

# The Post-Colonial State and the Nexus between Leadership and Poverty

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## Abstract

Leadership and Poverty have been identified as amongst the plagues hunting post-colonial African states. Leadership and poverty are central to a number of challenges confronting nation-building efforts in the post-colonial era. This paper draws a connexion between Leadership and Poverty and calls on civil society to close ranks with the working class as the only panacea to checkmate leadership inertia in post-colonial Africa.

**Keywords:** Crisis of Leadership, Poverty, Post-colonial African State, Nation-building, Neo-colonial Forces, Civil Society

## 1. Introduction

The post-colonial state is a state which is said to have become independent either through sustained arm conflict or constitutional struggles, but whose independent is in name only (Barkindo; 1994). It may be added that the post-colonial state is one which at one time experienced colonialism in one form or another, and even after independence has continued to suffer the effect of colonialism in its socio-economic and political developments.

By 1900, only Liberia and Ethiopia escaped colonialism in all the African continent. The principle of self-determination earlier enunciated by the United States gained currency after the Second World War (1939-1945). Subject people held on to this principle to press for self-government. Decolonization activities were vigorously pursued in Africa by vociferous African sons from Cape to Cairo. Such prominent and eloquent voices as Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Nnamdi Azikiwe and Herbert Macauley (Nigeria), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), to mention a few, continued to fan the embers of nationalism in their various domain.

From 1957, the activities of these “fire-fighting” Africans began to yield constitutional independence for some African countries. Others who still experienced very harsh forms of colonialism especially in the Southern African sub-continent and elsewhere, resorted to a more radical and revolutionary forms of expressions- the national liberation struggles. They include Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and Guinea Bissau. For most of independent Africa, constitutional independence has not addressed the manifold problems of poverty, corruption, boundary crises, underdevelopment and so on. The many years of slave trade and colonialism in the areas affected, have distorted and disarticulated African political economy to a point where it no longer met the aspirations of its people. To compound this situation is the massive and unabated corruption and leadership ineptitude of the national bourgeoisie which wielded power in African states after the departing colonial masters. The naked plunder and criminal economic mismanagement of African resources which characterized the post-colonial record have been vividly captured by Shikwati (2004), who noted that “far from being utilized to lift its people out of poverty, Africa’s vast mineral wealth and resources have been squandered”. Shikwati noted that Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Congo-Brazzaville produce substantial quantity of oil; both Nigeria and Angola earn over USD100 million a day from crude oil exports, yet, they ranked among the 30 poorest countries in the world.

In Nigeria, like other African countries, petro dollars accruing from oil is “squandered and frittered away in conspicuous consumption” by opportunistic highly placed public servants, the ruling class and their cronies with impunity, while the mass of the people are wallowing in abject poverty. The poverty with which the mass of most African people complain about is directly linked to leadership. In other words, the post-colonial state in Africa is bedeviled by a plethora of problems in all fronts, some internal and others external. First, a victim of colonial conquest and occupation and its incorporation into the Western Capitalist system as a primary producer of material resources for the metropolitan country on one hand and a victim of the crisis of leadership in the post-colonial era on the other hand, among other maladies.

This paper will attempt an examination of the crisis of leadership from a general viewpoint and show a connection between leadership and poverty and suggest the way forward. An overview of the post-colonial state will be followed by an exposition of the manifold problems of nation building in post-colonial Africa; the leadership dilemma and the way forward will lead to our conclusion of the paper.

## 2. An Overview of the Post-Colonial State

European colonization of Africa in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a culmination of European activities dating back to the early 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Scholarly works by both Africans and European visitors and colonial officers attest to the undeniable facts that European interest in Africa was basically economic. The works of Uzoigwe (1974), Eric Williams (1944), and Lord Lugard (1922), to mention a few, point to economic cupidity of industrial Europe in search of raw materials and markets for their finished goods. European powers in their different areas of influence were still enjoying the benefits of colonization of the African continent when African nationalist began to demand that they should leave after 1945. It was therefore not surprising that the former colonial powers continue to be very interested in the development taking place in Africa after elaborating various forms of socio-political -systems of administration which supplanted the indigenous ways of life.

The Euro-American powers have since been doing a lot to influence all the major developments in Africa overtly or covertly. Whenever the activities and politics of African rulers clashed with the interest of Euro-American powers, the latter, by a superior combination of political, economic and military might pull through to achieve its interest.

One of the earliest methods adopted by foreign powers to superimpose its interest on the rest of us was close collaboration with African Heads of State who had no ideological commitment to the ideals of African nationalism, independence, and complete freedom. Such heads of states were shored-up at the expense of their domestic misrule, which was often overlooked by their foreign godfathers.

Political destabilization through coups was another methods employed by Euro-American intelligence agencies to harness African states to the orbit of Western European imperialism, thus making it difficult for the African states to consolidate the political gains of independence. This adverse interference in the affairs of African states in particular and the underdeveloped world in general, has been described as neo-colonialism. The difference between the colonial and post-colonial state lies in the modus operandi by which relations were conducted. Whereas, colonialism suffered from direct politico-military occupation, the post-colonial state suffers from indirect or subtle methods of occupation through the activities of multinational companies, economic and military aid/technical assistance, and so on.

The features of the post-colonial state therefore, will include one or more of the following experiences:

- i. Political independence of post-colonial states was a serious threat to the European economies which was why the need to control the leadership in the emergent African states. Political systems of the metropolitan states with their political and technical advice must be adopted by the post -colonial states. In Nigeria for instance, at independence, system wavered from parliamentary to presidential forms of democracy after Britain and United States its western friends. Those states which showed signs of deviating were either denied or isolated and their leaders denied the opportunity of leadership or eliminated (Enor; 2012). Examples in Africa could be found in Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Amilcar Cabral (Gunea Bissau), Murtala Mohammed (Nigeria), and recently Mohammar Ghaddaffi (Libya), and so on.

The African state was not free to decide a form of political ideology most suitable to its socio-economic and political development. In some cases, military dictatorship was tolerated as in Congo (Mobutu), than an opposing political ideology. It is therefore not surprising that even after independence, most African states have continued with the pre-independence socio-economic policies with mere cosmetic reforms that reinforce their commitment to the metropolitan countries.

Both the civilian and military regimes in Nigeria, have not distinguished itself in any remarkable way since independence. The metropolitan remains the model of the post-colonial country. Experts are drawn from there, while trade, cultural, technical, diplomatic and other relations continue as they were during the colonial period, with the metropolitan power as the senior partner in the relationship since it is older and stronger.

- (ii). Economic underdevelopment is perhaps one of the most excruciating experiences ever witnessed by the post-colonial state. The manner of incorporation of African economies into the capitalist economy leaves very little room for development. A relationship that does not allow the post-colonial state to determine the prices of its primary products or direct trade to more favourable partners is frustrating. The continued pressure and dominance of the multinational companies of the metropolis have driven the post-colonial economies to the back seat.

With infrastructural decay, poor energy sources, feeble industries with a poor production base, the crises of underdevelopment have continued unabated. The debt burden, price fluctuation and unbalance trade all in favour of the advanced industrial economies, is compounded by unconditional aid. In reaction to this lopsided trading and other relations, African states have increasingly tilted to China as an alternative to the many years of

economic exploitation of the West. Indeed, the state of African economy is so aptly summed by a onetime Tanzanian economic development Minister as follows:

Ours are appendage economies, tied since colonial days to the metropolitan countries, as closely as the economy of Southern Italy, say, is appended to its Northern industrial 'metropole'. We are part and parcel of the metropolitan economies, and we produce extensively for them, not for ourselves (Barkindo, 1994).

Such has been the situation; how long this state of affairs would continue can only be imagined. The condition of dependency as shown by Ake (1983), and Offiong (2001), has largely disarticulated post-colonial economies and the underdeveloped world at large.

Apart from the economic and political features of the post-colonial state as analysed, are the socio-cultural characteristics too. In the field of education, the leading figures of independent African states continue to receive their education from the metropolis of their former colonial masters. Not only were the political leaders educated in Euro-American educational citadels, technicians, military officers, African students, all continue to patronize the metropole of their former masters. This patronage especially among the students has been increasing with the unpredictable educational atmosphere owing to instability in both polity and especially the educational institutions in Nigeria.

European language and communication has largely helped to sustain neo-colonialism in Africa. While language represents an important part of a people's culture, communication helps to establish a lasting relationship among people. In Africa, the languages of the colonial master are still the official languages in use several years after independence. In the West African sub-region, one could make references to the English speaking and French speaking West Africans. In Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, to mention a few, English is still spoken as the official language. The same can be said of the former Portuguese colonies. In Cameroun, Central Africa, Mali as well as other French speaking colonies, the French language is still the official language.

These dependency relations have grossly undermined African independence and further deepened nation-building efforts.

### **3. The Problems of Nation-Building in Post-Colonial African States**

Isana Elaigwu (2004), has defined nation-building as the widespread acceptance of the process of state building; it is the creating of a political community that gives a fuller meaning to the life of the state. Nation building also encompasses all the policy approaches sincerely undertaken by the state to ensure all round development and a national identity.

In recent years, the nation-building effort by different states has become so cumbersome that one may tend to question the sincerity or capability of national leaders. The problems of nation-building in Africa are so wide spread and glaring than need to border. Effort is however made to identify and itemize these problems in passing. This approach is informed by the fact that most of these problems are structural and internal and revolve around leadership.

Unfortunately, leadership itself the central issue of this paper constitute a formidable problem of nation-building in Africa. The poverty of leadership to a large extent aggravates most problems faced by African states.

Some of the identifiable problems of nation building in Africa will include:

- i. The structural composition of the states;
- ii. Ethno nationalism;
- iii. Political/succession crises;
- iv. Ethno-religious crises;
- v. Proliferation of arms in the hands of unlawful persons;
- vi. Economic inequalities
- vii. Unemployment/poverty;
- viii. Food crisis'
- ix. Under-development/poor infrastructure'
- x. Ecological/natural disasters;
- xi. Ideological poverty;
- xii. International or systemic pressures.

The aforementioned challenges have militated against the smooth workings of the post-colonial state. These challenges, as mentioned earlier, are compounded by the existence of corrupt leadership. The crisis of leadership as the subject matter of this paper is taken up in the subsequent sub-head.

#### **4. The Crisis of Leadership in Post-Colonial African State and the Nexus between Leadership and Poverty**

The crisis of leadership in Africa and Nigeria in particular has been a matter for serious concern globally, it has also provoked a lot of debates in scholarly and political circles. M. O. Ibrahim has noted: “nothing, simply nothing is more important to African government than good governance” ([www.ibrahimfoundation.org](http://www.ibrahimfoundation.org)).

The concern for good governance has provoked Ibrahim to set up “The M.O. Ibrahim prize for Achievement”, a package designed to help remove corruption and improve governance on the continent. A £2.7 million prize for Africa’s most effective head of state is thought to be the world’s biggest prize, knocking the Nobel Peace prize of £700.00 into second place. Ibrahim has stated that the prize will go to African Heads of state who deliver security, health, education and economic development to their constituents. Award winning leaders will receive £2.7 million over ten years when they leave office, plus £107, 600 a year for life. This motivation package will do a wonderful turn- around on our development efforts if only African leaders can respond sensitively to this package (Enor; 2007).

The concept of leadership has been variously defined depending on one’s persuasion of leadership roles. Hollander (1985), defined a leader as the person who exerts the most influence on group behaviour and beliefs. According to this viewpoint, a leader is a group member who exerts more positive influence over others; he initiates actions, gives orders, doles out rewards and punishment, settles disputes between fellow members and pushes the group towards its goal.

Ashimolowo (2007), defines a leader as a mentor whose life is transparent, wise and foresighted. As noted by him, the functions of leaders include creating a path for the coming generation to follow; putting the needs of others above their own and above all, inducing followership without coercion.

It is as well possible to have both formal and informal leaders in a group. The formal group leaders are those who are officially elected or appointed with the backing of authority to lead the group in an organization. The informal leaders may not be formally elected or appointed, still exert influence on their group members due to the regard other members have for them in the organisation.

Whatever the type of leader or the level, leadership is a social influencing process for the attainment of group goals. A good leader is therefore one who is capable of persuading others to attain the achievement of group goals. In this regard, Alan and Robert (1969), refer to leadership as a process where one person exerts influence over the members of a group.

Daniel Etona is even more critical in his conception of leadership. According to him;

Take an African, give him a bit of power and he will likely become pompous, arrogant, intolerant and jealous of his prerogatives. Constantly on his guard...he ends his career entirely devoted to the cult of mediocrity.... (in Ashimolowo; 2007).

David-West responds to the question of leadership in Nigeria is equally informing:

If government or leaders are servants of the people which in fact is what they are, it then follows logically that government or leaders must be accountable to the people... once a leader is made to assume the role of a god, he becomes pompous and arrogant, feels indestructible... (Ibezute; 2003).

Ikime (1974), lamented the poor leadership attitude of this generation which clearly manifest itself in mediocrity and poverty of leadership in governance and policy formulation. This factor has largely accounted for some reasons why sustainable development has remained and will continue to remain a far cry and illusive. Leaders who for instance, seek development from purely economic categories alone are not informed and do not draw from the rich pool which the past could offer. The evidence seems to suggest that if at all leaders revisit the rich past, it is only to draw from the negative or poor quality leadership traits which they replicate in their states. Squandermania, among leaders in recorded history in the West African context is traced to Mansa (1312-1337), a muslim ruler in the ancient Mali empire in Western Sudan. Musa is said to have carried and lavished so much of his state’s wealth while on pilgrimage to Mecca. Ifeka and Stride (1971), noted that Musa had to borrow gold to pay for his journey back.

Leadership at all levels of society should possess among other qualities, three fundamental characteristics viz; vision, integrity and courage. When a leadership possesses and exhibits these characteristics, the followership will have no choice but fall in place. Unfortunately, many African leaders lack these sterling qualities. It is hard to look into the African continent for leaders who could be said to have transcended their tribal, cultural and geo-political acceptance apart from a few and far between names like Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya.

Writing about Nigeria, Achebe’s (1983) remarks are succinct “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely, the failure of leadership”. Achebe stated that there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air, “Nigeria’s problem”, noted Achebe, “is unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility,

to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership”. Still about Nigeria, Ray Ekpu commented thus:

All the ingredients of building a great country are present: land, water, minerals, humanity....  
As far as politics and leadership are concerned, Nigeria is still a psychiatric case due in part to the haemorrhage inflicted on it by most of its leaders (Africa Today: Jan, 2000).

It is pertinent to state that the great continent of Africa has been the economic and social security of the Euro-American world since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. African slaves in their productive ages helped in no small measure to set Europe on the path of industrial revolution; when the slave trade was outlawed, natural and agricultural resources of Africa provided the much needed raw materials for European industries, and today, the continent is still securing spaces for Euro-American investment. Ironically, African leaders have not been able to maximize the advantage of their contacts with foreigners to build a virile society that could tap the productive energies of its human capital or set the part of honour and economic freedom for their teeming population. Lack of political will, corruption and leadership inertia made worse by ideological poverty has made leadership in Africa a mockery.

Greatness has eluded Africa because their leaders have chosen the wrong path to greatness. Martin Luther king Jr. was one of the greatest men of our time, an exceptional phenomenon in the life of America. His greatness lies in the fact that “he was an ordinary man who lived in an extraordinary time but was able to make it seem ordinary”. He did not set out to become great; when he was asked what testimony he would love people to give about him after he had died, he said:

Tell them, I tried to feed the hungry;  
Tell them, I tried to cloth the naked;  
Tell them, I tried to help somebody; (Ramdin; 2004).

The point is that greatness does not lie in the ability to use the public office in looting public treasury and in the process depriving millions of people their source of livelihood; true greatness lie in the ability to positively change the course of history of their people. In Enor and Chime (2016), the point was forcefully made that it would indeed amount to class suicide to expect the leader of a corrupt peripheral capitalist consortium like Nigeria to extirpate or reduce corruption; this is even so as observed by Marx and Engels, that the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of the ruling class. The best the leadership can do is to institute reforms within the social framework of production which amounts to mere palliatives to buy time and consolidate its grip on power, the power to loot. It is therefore a historic task of the poor masses to take up their destinies in their hands and destroy the relations of production which hold the masses down.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, a onetime American president lashed out at those who have made a mess of leadership when he remarked that democracy has disappeared from several other great nations, not because the people of those nations dislike democracy, but because they had grown tired of unemployment and insecurity, of seeing their children hungry while they seat hopeless in the face of government confusion and weakness through lack of leadership in government (Odey; 2002).

Roosevelt became American president in 1932, a time when the Great Depression of 1929-1930s had hit America below belt. Odey (2002), remarked that America remembers Roosevelt for being able to pull the country out of the outrageous consequences of the Great Depression and paving the way for American giant economic recovery. He did not set out to amass wealth for himself as most African leaders during the years of austerity measures induced by the structural adjustment programme.

Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela will still be remembered as a challenge and an inspiration in a continent where the so-called leaders make sweet rhetoric during their inaugural speeches but settle down to embezzle public money and allow millions of their countrymen to suffocate in hunger and disease.

Nyerere, for instance, enunciated a socialist political philosophy of independent self-help, self-reliance, community development and African brotherhood called *Ujama*. Nyerere remarked that socialism is good because it is people centred. His philosophy was never fully realized in Tanzania but Nyerere himself lived what he preached.

Legendary Nelson Mandela, as noted by Shikwati (2004), urged “African leaders to take up arms and overthrow corrupt leaders who have accumulated vast personal fortunes while children have gone hungry”. A call to pick up rifles “to defeat the tyrants”, from a highly esteemed statesman of international standing like Mandela, clearly express the frustration and desperation by which the African ruling class have subjected its citizenry.

African leadership style lacks the will power to push through radical socio-economic reforms that can give succor to their states. This is partly because they have aligned or collaborated with international capital at the expense of their national economies. Alien development ideologies which have little or nothing to do with the African economic systems are employed. The result serves to reinforce dependency of the peripheral economies to international economic system. A catalogue of so-called development strategies have been formulated and

experimented with the latest being a homegrown African oriented strategy namely NEPAD; yet development remains a far cry.

It is doubtful if after five decades of decolonization, leadership failure and corruption can still be attributed to colonial memorabilia. Leaders are preoccupied with primitive accumulation for accumulation sake (Toyo; 2010). Some or most have enriched the economies of the industrialized nations by laundering state funds in such countries. What is more, as the economies of the advance nations grow richer and wealthier, frustration, poverty, desperation and conflicts are the reverse in African economies. One can therefore clearly see the nexus between leadership and poverty in African states.

Loans obtained from international donor agencies are misused or diverted for personal use at the expense of the poor working masses, some of who have been made cheap labour for international capital equally like the raw materials they export.

Democratic experiments are simulacrum, only serving the ends of the leaders and their international collaborators who are seeking a safe haven for investment. The sit tight syndrome and tenure elongation make democracy a mockery in these states. It is only in Africa that leaders could serve their nations for as long as thirty to forty years and in the absence of a social agenda, plunge their countries into a chaotic state with famine and wars as daily pastimes. Kofi Annan, a one-time United Nations Secretary General, noted Shikwati (2004), "lamented that sometimes he is ashamed to be an African", "because of the never ending crises in Africa". What then can we say, but to say like Fanon (1956) that a society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a nonviable society, a society to be replaced.

The clarion call for all workers unity echoed by Marx and Engels (1848) several centuries ago is still germane today as it was in those years. It may be added that the forces of poverty and its precursors can be liquidated by adjusting obsolete relations of production to the needs of man and his aspiration. This task can be accomplished by the poor of the people, the working class, the unemployed and the underemployed- in one phrase, "the revolutionary forces", who are conscious of their class in relation to other classes in the process of material production of the needs of man.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted an examination of leadership and the nexus between leadership and poverty in Africa. The paper has done a brief comparison to demonstrate the bankruptcy of African leadership class.

The post-colonial African state and the problems associated with the state in Africa have been examined. Accordingly, the post-colonial state in Africa it has been stated, is bedeviled by external problems and internal constraints. The external factors include the European slave trade and colonialism which distorted African economies thereby inaugurating neo-colonial dependence and the manipulation of the international economy. Among the internal constraints have been crisis of leadership and corruption, syndromes which have held the post colonial state captive. A nexus was drawn between leadership and poverty.

A radical approach to economic development by an inward looking policy is advocated if only the leadership will exhibit the will power. In the absence of this, the followership should take up their destinies in their own hands in a historic struggle against the forces of poverty.

A mass socialization and conscientization of the working people through education will help to radicalize the polity and make way for proactive regimes. The intellectuals have this role to play..

Indeed, a social revolution by the people will whip up the seeming insensitivity and conservatism of the ruling elites in Africa; revolutions as noted by Babatope (1986), are festivals of the oppressed. African development and economic emancipation can only come from Africans themselves. Leaders who corruptly enrich themselves or collaborate with international capital to defraud the nation-state should be disgraced out of office if not by the power of the ballot box by revolutionary activity of the same people who have been made poor by the rapacious activities of their leaders.

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