

# **Rethinking The Building Of Leadership**

## **Capacity In Nigeria**

*Delivered by*

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## **INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING GCI**

May I begin by saying how privileged, honoured and proud I am that the Executive of our Association, GCI/OBA, selected me to be the presenter of the Anniversary Lecture at this 80<sup>th</sup> year of our dear Alma Mater. I do not know of any special reason why this honour should have come to me, but please be assured that I seized the opportunity with both hands as soon as the offer was made, lest someone should suffer a change of mind. Like all other Old Boys, I owe GCI such an enormous debt of gratitude and appreciation that I am usually eager to return thanks in anyway I can whenever the opportunity comes.

When my class of 24 boys entered School in 1946, GCI was 17 years old. In all that time, only 460 boys had preceded us, and our School numbers went from 462 to 485. This meant that the School had given in-depth attention to the education of about 24 new boys annually, and that the total student population in anyone year was less than 150. Teachers - who were also Housemasters - were able to give their concentrated personal attention to the comprehensive tutoring of their students, and to give them the rounded development that put them in excellent shape for the future. The education authorities of the time obviously knew that they were preparing leaders for the Nigeria of the future, and they gave the assignment everything that it needed.

Looking back now, I realise that, after an excellent grounding in values that we had from our families, Government College Ibadan was the place where we developed values and habits that have become hallmarks of our character. We were taught to focus on the task in hand, whatever that task might be. No activity was too mean provided it was positively productive. We were encouraged to seek to excel, and to embrace competition as the opportunity for developing competence and achieving respectable results. In the classroom and everywhere else, we had to develop an orderly approach, observing a strict discipline in which even the 45-minute siesta was a compulsory activity of each day!

Let me highlight four particular aspects of our GCI upbringing.

We found, on entering school, that the small population of 144 boys consisted of members from all over the country. The Head of School in our first year was actually from Cameroon! One of my classmates came from so deep in the Niger Delta that his journey home could not be completed unless he travelled, first by train, then by lorry, and finally by canoe! So, you see, today, no one has to teach me or any of my school mates that there are people of merit and competence in every part of Nigeria. Among other things, this means that it should be possible for leaders to operate the federal character principle in appointments and promotions without denying integrity, merit and competence. If we base our search on the true interests of the nation rather than political party preferences, we can find people of worth and honour in every corner of our country.

Then, in GCI we were encouraged to cherish team spirit, in both our inter-House and inter-School contests. As soon as we arrived as new boys in our respective Houses, some senior boy would take us in hand and warn that, if we could not swim three lengths of the swimming pool by a certain date, we would cause the House to lose 10 points at inter-house swimming competitions. Those new boys whose mothers had warned them against the hazards of going into any body of water,

quickly learnt to put the corporate interest of the House above their own personal fears and preferences. Is this not one of the things that we require citizens to practise today?

We learnt that recognition and reward should be expected only as a natural outcome of good performance. You could not win your 'colours' in any sport unless you performed notably above the average. Nor could you become a member of the school eleven in anything unless your performance was superior to that of the others who did not make the team. Recognition could not be lobbied, bought or stolen. It also could not be obtained 'up-front', however clever or popular one might be. Most importantly, we learnt to respect and admire people because of the real achievements that they registered. Their place of origin and the wealth of their families meant nothing at all to any of us. If only our national culture today would follow the same principles!

Finally, we found out that discipline was a serious matter. If you infringed any rule, you paid the penalty in full. You were required to participate in all sports even if your natural ability was questionable. Personal conduct and behaviour had to conform to the highest standards, and one paid dearly in every case of failure. Those who were found guilty of repeated violations of our collective discipline paid the ultimate price of expulsion from the school community. I do not remember any discounts or exemptions being granted to any student. Above all, there could be no "plea-bargaining" with the Prefect, Master or Principal. There was no immunity for anyone, even if one was a prefect or occupied some other position of leadership.

It is a matter of real regret that the excellent values and lofty standards that constituted the Government College brand have become progressively compromised in this nation as time has passed. Indeed, I remember that some of the political leaders of the second republic declared that the Government College philosophy of child education was elitist, and, therefore, unsuitable for Nigeria. Rather than raise as many other secondary schools as possible to the highest standards, they deliberately went in the opposite direction, and promoted a decay of standards and values for which we now pay a severe price. If our journey to the future continues to be directed in accordance with the limitations of such leaders, the destination will be a disaster of calamitous proportions. Clearly we must stop this from happening if we can. I hope it is now clear that it is my distress and discomfort with this negative trend that gave birth to the theme for today's lecture.

Going by recent events in Nigeria and media reports of such events, it is easy to conclude that this has not been a happy season for leadership in our country. The time available for this lecture is not long enough for us to catalogue all of the reasons for making that assertion. However, a few fundamental points should give us a good start, and we shall stick to issues that are already in the public domain so that none of us can claim to be unaware of our situation.

***First, where are the leaders?*** Whenever we talk of the failure of leadership in Nigeria as we do so often these days we are apt to point fingers at those who have taken high-profile public office, and to criticise their performance. However, experience suggests that leadership is necessary at all levels of human life and endeavour, and that leadership performance is critical to success at every point where responsible decisions and actions should be taken. By this token, it should be easy for us to see that leadership in Nigeria today is falling down in many places - in the family, in our schools, in our religious places, and in our communities. If we had conscientious leadership at all

these stations, I suggest that the total absence of leadership in the local councils for example, would not happen, for there is no denying that our indigenous values at grass-roots level were originally very noble and edifying.

***Second, what objectives are the leaders pursuing?*** As we know, there is a 'Vision 2020-20' that is supposed to be driving our performance so that our national economy will rank as one of the top twenty in the world by the year 2020. As far as I know, a critical part of our economy is the trade that flows from several parts of Nigeria to our ports. The roads along which trade travels are, currently, largely impassable. Between Ibadan and places to the north, we now have signposts warning drivers that "there is a bad portion of the road just ahead." Needless to say, the sign itself makes no contribution to the quicker flow of traffic that is essential to the realisation of our economic ambition. Yet, ladies and gentlemen, right now we are watching billions of naira being wasted on an expansion of the road between Abuja airport and Abuja city, so that the four lanes currently in existence will be increased to ten. No doubt, this will make today's fast traffic along that road even faster, but those who rejoice in this appearance of progress will be brought to a jarring halt as; they encounter the new concrete speed breakers in Abuja city itself. It makes one wonder if both projects are being prosecuted by two different governments! The ten-lane project certainly has no positive potential for our economic productivity.

***Third, who are the stakeholders of our leadership service?*** We are already used to the fact that the rhetoric of the majority party in any of our governments is that they are the party "in power"; for which reason their officials never refer to themselves as being 'in office'. Indeed, if the media reports are to be believed, some members of the lower house in Abuja now want to enjoy immunity from arrest and prosecution for all the crimes that they intend to commit. In normal human behaviour, a responsible leader would resolve to be of such excellent conduct that the police would not need to consider arresting him or her while in public office! This focus on power instead of the responsibility of office is probably to blame for the frequent power play between the parties to governance in our nation. How else do we account for the continuing stand-off between the Federal Government and the unions in the education sector? True, the heavyweight intervention of the Edo State Governor has produced a two-week recess, but neither party really behaves as if they understand the deeper issues involved. Government thinks that it is asserting its authority over the situation, and that this is hurting the unions. The unions also believe that their determined resistance is hurting government. Both parties ignore the reality that they are missing the true objectives of their respective roles, and damaging the expectations of parents, the prospects of children, and the future of the nation. Only a fundamental adjustment of thinking can lead all concerned to enlightened performance.

***Fourth, are we awake and aware?*** Because Nigeria is addicted to a culture of secrecy in governance, leaders often think that people really do not know certain things. They believe, for example, that the real reasons behind the calamity of public power supply in our nation are hidden in some file marked 'Top Secret' and locked away in a vault somewhere out of reach. We do not 'name and shame' those who loot the public treasury, and so we think that we can rebrand them with a veneer of respectability. Many leaders swear to oaths of office without the slightest intention of keeping faith with God or the community - even when they end such oaths with the words - "So help me God."

Since our people are resilient and long-suffering, leaders continue to push the frontiers of tolerance with impunity. Yet, we must keep in step with emerging reality, for we can see that our poor attention to quality is harming our future as a nation!

***Fifth, is education deteriorating?*** Nigeria used to be something of a high-flier as far as education was concerned. We were so highly respected that other nations gladly sought our help with upgrading their own education and other parts of their public establishment. Now another picture emerges: In an international study reported by the World Bank in which learning achievements in 22 African countries were compared, the learning achievements of primary school children in Nigeria were the lowest. Ahead of us were countries like Tunisia (1), Uganda (5), Zimbabwe (7), Mali (10), Togo (15), and Gambia (21). Even those who do well in our educational system constantly look for ways of expressing their talent elsewhere. It is estimated that right now, although we are in dire need of medical manpower in this nation, there are about 26,000 Nigerian doctors working in the United States of America. Are we really on course for 2020?

***Sixth, do we, as leaders, really care?*** A few months ago, we were told through the media that the Senate President had taken a look at the record of the upper house over the first two years of its current existence, and declared - "We have done well." Currently, you and I are victims of a media campaign that describes us as a 'great nation.' Why does one get the impression that we are like students who are sitting and marking their own examination scripts? Please do not misunderstand me: we are good people with every potential to become a great nation. Indeed, we have no reason to be anything less! However, I refer you to the supplement in Business Day of 2nd October, 2009, which appraises Nigeria at 49, and describes us as a nation "stunted by broken government." Consider also the fact that our own President accepts the fact that our electoral process is badly flawed, but the imperative reforms continue to be only a remote possibility. Going by available evidence, is 2011 likely to move us forward towards 2020 or set us back? Do we, as leaders, really care?

***Yet there is hope!*** Our theme for this discourse - Rethinking the Building of Leadership Capacity in Nigeria - is of interest to us because, in the end, the verdict must be that we do care. With no other country to call our own, we must care for this one. Moreover, our track record so far as a nation is not entirely unimpressive, and it may do us some good to recall some of the things that we have actually achieved.

We succeeded in making the transition from a colony to sovereign nation, and have crossed over from civilian government to military dictatorship and back again several times. That has to say something for our innate resilience.

We have indigenised our economy, our education, our civil service. Some of these things still have the status of 'work in progress', but we know we have the capacity to bring them to a respectable outcome.

We fought a civil war, from which we have emerged as a still undivided nation. We can point to some other nations that have not survived such civil conflict in one piece. We have broken

ourselves up into 36 States, and although we are still counting, we already can show real evidence that some State Governors give good examples of leadership performance.

Against all odds, we have transformed our telecommunications industry such that telephones are now for everybody. Only 12 years ago, we declared that telephones were not for the poor! We could go on, but we have probably recalled enough to give us some encouragement. Even in the case of our bad performance at elections and our unconvincing fight against corruption, we know that all we need is some leaders with clean hands, pure hearts and sufficient political will - and we should make impressive progress.

Above all, we are a people of incurable optimism and good humour, and I believe we are now at a stage where this may be one of the major reasons why Nigeria is still standing!

## **OUR LEADERSHIP INSTINCTS AND INCLINATIONS**

It is not only this past performance that gives us hope that the future can also be positive; it is also the fact that we know ourselves fairly well. We know that, as a people, our instincts and inclinations have usually reflected good discipline and a sense of responsibility. The current trends in our leadership behaviour are not indications of our true nature or original character as a people. Let us consider a few illustrations. Nigerians have always been people of noble family values, with a strong emphasis on the sanctity of parental responsibility. Indeed, the extended family structure that is indigenous to us has been the context within which we acquired and expressed a keen sense of communal responsibility. We have always cherished the family name and reputation, and accepted our individual obligation to maintain the integrity of our inherited name. In the typical village community, an elder noticing some child behaving in an unseemly manner feels an obligation to correct the youngster on the spot, and even to call the attention of his parents soon thereafter.

We are a people with a well-earned reputation for hospitality, especially to strangers. We used to be quick to lend a helping hand when needed, and to stand against acts of oppression or intimidation. Yes, we did fight a few inter-tribal wars to assert the integrity of our territorial heritage, but we put all of that behind us a long time ago! We had settled for the peaceful co-existence of our ethnic and religious affiliations until recently, when some politicians, lacking any respectable agenda or credibility, began to exploit the situation, turning the variety of our make-up into differences over which we must fight. They encourage their followers to fight, not so as to iron out these imaginary differences, but to entrench them into platforms for securing undeserved support at every election opportunity. Clearly, because Nigerians are mostly people of high intelligence, creativity and productivity, it is up to us to enlighten ourselves and isolate those who would continue to betray their leadership responsibilities in this manner.

If we truly believe that a change - even a transformation - is necessary, we may, at this stage, remind ourselves briefly of the trends that we find so unacceptable in our current situation. For me, there are seven major concerns, and I would state them as follows:

1. We seem to be thoroughly confused about our national priorities; thus we pursue policies that cater to self interest and party preferences at the expense of our national interest. For

instance, we referred earlier to the strange situation in which we are currently expanding the road to Abuja airport at considerable cost, while we seem unwilling or unable; to repair the broken roads that carry the commerce that should promote our chances of reaching 'vision 20-2020'.

2. We have this tendency to focus on politics rather than governance. Between the government and the university unions, this nation has failed to ensure the uninterrupted education of university students for a large part of this year. On another note, some legislators seem to believe that the proper approach to upholding the rule of law is to provide a statutory cushion of immunity for the law breakers in their ranks.
3. We show a disdain for truth and justice that has become very worrisome. We now do not know how much of what we are told should be believed, especially as our lawmakers seem reluctant to free up access to information. Here, it is not the appointed leaders alone who need to acknowledge their guilt; the rest of us have also watched truth and justice take the back seat in many of our daily transactions.
4. Closely linked to this point is the blatant manner in which a number of people openly abuse the authority and privilege of office. Until very recently, some of us in Lagos had the daily experience of being noisily warned to clear the road for an approaching public official or run the risk of being brutally forced to acknowledge his superior authority. The official might be one of those who are actually paid to ensure that the roads should provide free passage for the citizens of the State. Is there any real assurance that evil practice has gone for good?
5. In government as well as other areas of activity, we seem to have settled for a pattern in which selection for appointment or promotion to high office is driven, not by performance but by patronage. This has trickled down to corrupt even the process for getting our children into educational institutions, and it is now accepted that brilliant performance at the entrance examination is not as strong a guarantee of admission as the willingness and ability of parents and guardians to stretch their 'legs' in appropriate directions.
6. What has happened to the culture of accountability in our land? The question is appropriate because neither the leader nor his followers seem ready to play a role in calling responsibility holders to question over the ways in which they handle their responsibility. When a leader annuls a free and fair election, he tells us that, if only he owed us an explanation, we would discover that he acted in our best interest. On the other hand, when another official comes out with a forceful thrust of action to hold people accountable, we immediately question his real motives and tell him that he must catch all miscreants at one and the same time if he is not running a programme of selective victimisation.
7. As my seventh concern, I refer to the lack of stakeholder empowerment in our country. In the face of all that we do not like about our situation, there is a general feeling of helplessness that makes us doubt that there is anything we can really do to make any difference. The stakeholders of the national venture seem to have become a captive population in the hands of leaders who conduct themselves as if Almighty God Himself has no interest or authority in their affairs. Yet, the truth is that, all the way from the family

to the national community, our mutual accountability has been divinely decreed. In any case, the Apostle Paul assured his Roman readers that all of them - and, ultimately all of us - must give account of our stewardship to God. This inescapable certainty should provide a wholesome stimulus for good leadership performance!

## **WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF OUR TIME?**

If we are to take care of our concerns and overcome their deleterious effects on ourselves and our children after us, we must define as closely as possible the 'new Nigeria' to which we want to transform our nation. Someone has said that "leaders are tenants of time and context." If we apply that to Nigeria, we can easily see that the leaders who brought us to national independence in 1960 had a specific task to perform, and that they did it effectively within the context of the time. Some political leaders served jail sentences as they paid the price of their bravery and determination. This was not limited to political leaders; it included also the leaders of the civil service, the executives of business, religious leaders, the judiciary, and others who contributed their quota to the pioneer work of building a sovereign nation. Lately we have had another set of leaders whose main task was to help Nigeria to free itself from military governance and regain civilian governmental expression. The jury is still out as to how effectively this job has been done.

Our concern now is that we have come face to face with the reality that our loss of values, standards and discipline is threatening the strength of our national standing today and the probability of our national survival tomorrow. In today's time and context, I think we would agree that leaders should concentrate on the pursuit of a four- point agenda, namely:

1. A restoration of the right values for individual performance and interpersonal relationships;
2. The re-establishment of high standards in business, governance and social behaviour;
3. The adoption of good discipline as the norm in the daily life of individuals as well as the nation;
4. The establishment of a credible system for ensuring consistently good leadership performance at all levels of responsibility.

In my view, we would experience a real transformation of our present situation if we were to proceed as suggested here. I believe that none of us is in any doubt that what we need is radical change in many things, not some pussyfooting cosmetic adjustment here and there. We must face reality and follow all our dialogue with real action that will get Nigeria away from the image of a confused 'giant of Africa' to one of a nimble performer who has rediscovered the road to dynamic self actualisation.

## **WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

We can begin to do this by setting up forums of discussion and exchange through which we should be able to agree on new concepts of leadership that emphasise the responsibilities of leaders as opposed to status, title or position. In this connection, there seems to be a great deal of wisdom in some of the thoughts of the famous management writer, Peter Drucker. He had this to say about leadership:

All the effective leaders I have encountered, both those I worked with and those I merely watched, knew four simple things:



1. The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers. Some people are thinkers. Some are prophets. Both roles are important and badly needed. But without followers there can be no leaders.
2. An effective leader is not someone who is loved or admired. He or she is someone whose followers do the right things. Popularity is not leadership; Results are.
3. Leaders are highly visible. They therefore set examples.
4. Leadership is not rank, privileges, title or money. It is responsibility.

Regardless of their almost limitless diversity with respect to personality, style, abilities and interests, the effective leaders I have met, worked with and observed, also behaved much the same way.

i. They did not start out with the question - ‘What do I want?’ They started out asking - ‘What needs to be done?’

ii. Then they asked, ‘What can and should I do to make a difference? This has to be something that both needs to be done and fits the leader’s strengths and the way she or he is most effective.

iii. They constantly asked, ‘What are the organization’s mission and goals? What constitutes performance and results in this organisation?’

iv. They were extremely tolerant of diversity in people and did not look for carbon copies of themselves. It rarely even occurred to them to ask, ‘Do I like or dislike this person?’ But they were totally - fiendishly - intolerant when it came to a person’s performance, standards and values.

v. They were not afraid of strength in their associates. They gloried in it. Their motto was - “Here lies a man who attracted better people into his service than he was himself.”

vi. They made sure that the person they saw in the mirror in the morning was the kind of person they wanted to be, respect and believe in. This way, they fortified themselves against the leader’s greatest temptations to do things that are popular rather than right, and to do petty, mean, sleazy things.

## **OUR CAPACITY**

Measuring current leadership performance on the Peter Drucker scale, we would have to confess that there is a lot of room for improvement. But we must be grateful for this, for the whole essence of room for improvement is that right thinking human beings should seize every opportunity to occupy the room and improve themselves. What gives us the confidence that we can, in fact, make the improvements that we so sorely need? Let us consider a few things that are already working on our favour:

First, it is estimated that about 50% of our population in Nigeria is the age of 18 and below. What an excellent opportunity this gives us to renew ourselves and bring up leaders that we can, nurture

on the right values, beginning today. What we need to do is to engage these young people in a manner that convinces them that we who are older have developed a distaste and a disgust for the current unattractive state of our nation, and that we look up to them to come up with good ideas for its transformation. We may be surprised at the high quality of thinking that -already agitates the minds of our young people. About 25 years ago, my colleagues and I were eager to set up a scheme of awards for excellence in the company that we were running at the time. We challenged our class of fresh management trainees to create categories of awards and specify the criteria for winning them. The outcome was a set of proposals that far exceeded our own thinking and expectations, and the awards scheme, first instituted in 1985, has survived till today. The youthfulness of such a large portion of our population is a blessing for our leadership capacity building project. The fact, however, is that we must actively stimulate the potential of our young human beings, and then watch as they take off into an orbit of distinguished performance.

Secondly, I am sure that many of us are aware of the fact that increasing numbers of our people are actively discussing this burning issue of the need to transform leadership performance in this nation. In the last thirty days, this is the fifth forum in which I have personally participated, by invitation, in organised discussions on leadership. Two of those forums were held in Abuja, and three in Lagos. There is truly, a constructive dissatisfaction with where we are, and an eagerness to build a better Nigeria. We may also not be aware of the existence of strong groups that have taken the, leadership issue as their mission. I have personal knowledge of a few, including the Nigeria Leadership Initiative, NLI. This initiative now has well in excess of one hundred Fellows across a range of 20- 50 year olds, made up largely of Nigerians who are resident in Nigeria, Europe, Asia and the United States of America. NLI Fellows have not only initiated investment endeavours in Nigeria, they have also embarked on a whole range of projects that are adding tangible value to national development. Only in the last day or two, I have learnt of another group, known as the Leadership Masterclass, whose vision is to take direct, active measures to develop a new type of leadership in Nigeria. Even the House of Representatives in Abuja has its very own 'Integrity Group.' What all this is saying to us is that the next generation is not simply hanging around waiting for things to get better; its members are applying their energy and resources to their cause. It is early days yet, but I believe that the least we should do is to acknowledge these developments and use our national resources to add significant strength to their efforts.

Thirdly, let us also be grateful that in this wilderness of leadership performance, we can point to a few States in which real change seems to be happening. The story of the gradual transformation of Lagos State is one that should be told repeatedly with pride. It gives a vivid illustration of the ways in which people can actually voluntarily change their way of life under good leadership. The queues at bus stops, the respect for public property, and the willingness to pay income tax - all these are phenomena that some people never expected to see in Lagos. I am told that there are also one or two other States in which similar trends are beginning to emerge. In fact, the Governor of Niger State deliberately styles himself "Chief Servant" to emphasise his approach to the responsibility of his office. In the context of our discourse today, I think it is worth remembering that the Chief Executive of Lagos State was already a Senior Advocate of Nigeria before taking office; and that his Niger State counterpart also retired as a Federal Permanent Secretary before contesting gubernatorial elections. Both men already had impressive track records of responsible

professional and management performance in other positions. They are effectively defending the reputations that they had painstakingly built over many years.

## **LEADERSHIP BEST PRACTICE**

The reference to the performance of some current public office holders reminds us that we ought to search other parts of our national scene for examples of best practice that we can replicate. Specifically, I would like to point to two examples of leadership capacity building that we already have here in Nigeria, and that are working effectively. I will take the first example from the business sector of the economy.

## **DEVELOPING MANAGEMENT CAPACITY IN BUSINESS**

I call attention to the advertisement that appeared on page 33 of the Punch newspaper of Friday, October 2, 2009. It is published by a company that is looking to recruit Management Trainees. According to the publication, the management trainee status in this particular company offers the following:

- a structured intensive development programme lasting two years;
- a dedicated coach and mentor throughout the programme to guide the trainee's development;
- focused development of the trainee's leadership and functional capabilities;
- exposure to different projects; and
- inter-Departmental project management experience.

To qualify to enter the trainee programme, the candidate must be a university graduate with a minimum of second class upper division. He or she must have no more than 3 years working experience, a demonstrated entrepreneurial spirit and strong communication skills. Proficiency in French, and a Masters degree would be an added advantage. All these pre-qualifications and the exposure promised by the company would combine to make the trainee a candidate for the following promise - "an exciting, challenging and rewarding career with the potential to move into a managerial position at the end of the programme." In other words, the company and the individual will invest so heavily in this venture, at the end of which all that the individual can expect is to be considered for appointment to one of the lowest rung managerial positions in the company. Advancement to higher levels of leadership responsibility will involve much further training and exposure, plus a record of effective performance of the responsibility at each stage of the manager's career.

After I read the advertisement, I had an irresistible urge to remind myself of the qualifications for some of our public leadership positions, and for this, I consulted The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. I will quote Section 65 of our Constitution in

- (1) Subject to the provision of section 66 of this Constitution, a person shall be qualified for election as a member of - (a) the Senate if he is a citizen of Nigeria and has attained the age of thirty-five years; and (b) the House of Representatives, if he is a citizen of Nigeria and has attained the age of thirty years.

- (2) A person shall be qualified for election under subsection (1) of this section if- (a) he has been educated up to at least School Certificate level or its equivalent; and (b) he is a member of a political party and he is sponsored by that party.

I looked in vain for any mention of experience, exposure, or even the mentoring and coaching that the private sector promised to arrange for its management trainees. A quick assessment of the situation could lead anyone to think that we consider the responsibility of a Senator or Member of the House of Representatives less important and less demanding than that of a management trainee in the business sector. Since we know that this is not the case, a charitable conclusion would be that we simply have not given the matter any thought; for surely we do know and believe that some minimum development is necessary as preparation for the critical responsibility that is attached to the job of representing the people of one's constituency in Parliament.

### **DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY**

One of the views that I hold very firmly is that leadership performance in our grass-roots, traditional society is usually of far superior quality to that which emerges in our modernised governance system. For this reason I thought I should look at the traditional system for insights as to how we might build leadership capacity for Nigeria, going forward.

I looked specifically at the system in Ibadan, capital of Oyo State, and discovered afresh that governance and leadership are very well structured and organised into a system that seems to have worked efficiently over two centuries or more. Responsibility is clearly demarcated and spelt out, such that the warrior class has responsibilities for defense and security, quite distinct from the ruling group of families whose task is more governance and administration related. What really excited my interest, however, was the system of accession to the position and responsibility of the Olubadan, paramount ruler of Ibadan land. The details would take too long to discuss, but in summary, the chieftaincy structure in Ibadan is carefully graded, and those who enter the system usually start their management of chieftaincy responsibility at the level of head of a family, or neighbourhood, or discrete community. To get into even this lowly leadership role, one has to be acceptable to the elders of the unit, who take a recommendation for the appointment to the Olubadan-in-Council.

Good performance at this first level is considered sufficient preparation for the next upper responsibility in which one becomes something of a supervisory chief, looking after two or three lower level constituencies. And so it goes on, the leader rising by well ordered stages to ever increasing responsibility. Preparation for each higher role involves a combination of exposure, working experience, mentoring and participation in councils that may be made up mainly of one's elders. Of course, all this takes quite a bit of time, and those who make it right to the top as Olubadan are usually quite advanced in age on arrival. However, the system has important features that guarantee effectiveness of leadership performance. First, the system is orderly and well understood by all. Secondly, it is based on performance criteria that are well publicised. Then it has the advantage that it offers training and experience that promotes efficient performance. Because of this, it has earned the acceptance of the community, and increased the confidence that the people repose in their leaders.

Above all, it confirms to all in leadership that continuous learning helps the leader to qualify for increasing responsibility, and that the heart of development is self development.

## **BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY**

I believe that the examples that we have discussed should stimulate thoughts in us about the ways in which we could refresh our philosophy and practice of leadership capacity building. Before we come to those thoughts, let us remind ourselves of a few fundamentals.

*First*, leadership is needed at every level where responsible decisions and actions must be taken. Therefore, no one in any position of responsibility should deny his or her leadership obligations.

*Second*, our natural place for learning about leadership early in life is the family. Leadership at home helps us to build values that should be respectable and edifying, and which we can apply to work situations in later life.

*Third*, the parent-child relationship is God's gift to show us that a leader needs to grow through a maturing process supervised by someone of experience who has a positive interest in the growing individual. Often, we are also blessed with older siblings with whom it is natural to share problems and experience.

*Fourth*, at home, but more so when we go to school, we learn to deal with leadership that may not feature any form of emotional attachment. So we learn the next lesson, that as members of a team of non-family individuals, we still have joint responsibility for corporate interests that supersede personal preferences.

*Fifth*, throughout the maturing process, we gradually recognise an important fact - a leader who wants to move to a higher responsibility needs to learn, and to be prepared morally as well as possible for the new role.

## **RETHINKING THE CAPACITY BUILDING IMPERATIVE**

As we move to the conclusion of this discourse, permit me to share my views about the rethinking that we must do if we are to build effective and respectable capacity into leadership in all aspects of our national life.

### ***1. What is leadership for?***

We must reiterate the fact that leadership is meant to add value, not to diminish or demolish it. If we had a good understanding of this, the face of our leadership performance would change in a dramatic way. Honest people would be humble enough, and brave enough, to refrain from taking on leadership responsibilities for which they know they cannot deliver the desired results. Those who choose leaders would also be more careful in making realistic assessments of the capacity of their chosen man or woman to meet the desired objectives. Above all, we would appreciate the truth that the best contribution of leadership is to build people up so that they attain their full

potential of productivity, and readily contribute their best to do the tasks of today while working together with everyone else to build a platform for greater achievements in the future.

## ***2. Building people: the role of education –***

Experience proves to us that education is the best instrument available to us for building leadership capacity in our nation. Therefore, our top priority in the rethinking effort must be to determine what we need to do to make education more effective in playing its role.

Unless we wish to deceive ourselves, we should acknowledge the fact that our Education Sector in this nation - is already in a state of critical emergency. We have not made any official declaration of this, but the poor results and diminishing returns from our efforts tell their own story. We now have a situation in which less than 15% of candidates, taking the school certificate examination pass with the minimum five credits required to move to the next level of study. Our tertiary educational institutions have become dens of all kinds of cultism, and the lecturers, many of whom are competing for laurels in trade unionism rather than academics, have time only to photocopy handouts from textbooks, and they charge the students additional fees for access to a culture which actually discourages any effort to think and to stretch one's mind in curiosity-driven study.

A contemporary statement from the World Bank reminds us that “a quality education, beginning with primary education, is fundamental to endow individuals with the capacity. to successfully pursue their private goals, while at the same time equipping them with the knowledge and skills as well as values and attitudes, necessary to contribute effectively to their societies.”

Some experts who have looked at what we currently do in education have sounded an alarm. Their report says “Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is in a perilous state. Despite the best efforts of many teachers, Head teachers and management committees, there is a significant shortfall in both the quality and quantity of public education. Good practice is a rare commodity and the need for change is acute.”

Speaking at a convocation event at the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, a former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria made a damning pronouncement. In his view, “71 per cent of Nigerian graduates like bad cherries won't be picked by any employer of labour because they are not fit for anything even if they were the only ones that put themselves forward for an employment test.” To cap it all, some statistical information that is available to our education authorities reveals that - Only 20% of the students that sat for WASSCE in Lagos State passed the 2007 WAEC exams (29% in 2006).

In Nigeria (nationwide) only 13% of the children that sat for WASSCE in 2008 passed i.e. scored 5 credits and above.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the quality of the foundation upon which we are attempting to construct the edifice of a vision 20-2020! Perhaps we should face facts and begin our rethinking of capacity building by immediately declaring a state of emergency in the education sector, and then taking every action to retool for better performance going forward.

In my view, the measures required include the following: - The Minister and other senior officials managing our education should be thoroughly screened, and only those who have a real passion for helping young people to learn and develop should be offered positions of responsibility in that ministry; The teaching profession should be given a new status that is commensurate with the awesome task of building the future of our nation. We should put fresh effort, and respectable financial resources, behind the recruitment, development, remuneration and discipline of teachers at all institutions of education. Most importantly, teachers should be given new encouragement to confirm their belief that theirs is a vocation of the utmost importance to the nation.

**3. *Building leaders:*** a development process - Our nation should adopt the more sensible strategy whereby we accept the reality that people succeed best when they grow into leadership responsibility. It is a development process through which people mature gradually and gain confidence as they go. When we choose a system that pitchforks unprepared people into leadership, we should not be surprised that they fail to deliver the desired results.

We should be grateful that we have such a large population of truly able people from which we can select the best for our purpose. What we should do is to create a pool of people with respectable ability, and put them through the kind of development that enlightens them about ethics, integrity and the principles involved in responsibility, teamwork and accountability. This pool of leadership talent should be made to focus on four imperatives of good performance, namely:

- Character - the leader's ethical standards, integrity and authenticity;
- Personal capability- the leader's intellectual, emotional and skills profile;
- Results - the capacity for getting things done to the specifications of good values, standards and discipline; and
- Teamwork - the ability to combine one's efforts with those of other people, with a focus on the interests of the; whole body, not on self.

I believe we already know that many of our young and talented people usually seek opportunities elsewhere only because they do not feel able to develop to their full potential at home in Nigeria. How do we feel when we see Nigerian-born sportsmen and women performing and winning medals in the colours of foreign nations, while our own representatives at the same championship competition languish in the 'no-medals zone'? The Ethiopians and East Africans have maintained their dominance of long distance athletics events, but now, Nigerians are totally absent even from any awards in the boxing ring where we once ruled the world. The answer is to resume a strategy that will enable us to put our best resources behind the development of our gifted people.

Surely, the outcome will reflect itself also in the improved moral fibre of the leaders who emerge from this pool of talent.

Building leaders through task accomplishment - My next suggestion is that we should stop neglecting the productivity potential of our young people.

One of the hallmarks of the Nigeria Leadership Initiative to which I referred earlier, is the emphasis that we give to the management of productive projects. One is usually amazed at the enthusiasm and skill with which members of our classes of Emerging Leaders come up with creative project ideas to which they then give their sustained best effort. This reminds us that there is an irrepressible entrepreneurial spirit that is available for us, as a nation, to develop and build upon.

Think what an absolutely vibrant nation we would see if we had clusters of young Nigerians activating their entrepreneurship at federal, state and local government locations around the country, instead of agonizing endlessly about the non-availability of employment opportunities as we do today. This aid to leadership capacity building is one that we should be ready to support with all necessary financial and other resource. Certainly, it would yield a better dividend than most of the white elephant projects that merely serve as conduits for the illegal transfer of funds from the public treasury.

Building leaders through stakeholder empowerment - My concluding suggestion is that leaders should embrace the responsibility of involving civil society, ordinary people, more closely in the governance endeavour. We should always remember that the people of Nigeria are the true owners of the venture, and that they need, not only to be informed about things going on, but also to make their own input to decision making through channels that are deliberately created for the purpose. Let us create more opportunities for face-to-face encounters between the holders of public office and the rest of us. We can then ask questions and demand information that would assist us in playing a more dynamic role in promoting our corporate interests. After all, the business sector already practices this system of accountability through the statutory annual general meetings at which stakeholders take directors to task over the way they are managing their investments.

Promoting this practice at local government level in particular, would soon motivate better behaviour on the part of the group that is currently labeled “month-end councilors”.

### **THE VALUE-ADDING LEADER**

Of course, as I have said twice or thrice during this lecture, the key to successful development in any human being is self-development. Even if we were to be successful in doing all that we should as a nation to build our leaders, each candidate for leadership still has to take ownership of his own development and performance. We may therefore, appropriately conclude this lecture by urging the leaders of today and the aspiring leaders of the future to contribute their quota to our capacity building effort by becoming **LEARNING LEADERS**. A learning leader, in my definition, starts by demonstrating some humility - a way of life that reflects a readiness to acknowledge that one does not know it all, and that a new responsibility brings with it the unavoidable need to learn something new.

The learning leader will studiously develop the ability to take on new knowledge, new skills and new insights. Self development will be an integral part of his personal philosophy and agenda.

He will also be fully aware of the fact that he - and others working with him - will make some mistakes as they go.



He will not seek to hide such mistakes or treat their consequences with contempt. Rather, he will regard his mistakes and failures as opportunities to learn and improve. He will convert his setbacks into stepping stones to better performance.

How, then, should we go about identifying leaders who will come into office with a desire and an eagerness to add value? Just as we do with contractors before awarding them a huge project, so we should “prequalify” candidates for leadership positions so we can be sure that they have the qualifications and experience needed in the leadership role. In addition to the minimum standards required in our Constitution, we should have the wisdom to choose only people who have received appropriate development, exposure and working experience that gives us the confidence that they will know their way- around the new responsibility. We should require leaders to show, at least, (a) that they have successfully managed an identifiable responsibility in the past; and (b) that they have won a reputation that is worth protecting and defending in the market place.

A value-adding leader at any level should possess attributes such as competence, courage, the right values, a passion for high standards and high quality, discipline and stamina. We should devise ways of testing for these attributes (as is already the case in the business sector), and where the candidate does not already possess them, we should provide the learning opportunity for him or her to acquire them.

People who are elected or appointed to public office should undergo formal and well structured seminars that will improve their familiarity with the Constitution and other statutes that are relevant to their role. This should be done before they take their seats in the House, and the seminar should also challenge the lawmakers to operate their responsibility with high philosophies of morality and discipline. They should also be taught that the authority of office is conferred only so that officials can deliver service to the people. In addition, they should be instructed in ethics so that they can lead the war against indiscipline and corruption in our society.

Nigeria is overdue for electoral reforms, but it is doubtful that we will get to credible reforms as long as the party politicians themselves are the ones that we must trust to authorize the implementation of reforms. It is difficult to see why anyone would legislate against the armed robbery of ballot boxes, and their nocturnal stuffing with fake votes, if this is the only way he knows that he has any chance of winning an election. Our reform agenda should, therefore, be re-ordered in such a way that the eminently sensible recommendations of the Justice Uwais Committee will be put before a referendum, or a constitutional conference made up mainly of non-carriers of political party cards.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to end this by reminding you - and reminding myself - that we must all be involved in the effort to build the leadership capacity in this land. The leader must keep faith with the essence of the leadership responsibility, and the rest of us, as stakeholders, must drive the accountability agenda. That way, the success of our building effort should be only a matter of time.

I thank you for your generous attention.

## **ABOUT THE LECTURER**

Christopher Olusola Kolade is an accomplished diplomat and from 2002 to 2007 served as Nigerian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

Before this appointment, Dr Kolade had a distinguished public career starting out in 1955 as Education Officer in the Ministry of Education in the now defunct Western Region. He joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (now Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) as the Regional Controller and later became Director, Television and Programmes. He was appointed Director-General of the Corporation where he distinguished himself as an outstanding administrator. He moved over to the private sector in 1978, starting out as the Administration Director, Cadbury Nigeria Limited. He rose to be the Managing Director, then Chief Executive Officer and eventually Chairman.

An avid exemplar of corporate governance, Dr Kolade taught Corporate Governance, Human Resource Management and Leadership at the Lagos Business School from 1995—2002.

Dr Kolade was born on December 28, 1932 in Erin Oke, Osun State. He attended Government College Ibadan and Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts (Dunelm) in 1954. He was awarded an honorary doctorate of Civil Law from the University of Sierra Leone in 1976.

Dr Kolade received many awards including the order of St Augustine, conferred on him by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was installed as Lay Canon of Guildford Cathedral, DCL and is also a Commander of the Order of the Niger, CON, an honour conferred on him by then President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo.

Dr Kolade has served on several boards and committees. He is board member of CSS Bookshop, Cornerstone Insurance and Turning point newspaper. He is a former President of the Food and Tobacco Employers Association and is the chairman of System Specs, one of the nations' leading software establishments.

Dr Christopher Kolade, is the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council of Pan-African University.

Dr. Kolade has served in many national and international bodies, having been President of the Nigerian Institute of Management (1985 — 1988), the Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (1988 — 1993), the International Institute for Communications (1973 — 1975) and of the World Association for Christian Communication (1975—1982).