and damaging them, we eliminate pollution, eliminate the risk of conflagration from a spark, and remove the congestion at our ports. From those depots trailers can evacuate the petrol, or better still we pipe petrol to various petrol stations using a metering system just as we pipe water to houses. I don't see petroleum trailers in England and yet they drive cars.

I'm here to talk to you about visionary leadership within the context of our independence day. I'm going to start by telling a story.

There was a man named Pa Odiwano. He was a messenger in my father's office. My father, now late, was a civil servant. He

retired as a deputy head of department in the Ministry of Information. Pa Odiwano was attached to his unit.

The first thing you'd notice about Pa Odiwano was that he was leathery. Though detached and thin in places, his skin was like tough leather. He was light in complexion but had turned a golden tan from exposure to the sun. His complexion was like the mid progression of the colouration of akara (bean cake) ball as it fried in vegetable oil.

His brows were furrowed and deep in concentration, like someone contemplating a particular problem of this world, like someone having a headache solving a puzzle. This somehow gave him the appearance of an owl. He was a small figure, slightly stooped. He chewed tobacco permanently. The tobacco coloured his teeth - the one or two left on the front row.

The only replacement for the tobacco was a short, stubby and stubborn chewing stick which dangled from his lips every morning, the way Clint Eastwood used to dangle cigarettes in westerns. Pa Odiwano seemed to chew on the stick with impatience.

He was sinewy. There wasn't much fat left in place. That's because Pa Odiwano trekked to work and back every day. He lived in Orile Iganmu and worked at Marina. That's a distance of 18km every day. He could not afford transport fare. The reason he couldn't afford transport fare was not unconnected with the fact he had nine children. How does a lowly messenger feed nine children? They were roughly spaced at gestation intervals, which is another way of saying the kids were barely one year apart, and

by the grace of God, many more to come. You see, Pa Odiwano had a curious understanding of human anatomy. He believed sperm was stored in a pouch in the body, and that a man has to exhaust his sperm bank before final departure. It was almost as if he believed God would judge him for not exhausting his seed bank. And so when you ask Pa Odiwano why so many children he'd simply reply, "The thing never finish for my body."

When you're poor and you have nine children, accommodation becomes a problem. Pa Odiwano lived with his wife and kids in one bedroom. Which of course raises the issue of privacy. Pa Odiwano simply solved his problem by dividing the room into two with a curtain, and so you have the outer court and the holy of holies. Pa Odiwano had simple pragmatic solutions to the problem of poverty.

Now, we can blame Pa Odiwano's predicament on his lack of education but the real problem is, he never planned. He had a management challenge. He believed God would sort things out like a typical Nigerian. He never projected into the future, never asked himself difficult questions, like what kind of accommodation would I need to raise a family of eleven? Would I be able to afford it? Can I afford to feed nine children? What about schooling, can I afford to pay the school fees? Can I really afford that many children given my income? These are not rocket science questions, they're fundamental questions any reasonable person should ask.

That is how we operate as a nation. When it comes to management we're no different from Pa Odiwano. We didn't ask tough questions, we didn't seem to project, and so our population overwhelmed us. Or maybe we lacked the political will, the courage to take tough decisions.

There's of course the question of values. There's leadership greed and avarice. A greedy and avaricious leader only thinks in selfish terms.

Then there are legacy issues like the problem of trust – hegemonic fears. It's the singular reason we go to the brink often; we manage to pull back at the last minute. The civil war taught us a lesson though not everyone. If we can manage our resources very well, there'll be less agitations and less existential threats to the nation. Nobody prosperous wants to imperil his prosperity. And so we suffer as a nation from Odiwano Complex. It's the antonym of visionary leadership.

Because we never planned for the future our economy is dependent on oil revenue. Without the distribution of oil revenue many States can't function. They can't afford to pay salaries. Many of our States are not economically viable. In order words, there are management issues at sub national governments. When oil revenue dips, there's general suffering in the land.

Our inability to plan has created deficits in critical areas of our national life. Nigeria has a population of 170m - 190m depending

on whom you ask, but we have only 35,000 doctors. Turns out the whole of Zamfara State has only 23 doctors! The Minister of Health said so. Lagos has 2,162 hospitals, Zamfara has only 24. In actual fact, there are only 45 federally owned hospitals in the entire nation. Our social services deficiency has engendered medical tourism to places like India and Dubai. These nations suck out \$1bn from our national kitty annually. Nigeria has only 7 radiotherapy machines for cancer patients. None is working at full capacity and so 70% of cancer patients die within 5 years. There are only 152 universities in Nigeria, 68 of which are private universities. Out of 1,428,379 interested applicants, only 415,500 were admitted into university through JAMB in 2015. That's a 29% admittance rate. What happens to the youths who didn't make it? And what happens to those who made it upon graduation? It is estimated 47% of university graduates fail to get employment or are under-employed. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of Nigerian students abroad increased from 26,997 to 71,351. That's also a huge drain of national resources. We can go on and on. We simply failed to plan. If we did, we never executed.

Unlike Nigeria, the United Arab Emirates prides itself in the ability to plan for the future. To quote Sheikh Mohammed, "As a nation, we have always been forward-looking and planning for the future, which has been our driver for success."

The question of vision is on two levels. First is what we call mechanistic vision; second is what we call conceptual vision. It's like trying to create a car. First, you decide what kind of car you want to build, what's the idea of the car. Is it a sports car, or is it a

family sedan, or an all-terrain vehicle? Whatever concept you decide on will then determine the engineering. A sports car cannot be engineered like a family sedan. There's no need for turbo for example. The determination of whether it's a sports car or jeep is what we refer to as the conceptual vision. The engineering is what we call the mechanistic vision. The conceptual vision comes first. But in Nigeria, we have put the cart before the horse. To solve our problems, we first need to decide the type of nation we want. Only then does the issue of engineering arise.

Everyone shouts federalism but federalism is a mechanistic vision, it is not a conceptual vision. And we can't agree on the definition of federalism – is it regional federalism, or resource federalism, or fiscal federalism?

The mechanistic vision of the United Arab Emirates, the functional mandate was created after UAE discovered oil in 1960. At the time, Dubai was a dwindling ex-pearl fishing port struggling for purpose in the region. When oil was discovered the leadership decided that every dollar extracted should be re-invested into diversifying the economy. This is the mechanistic vision: “Use this vast but temporary wealth to create a hub for people, trade, finance, travel, tourism, knowledge and development in the region. To become the number one airline, the number one tourist destination, the number one shipping port, the number one financial centre for the Gulf and emerging markets.” The conceptual vision is to build a new reality for the people, a new future for our children, and a new model of development. We should be talking in those terms.

Our number one priority as a nation therefore, is to first of all define a vision for the nation. We start with a conceptual vision and then develop a mechanistic vision. There seems to be no vision. We just battle with power, battle with militants, battle with terrorists, battle with roads, battle with education, battle with hospitals, battle with ASUU, battle with NLC. Then we battle with our selves. Our youths need something to hold on to, something to latch on to. They need an inspirational anchor. The green colour of our passport must not be the colour of derision and suspicion. It must be the colour of pride. Government officials often complain Nigerians badmouth their country but you don't mandate patriotism, you inspire patriotism.

Without a vision there is no definition of a nation. Without a vision there can be no strategic planning. And when there's no strategic planning, the law of Odiwano Complex kicks in.

In closing, let me quote the words of President Trump at the UN General Assembly: "The nation-state remains the best vehicle for elevating human condition."

This Republic, the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall exist and continue to exist for the common good and benefit of all Nigerians. In this Republic, the dreams of our fathers shall fructify and the aspirations of the young shall be fulfilled.

Our sacred mandate is a prosperous and peaceful nation, where there is justice, equity and amity. This nation shall be a servant of hope and a beacon of light.

I want to thank you for listening. May God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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