

*The language of hunger is universal.*¹

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOOD GOVERNANCE:
ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE POLITICAL CLASS

It is a pleasure to be invited to address this topic as regular followers of my public discourse will agree that the central topic in most of my engagements is good governance. The state of our nation has made the issue of good governance a public topic in all serious gatherings of men and women. The threat we have faced in recent times, ranging from terrorism to banditry, kidnapping, economic devastation, ethnic agitations and youth restlessness culminating in the EndSARS protests and its concomitant state violence, vandalization and looting and now recession, are pointing to no other conclusion than governance to say the least is challenged in Nigeria and we either get it right or face collective damnation.

Both local and international assessments are concurring on the point that Nigeria has been a long-time victim of bad governance. The attitude and performances of our leaders in this regard have not justified a contrary conclusion. No young man of thirty years of age can boast of having tasted what could be described as good governance as the era of Western Nigeria miracle had long gone before he was born. In Udombana's observation which I concur, "Nigerians may not agree on such high-sounding philosophical and political theories as existentialism, metaphysics, idealism, rationalism, nationalism, or pragmatism, but Nigerians everywhere agree on, and desire, good governance, peace, stability, prosperity, freedom, justice and equity. There could be wide disagreements about truths and about telos - the ends of society - but Nigerians desire a country where everyone has an

¹ Nnimmo Bassey, Don't Play Politics with Hunger, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, 2011, page 8.

opportunity to aspire and perspire without inhibitions based on sex, place of birth, language, or other meaningless considerations. They desire a country where merit prevails over mediocrity and nepotism, and where its leaders work for the common good irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliations. Thus, even in the current atmosphere of mistrust and intolerance, Nigerians could proceed on these fundamental issues”. However, in delving into the substance of today’s discourse, it is imperative we examine certain terminologies the analysis of which will form the basis of our conclusion as regards the expectations from the political class. In that regard, we examine what is meant by “ethical leadership” on one hand and “good governance” on the hand.

Meaning of Terms

While it is rare to find a universally acceptable definition for any concept, we will attempt a descriptive meaning of the terms. The challenge always lies in the fact that definitions often reflect the definer’s idiosyncrasy. The term “ethical leadership” is a combination of two different words, namely, “ethics” and “leadership”. Ethical leadership has, therefore, been defined as²:

...a leadership style that highlights the ethical dimension of leadership in management. It refers to the leader’s values, ethical traits and ethical behavior in organizational settings, and the way they relate to employees, organizations, and society. Ethical behavior is understood as one that can be judged according to generally accepted moral norms of behavior (Treviño et al. [2006](#)). Ethics refers to a set of principles and moral rules of behavior that guide human relationships ([Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)) about what is morally good and bad. And leadership involves influence processes within human relationships (Graen

² Páez Gabriunas I. (2017) Ethical Leadership. In: Poff D., Michalos A. (eds) Encyclopedia of Business and Professional Ethics. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23514-1_55-1

and Uhl-Bien [1995](#); Yukl and van Fleet [1992](#)). Thus, ethics in leadership translate into leader's ethical behavior that make followers to act responsibly toward others, by protecting their human dignity and each other's rights and needs (Gini [1998](#); Guillen and Gonzalez [2001](#))..."

The implication of the above is that a responsible leadership is one that takes ethical consideration as primary. The place of ethics in leadership is all encompassing and a leadership without ethical consideration is a liability to governance and the society on which it presides.³ A budding literature and research has developed on the theme of ethical leadership and it is a matter of general agreement among scholars that ethical leadership is *sine qua non* to societal progress as the attitude of a leader has direct impact on the followers not only in terms of being direct recipient of the consequences of his acts but in terms of their own response to similar situations. Thus, Brown et al, defines ethical leadership as "*the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to the followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making*" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). It is their submission that under the supervision of ethical leader, the followers imitate their leader's behaviour and he is believed to have a significant influence on follower's ethical conduct and behaviours. It is, therefore, indisputable that a corrupt leadership has a tendency to transmit the current of corruption to the followers who also see the system as having justified corrupt tendencies in which they must indulge to the detriment of the society. The simple import of the above is that ethical leadership entails leading with some core values.

³ See Israr Ahmad, Yongqiang Gao and Shafei Moiz Ali, A Review of Ethical Leadership and Other Ethics-Related Leadership Theories, published in [URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n29p10](http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n29p10) and accessed on [22/11/2020 at about 3.33 pm](#).

On the other hand, good governance as a concept does not yield to easy definition as observed by Rachel Gisselquist in a 2012 article titled “What Does Good Governance Mean?” published on the website of the United Nations University.⁴ However, by certain characteristics, we can determine what amounts to good governance. In world Bank’s perspective, it includes; efficient public service, reliable judicial system, accountability; freedom of press. In this context, Johnston description seems apt: “Good governance: legitimate, accountable, and effective ways of obtaining and using public power and resources in the pursuit of widely-accepted social goals”

It is certain that there is a strong and inseparable link between ethical leadership as an art and good governance as practiced in sane societies. The link is so strong that we shall see that there cannot be good governance where the leadership style is devoid of ethical considerations for what is good and what is bad. In this regard, while our definition and consideration of good governance shall be based on certain characteristics that constitute what amounts to good governance, it is submitted from the beginning that our examination of contents of good governance shall illuminate what amounts to ethical leadership with reference to what is expected of the political class. Thus, we have come to the following conclusions using the World Bank template that the followings constitute essentials of good governance : Transparency, Access to information, Public participation, consensus building, Accountability, Responsiveness, Effectiveness and efficiency, Equity and inclusiveness, Democracy. This we shall discuss in no particular order to reveal the expectations from the political class in terms of engendering good governance and qualifying as ethical leaders.

1. Accountability

⁴ See <http://unu.edu/publications/articles/what-does-good-governance-mean.html> accessed at 4.38 pm on 18 November, 2015.

According to Good Governance Guide, “Accountability is a fundamental requirement of good governance.” Thus, every government “has an obligation to report, explain and be answerable for the consequences of decisions it has made on behalf of the community it represents.”⁵

It is a core value of good governance that is expected from the political class, at least in terms of rendering returns on their leadership.. Every ethical leader must ensure probity and accountability. Rather than the above, what we have been experiencing from the Nigerian political class is deficit of accountability. Our leaders do not feel they are accountable to the mass of the people who elected them into office. We have rather been priding ourselves on impunity coupled with over-spilling arrogance that considers its bearer as the master of the world rather than servant of the people. The persecution of the EndSars protesters is a good example. Why must they be villains for demanding accountability? Remember the demand for the names of the beneficiaries of the social intervention fund, recall also that of the total amount benefitted by the former Governors and their deputies under the obnoxious pension scheme, the salaries and emoluments of the legislators, Alpha beta issues, I can continue to multiply this. This failure of accountability has permeated our decision-making process to the extent that looting state coffers does not commend any restriction to many people in governance. They do not feel there is any difference between state coffers and private pockets. How do you place the revelations under the NDDC and the Lagos state speaker’s auspices?

Failure of accountability begins when a state official fails to attend to his duties with speed required of public service but indulges in self-delusion believing that the public is at his mercy to pity than to serve.

⁵ See <http://www.goodgovernance.org.au/about-good-governance/what-is-good-governance/> accessed at 4.43 on 18 November, 2015.

Our political space is dominated by non-accountability of public officers that our records before the international community spews of low consideration. Majority of such officers in public service today are men and women of our generation which casts doubt on our sense of responsibility as a people concerned about posterity. Accountability is anchored on the concept of trusteeship. The leaders are trustees of the assets put under their control and must at all times be ready to account for its usage.

Accountability and probity are the watchwords of an upright leader and is a core responsibility of a political class to promote. An ethical leader renders account without the demand of the followers. State coffers cannot be an extension of the pocket of an ethical leader who is ready to serve the people. The use of government assets for purposes other than that designated is a virtue of an ethical leader. Recall the case of a Secretary of state that branched for vacation in the course of official duty and had to resign in UK. Remember the use of official jets by president's daughter with impunity in Nigeria! What is the fate of a people when the executives at the local government level do not execute community projects anymore and the legislatures now run away from law-making and choose to be contractors? It is certain that such a swap of responsibilities can never do good to the masses as the two arms of government do not share the same responsibilities save as permitted by the Constitution, the organic law of the land. How many local governments and States discloses their internally generated revenue?

Every leader must be accountable to his people. A leader that cannot render a valid account to the populace does not deserve to occupy the post of leadership. All monies embezzled by all past and present leaders must be accounted for. The effect of repealing the Executive Pensions laws should be for them to return the properties taken. It is sheer

recklessness and self-aggrandizement that make a king covet others' entitlements.

While accountability is a feature of ethical leadership, it is certain that no scorecard can reflect good governance in the absence of accountability. Thus, it is a primary expectation from the political class that accountability must be its primal consideration.

2. Transparency

A fundamental factor that should be considered in governance is transparency. Today when private citizens lie on oath, it is an offence contrary to several provisions of the Criminal Code or Law depending on the circumstances in which it is committed whether it is lying on oath or perjury which attract different punishments. But where government lies to the people, it is considered to be politics. A nation that prides itself on public deceit can never make necessary growth and it is the duty of the leaders to aspire to be transparent. This is a viable way of avoiding and eliminating suspicion.

The process of decision making is required to be transparent. In this age, public officials are still made to swear to Oaths of secrecy, over what? Asset declaration forms are still not been published to the public nor made accessible to them. The Procurement Act and laws are meant to ensure transparency amongst others in the contracting of services and products. Till date, not all States have enacted same. Even where they exist, they are more honoured in breaches than obedience. Policy decisions are not subjected to public scrutiny. This calls into question compliance with due process. It is in Nigeria that we subvert due process as if we were born specifically for such purpose. Thus, "people should be able to follow and understand the decision-making process. This means that they will be able to clearly see how and why a decision was made - what information, advice and consultation" government

“considered, and which legislative requirements (when relevant) council followed.”⁶

When the government fails to follow rules laid down in procurement but decides to subvert the law, the populace is bedeviled with lots of politico-economic and social malaise such as characterized the previous regimes in which monies meant for procurement of arms to combat terrorism ended up in the hands of political sorcerers and spiritual consultants. Look at the number of young men and women that have been devoured by the lunacy of state cum spiritual delinquencies of *boko haram* and the likes in the North-East, the useful men and women of another generation that been consumed by kidnappers, armed robbers and our decrepit roads. The list of casualties is endless ranging from human casualties to infrastructural casualties. It is a lamentable state of woe.

The political class has a huge responsibility in this regard. Politicians are wont to treat issues of public concern as surrogate to personal interests. Attitude of members of the political class is destructive of public confidence.

3. RULE OF LAW

This simply means that we should all be guided by the law, both the government and the governed. It further implies that no man must be punished without a law; No man is above the law; and there must not be a special court nor law for different category of persons. All conducts and acts must be in conformity with the law. The society is ordered on the rule of law. The alternative to the rule of law is rule of man. In this state, we resort to the State of nature in which life will be nasty, brutish and short according to Thomas Hobbes. A state of anarchy. The rule of law has given way to rule of man and an average government official considers the law as beneath him when riding

⁶ Ibid.

roughshod over the rights of others notwithstanding whatever the court might say. When he is out of office and the system of impunity that he has once encouraged decided to treat him less than human, he will run to the same court that he has once pooh-poohed for protection. The rule of law is what guarantees the rights of everyone notwithstanding your status. Members of the political class must realize that the only thing that is constant in life is change and no condition or position is permanent. Thus, every ethical leader must be seen to promote the rule of law. Furthermore, it is the rule of law that births institutions. We continue to develop strong individuals as against institutions. The MAGU/DSS example. Obedience to court judgments and observance of the rule of law is a key element of ethical leadership. The Enugu example. Government must always follow the law.

4. Democrazy

In Nigeria today, our democratic sense is highly questionable. Except leaders live by democratic ideals and principles, recognizing that the will and wish of the majority must always be respected, there is nothing for the followers to embrace. In fact, wrong set of people will continue to occupy the political space and bad governance will be the order of the day. The essence of democracy is to throw up credible leaders that will engender good governance

Our leaders have made democracy an alien in the conduct of our affairs even at the level of political parties. It is instructive to note that failure to conduct primary elections as required by Sections 85 and 87 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) has resulted in the nullification of the elections of many elected members of All Progressives Congress and likewise other political parties. It shows absence of democracy in our system of politics which has deterred many from venturing into participation.

Elections in the past and even in some instances in recent times, represent a mockery of what democracy means. It was just a validation of the viewpoint of those who tenaciously hold that there is nothing like democracy. It is, definitely, an aberration of all virtues of good governance when democratic ideals are thrown to the wind by certain individuals who see politics as a 'do-or-die' affair. It is unfortunate that among these miscreants are people who enjoyed the best in terms of education and good governance under icons like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Michael Okpara and a host of others.

Ladies and gentlemen, the political class must ensure that all votes count and all votes are counted. It is an aberration when we proclaim democracy but enthrone jungle manner of ascension to public office. What operates and is foisted today is political struggle among chimpanzees where the strongest seizes power and rule by brute force. There is no ideal political party with the necessary ideology. It is the fact of ideology that distinguishes political parties in other climes. In Nigeria, only political platforms exist, little wonder they cross carpet frequently.

It is heartless to also embark on forceful suppression of peaceful protest. Protest, albeit peaceful, is part of democratic rights and must be respected at all times. The political class must realize that a society that disallows peaceful expression of popular opinion, will soon cave in to violent reaction from the masses.

PARTICIPATION.

It is one thing for democratic ideals to exist, it is another for people to take advantage. Citizens must be encouraged to participate in the process of electing their leaders. This is where civic education by leaders comes in. The continuous apathy in our elections is not good. Even the few that participates are the ignorant and uninformed ones. This is why we continue to have charlatans in positions.

This obliges an ethical leader to involve and engage the people in the decision-making process at all levels and stages of public determination.

There can never be good governance where people that are to be governed deny themselves the right of participation, or are denied the right of participation. The consequence of failure to participate in the governance of your society is that you will be governed by idiots and miscreants, according to a philosopher. Most times, this arises as a result of the violence perpetrated during election and the perception that votes do not account. Ethical leaders are therefore expected to shun violence and promote the absence of same. They must ensure votes count and elections are not manipulated.

5. ACCESS TO INFORMATION.

Citizens must not only be provided with information on government activities, they must equally be obliged where they demand so. It is the reluctance of the leaders to so oblige that led to the enactment of the Freedom of information Act which some States have passed into laws. However, some States like Lagos are still reluctant to pass same into law for obvious reason such as the unfolding events at the House of Assembly. Notwithstanding the Appellate court's decision that they are bound by the Act, they still play ostrich. Beyond legality, I believe that morally they are obliged to divulge any information sought. This is part of the code of an ethical leader. As earlier remarked, you are purportedly elected to manage the properties of the State on behalf of the citizens, hence where they demand explanation, you have both moral and legal duty to discharge in supplying the information. Both the Constitution of the Country and other laws permits the receipt and imparting of ideas and information without any interference from any quarters.

CONSENSUS

Ethical leaders are expected to dwell in consensus building in the process of decision making. They must be ready and willing in building consensus around issues at all points in time. Consultation must be their watch word. Ethical leaders constantly recognize that they do not have a monopoly of wisdom. In addition, they must remember the social pact that led into their being in positions of authority. They are not there in pursuit of their personal desires but collective goals of the people. Consequently, at all times, they must strive to reach consensus between their ideas and that of the majority of the people they govern. This is what good governance is all about. Dictatorship certainly is not a feature of ethical leadership.

CORRUPTION

Ethical leaders avoid any shred of corruption in whatever they do. As little as time keeping, they ensure that it is always complied with. Integrity must be treasured and demonstrated in all they do. The strength of character must be an asset, and be valuable to them. It is not sufficient as in the country's present circumstance to have it as mantra, there must well thought actions on the part of all. Addressing same must never be selective. Perception is very important in this regard. Bullion van question.

JUSTICE/JUDICIARY

Without justice in the society, there cannot be peace. This desire must be demonstrated and practiced by the ethical leaders. Upholding the rule of law and obedience to court judgments is a must. There could only be peace and progress in a society where there is justice. Access to justice is a cornerstone of good governance. Access to justice in Nigeria is virtually nil as cases spend years in court without the rights of the parties being determined. This is at times referred to as exit from justice. No sane foreign investor would like to put his

money where access to justice is zero. It is only crooks among foreign investors who understand how to subvert and pervert justice that are interested in Nigeria since they know that public officials can be easily bribed and judges are available for hire. Government itself encourages pliable judges.

Trending among clients these days is the saying: why do you need to hire a lawyer when you can buy a judge? What is the status of a judge whose judgment can be bought like a book in a bookstore and the higher bidder among the parties wins the case? It is certain that no progress can attend a society where justice in its concrete terms is elusive. The political class must look into this and ensure that there is redress to this situation. We have lamented the poor remuneration of judges and their poor working conditions. This is determined by no other than men and women who populate the political class in both its executive and legislative arms. A hungry judge is not in any way less exposed to corruption than a rapacious public official before whom cash is dangled but is not allowed to touch. Ethical leaders promote and guarantees independence of the judiciary. Regrettably, this is not so in Nigeria of today. In fact, citizens believe that you cannot win government in government court. This ought not to be so but the reality today is that the judiciary is still continuously treated as an appendage of the Executive. This is a shame and is not ethical.

FREEDOM OF PREESS

Dissemination of information, particularly as guaranteed by the constitution must at no time be fettered. Government must not interfere with the freedom of information in whatever form. The recent attempt to regulate the social media space in my view is not welcome. We have enough laws to deal with the abuse of social media, particularly the cyber space Act. To do otherwise, is to narrow the window of information dissemination to the public. This negates the

status of an ethical leader. Consequently, it is a trait that the political class must eschew.

Conclusion

There are so many codes of ethics that needs to be developed to account for the gap in ethical leadership. However, the starting point must be the development of National ethics in Nigeria. For ethics in our nation is still a relative concept. Undoubtedly, values and virtues have collapsed in our system. Little wonder why we celebrate iniquities in one form or the other. It is when this feat is achieved that we can even start developing ethical leaders who will deliver good governance for us. It is our conclusion that there is the need for the members of the political class to search themselves and develop these codes so that our generation too will not end up being a wasted generation like the previous ones as described by the erudite Professor Wole Soyinka. It is certain that a society that neglects its future would permanently be haunted forever by its present inequities. Let us think very well and right the wrongs. We are the alumni of yesterday's inequities, let us not turn our children into alumni of today's inequalities. The point must still be made that the political class is part of the larger society devoid of ethical standards. Consequently, purification of the larger society along the line of minimum ethical standard is equally a sine qua non for the emergence of ethical leaders.

Let us take interest in the children of the poor so that they don't become an albatross on the children of the rich and the children trained with millions of currencies would not be devoured by those neglected via mis-governance.

God bless you all. Thanks.