

Leadership and Economic Development of the Asian Tigers: What can Nigeria learn from Singapore?

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Abstract

Economic development is identified as a function of effective leadership. In order to demonstrate this argument, the study examines the impact of leadership as an important variable that stimulates national development, which as a result engendered economic growth and prosperity amongst the countries of the Asian Tigers who were hitherto classified together with Nigeria as Third World Nations. Specific attention is given to Singapore considering the type of leadership provided by Lee Kuan Yew which turned around the fortune of the formerly poor Singaporean nation to a world class economy. In contrast Nigeria still struggle with the crisis of underdevelopment due to poor leadership. Structural Functionalist Theory of Political Development was used as the framework for the research. Secondary sources of data which were closely related to Nigeria's political and economic reality were relied upon. It was discovered that the economic fortune of a country is highly dependent on its people; the quality of leadership provided by the ruling class and the existing institutions put in place. It was accordingly recommended that recruitment of leaders within the present democratic system in Nigeria should be based on ones character, integrity and passion for national development. Thus, citizens should be analytical and objective in their selection of people that govern, while the various political and social institutions should be strengthened in such a way that national interest will supersede personal gains.

Keywords: Leadership, Economic Development, Asian Tigers, Nigeria, Singapore.

L'élite Dirigeante et le Développement Économique des Tigres Asiatiques: Que Peut Apprendre le Nigeria de Singapour

Résumé

Le développement économique est identifié en fonction d'une élite dirigeante efficace. Afin de démontrer cet argument, l'étude examine l'impact de l'élite dirigeante comme une variable importante qui stimule le développement national, qui à la suite, a engendré la croissance économique et la prospérité entre les pays des tigres asiatiques qui ont été jusque-là classés conjointement avec le Nigeria comme des Nations du tiers-monde. Une attention particulière est accordée à Singapour compte tenu du type d'élite dirigeante fournie par Lee KuanYew qui a transformé la fortune de l'ancienne et pauvre nation Singapourienne à une économie de classe mondiale. En revanche le Nigeria est toujours aux prises avec la crise du sous-développement en raison de la mauvaise gestion. La Théorie fonctionnaliste Structurale du développement politique

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a été utilisée comme cadre pour la recherche. Les sources secondaires de données qui ont été étroitement liées à la réalité politique et économique du Nigeria ont été invoquées. Il a été découvert que la fortune économique d'un pays est fortement tributaire de son peuple; la qualité de l'élite dirigeante fournie par la classe dirigeante et les institutions existantes mises en place. Il a donc été recommandé que le recrutement des dirigeants au sein du système démocratique actuel au Nigeria doive être basé sur les personnages, l'intégrité et la passion pour le développement national. Ainsi, les citoyens devraient être analytiques et objectifs dans leur sélection des personnes qui gouvernent, tandis que les différentes institutions politiques et sociales devraient être renforcées de manière à ce que l'intérêt national remplace les gains personnels.

Mots-clés: l'élite dirigeante, le développement économique, les Tigres asiatiques, le Nigeria, le Singapour.

Introduction

Leadership plays an important role in uplifting any human society or holding down the wheel of progress. It is the foundation that determines progress or absence of it (Olaoye, 2013). Economic development is arguably the bedrock of societal development. The inability of the Nigeria state to transform the living conditions of its people, whose large population still wallow in abject poverty and degraded social living conditions despite the enormous human and natural resources the nation is endowed with, appears to be predominantly a question of leadership evident in the underdeveloped state of the economy. Critical issues that would have otherwise been addressed such as unemployment, inequality and poverty described by Seer (1969) as symptoms of underdevelopment seems to have no remedy. Although other factors have their share, but none of such takes center stage like leadership (Olanrewaju, 2015).

Leadership is defined as the act of governing that has to do with providing direction for others resulting to realization of an organization objectives. It is a dynamic process of influencing people which, in certain organizational conditions, can have an effect on other members, with the aim of meeting the objectives of the group (Gonos and Gallo, 2013). This perspective is taken from the management standpoint and it accordingly sees leadership as being either autocratic or democratic. Perhaps, there is no definite definition of leadership; but from the perspective of this paper and field of political science, it can be viewed as the act of governing, ruling, being in control of state apparatus or authority to administer. It can also be seen as the act of being in possession of power and authority to be discharged towards the realization of the objectives of the state and the general wellbeing of the people (Anifowose, 2001).

Economic development on the other hand implies general improvement in the living standard of the people as a result of increase in the country's productivity, due to proper harnessing and utilization of both human and natural resources. According to Leibenstein (1957) economic development can be justified based on two factors – income determinant and income determinant characteristics. For the income determinant, an economy that experienced development is conspicuously characterized by high entrepreneurial ability, technical knowledge, credit systems, savings, employment opportunities, and high volume of trade per capital. Income determinant characteristics on the other hand entails, good housing, less proportion of expenditures on food and basic necessities, absent of malnutrition, low indebtedness relative to assets and income, good hygiene and sanitation, etcetera, engendered by income determinants. By implication, economic

development must inhibit growth which will translate into better living condition. However, in a less developed economy like Nigeria there is short life expectancy, high birth rate, malnutrition, illiteracy, meager capital supply and unemployment, dominance of the agricultural sector, low status of women, rudimentary middle class and formerly political authoritarian (Sauvy, 1956). In addition to these, Gannage (1962) identified other factors common to less developed society to include rigid social structure, traditionalism, and passive or indifference towards desirable or even necessary change. Therefore, economic development in general is all about the transformation of the society from one state to another with positive outcome (Ake, 1982). This is determined by its level of industrialization, production output (GDP, GNP etcetera), equitable distribution of income and resources leading to absence of poverty. Lack of capital and natural resources are identified as major setbacks to economic development (Lewis, 1955).

Nigeria is not the only country battling with the problem of development that contributes to the poor state of its economy. There are still many other South-South nations whose condition has not significantly improved. However, what becomes worrisome in its case of Nigeria is that at certain period of time the country's development performance was impressive but only to start declining with no remedy in spite several reforms (Olaoye, 2013). It is also important to note that Nigeria has failed to achieve significant economic development in relations to its resources. There is the general consensus that this factor in addition to how they are harnessed through the use of good policy instruments should expedite the pace of economic growth leading to general development of a country (Zakaree and Egwaikhede, 2012). Lastly, the inability of the country to keep pace with other countries that were moving at the same rate of economic development is a subject matter of most debates (Olaoye, 2013).

Taking all these into consideration one will argue that new approach is required to turn things around for the present generation and the ones yet unborn. It is on the basis of this call that this paper becomes inevitable.

Statement of Problem

Nigeria is a country abundantly rich with untapped natural and human resources. It is ranked among the first ten world oil producing nations and the most populous black nation in Africa and the world over. The country is blessed with rich and vast arable land for agriculture, besides other natural endowments. Despite all these economic potentials, majority of Nigerians, about 43.3% still live below poverty line (The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Report, 2014). The country ranks 152 out of 187 in the Human Development Index (UNDP HDI Reports 1999-2014), as 65% of the country's wealth is in the hands of 20% of its population (UNDP, Human Development Report, 2014).

Lewis (1955) is of the view that major impediment to economic development is lack of capital and natural resources. This assertion however is proven otherwise based on the state of Nigeria's economic development when closely compare to Singapore. Whereas Nigeria is unable to achieve meaningfully in the midst of plenty, Singapore catapulted itself in the midst of less. It is for this reason this paper examines the role of leadership as a tool for economic development with Singapore as a model. This is in the attempt to answer the following questions:

- i. What qualities or types of leadership facilitate development among the Asian Tigers and in particular, Singapore?
- ii. How can leadership in Nigeria be fine-tuned, to facilitate development as seen in Singapore?

Methodology

The study relies mainly on secondary sources of data, from relevant books, journals, magazines, newspapers, internet materials and other publications. It is the contents of these sources that were analyzed and useful information extracted.

Theoretical Consideration

This paper adopts the Structural Functionalism theory of Political Development by Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell propounded in 1966 and supported by the scholars of the Princeton Series (Ake, 1979) as a framework of analysis. However, there are many theories within the field of Political Economic and Development Studies such as the Classical, Neoclassical, Marxist and Neo-Marxist and even within the modernization school that Structural Functionalism belongs to, like Rostow (1961) theory of stages of economic growth that try to explain causes of economic development, but Structural Functionalism is considered most appropriate because it focus basically on the behavior and structure of a political system, how it aid in recruiting leaders that can produce the needed development within the society. The theory is relevant considering that Nigeria has for well over 16years been under democratic rule with less or nothing much to show. Structural Functionalist perspective identified two components within the political system which are political culture and structure. In any political system, a developed political culture transforms to cultural secularism. This is a process where people become increasingly rational, analytical and empirical in their political actions. In a system that is secular, there is the emergence of pragmatic and empirical orientation. Interaction within the polity is usually on a basis of give and take. Accordingly, role becomes specific rather than diffuse (Almond & Powell, 1966).

On the other hand, for a political structure that is developed, there is structural or role differentiation (Almond & Powell, 1966). By differentiation, it implies specialized roles and autonomy of structures within the political system. For a system that is characterized by this, it would be expected to be able to extract more resources and efficiently distribute them. In Nigeria, both leaders and followers are not rational, analytical and empirical in their decision making within the polity. Wants and choices are beclouded by primordial sentiments and narrowed to self (Barileidum & Serebe, 2013). The country lacks pragmatic and critically minded leaders that can take advantage of the environment to stimulate the needed economic growth. The existing political structures are not viable enough to recruit the desired personalities that would ensure rapid economic changes.

Leadership in Nigeria

Perhaps what Nigeria need most at present is not natural resources but leadership. The problem of bad leadership has generated many debates among political analysts and within the academia. Most discourses always ended up attributing blames to lack of patriotism, greed and desire for primitive accumulation engendered by capitalist orientation. Of all these, none is able to provide any comprehensive scientific or behavioral explanation to the leadership question that the country has found itself.

Bad leadership in Nigeria spread across all levels of government. It is experienced right from military regimes down to the period the country came under civilian regime in 1999. Leadership is not seen as a call to service but rather for personal enrichment. Access to state power means access to public resources which are rather siphoned into personal purse (Fagbadebo, 2007).

It is for this reason the country is ranked as one of the most corrupt nation in the world, a position that has somewhat improved recently.

Chris and Duke (2012) demonstrated that both present and past leaders of Nigeria seem to have failed to provide quality leadership capable of addressing numerous challenges confronting the country. At present, politics in Nigeria is for the highest bidder thereby relegating individual's character, integrity, credibility and disposition to public life. Morality has been thrown to the dogs with no one paying attention to. People with vision and passion for development are no longer considered eligible to talk more of giving the opportunity to govern. Effective leaders influence followers in a desired manner to achieve desired goals (Nanjudeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). However, the idea of "get the right man in the leadership job and all your problems will be solved" as proscribed by Bhagwan & Bhushan (2007, pp. 211-212) appears impotent.

Economic Growth in East Asia and the Status of the Asian Tigers

East Asia has a landmark record of high and sustained economic growth. From 1965 to 1990 its 23 economies grew faster than those of all other regions. Most of this achievement is attributable to seemingly miraculous growth in just eight high performing Asian economies (HPAEs) – Japan; the "four tigers": Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan; and the three newly industrialization economies (NIEs) of South east Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. The East Asian Economies provide a range of policy frameworks – extending from Hong nearly complete laissez faire to the highly selective policy regimes of Japan and Korea. The coexistence of activist public policies and rapid growth in some of the East Asian economies – especially Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan – have raised complex and controversial questions concerning the relationship between government, the private sector, and the market (Page, 1994: 219-220).

East Asia stands out as the only region where living standards are catching up to those in industrialized countries, while other countries of Third World are still lagging behind (Bosworth, 1996). Factors associated to this as pointed out in many literature is not far from the ability to accumulate, save and invest (Shirley, 2014). These are based on the type of leadership provided by the ruling class, which stimulated the people and engendered high inputs through the application of technology adopted from the early industrialized nations. The aspirations of the leaders were achieved through strong ideologies and institutions put in place to regulate both public and private lives which even the ruling class subjected themselves.

Barro (1998) observed that in comparison with typical developing countries, government policies in most of the East Asian countries have been fiscally responsible, pro-market, and hence, reasonable. Good policies are product of leaders' vision and the ability to translate them into reality has multiplier effect on the wellbeing of the generality of the people and defines the character of the leader and his passion for his followers.

No discussion within the academia on the success story of economic growth and development among the countries of the East Asia is always conclusive without narrowing it to the Four Tigers otherwise referred to as Asian Tigers. The rapid speed that characterized their economic exploit remains no doubt lesson to leaders of other nations that were hitherto all classified as Third World – underdeveloped and less industrialized (Shirley, 2014). Therefore, who are the Asian Tigers and what earns them the name?

Asian Tigers according to Wikipedia, are the highly developed economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. They are the first newly industrialized countries, known because of their very high growth rates (they became rich very fast) and fast industrialization between the early 1960s and 1990s. This definition implies that the speed to which these countries

achieved their economic growth and development was so rapid that one could ever imagine. It was extraordinarily achieved in comparison to what is obtained in other nations that were at the same level of economic development in line with what Rodney (1979) considered as basis for appraising development.

The Asian Tigers have the following demography:

Demography of the Four Asian Tigers

Country or territory	Area km²	Population	Population density per km²
Hong Kong	1, 104	7, 234, 800	6, 544
Singapore	718.3	5, 469, 700	7, 615
South Korea	100, 210	51, 302, 044	490
Taiwan	36, 193	23, 373, 517	644

Source: Wikipedia

It was on the basis of this thin demography that the high economic performance of these countries evident in Gross Domestic Product that was reported in 2013 to have gulped 274, 01 billion, 297, 94 billion, 1, 304.55 billion and 489.21 billion US dollars for Hong Kong; Singapore; South Korea; and Taiwan, respectively was realized. These GDPs accordingly represents 0.44%; 0.48%; 2.10%; and 0.79% of the world economy and all combined to make up 3.81%. The GDP of these countries per capital (nominal) as at 2015 were 42, 097, 5, Hong Kong; 53, 224, Singapore; 27, 513, South Korea; and 22, 083, Taiwan. Their Human Development Indexes based on world ranking were respectively, 0.910 (12th); 0.912 (11th); 0.898 (18th); and 0.882 (22nd as 2011) ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four Asia Tigers](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Asia_Tigers)).

Shirley (2014) identifies the exemplary leadership quality provided by the Asian Tigers as the only way forward for the economic development of most of the developing countries including Nigeria. He argues that leadership becomes more legitimate in the presence of economic prosperity rather than democratic elections or principles. Singapore thus has the highest economic performance enhanced by exemplary leadership role.

Leadership and Economic Development of Singapore

Besides the role of leadership, the economic exploit of the Asian Tigers has been attributed to a specific cultural factor peculiar to the region. This is known as principle of Confucianism, which encourages stability, hard work, loyalty as well as respect towards authority figures (Lin, 2011). This brings to bear the reason for the strong political institutions established to aid economic growth.

Singapore was a British colony for more than a century. It became free from British control in 1963 and merged with Malaysia, as Federation of Malaysia. It was voted out of the Federation by the overwhelming votes of the Malaysian parliament in 1965 due its poor state which had been responsible for the two years hostility they faced from the Malays (Knoche, 2014). Singapore at formal independence in 1965, specifically August 13, was a poor country with no natural resources

and arable land for agriculture. The country lacked the economic capacity to provide basic infrastructure for its citizens. Under British rule, the economy of the colony relied basically on trades from the entre pot.

At independence and prior to the economic boom of Singapore, the nation's GDP per capita was below \$320, but at present it is above \$60, 000. Its per capita Gross National Income (GNI) as at 2014 was \$69, 169 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2015). It ranks 11th (0.912) in Human Development Index in the same year (Wikipedia). At present, Singapore ranks among the world's most industrialized nations. No doubt, Singapore's economic miracle is the result of strong leadership (Knoche, 2014). This made Lee Kuan Yew who became the Prime Minister of the country together with Yosuf Bin Ishak as President at independence prominent figures in its economic history. How was this achieved?

Lee Kuan Yew believed in providing a moral leadership; building strong institution; equal opportunity; discipline; stability and strength. His philosophy for moral leadership was anchored on the belief that those bestowed with public trust should focus on building up a society in which people will be rewarded not according to the amount of property they own, but according to their active contribution to society in physical or mental labor (Allison, 2015). Based on this, he encouraged leadership with ethical character and vision as the needed character that would provide direction for his people. These characters resulted in the following directions:

Building strong institutions: Lee Kuan Yew sees good leadership as what can motivate performance. For this to come to light, strong institutions, especially to regulate human conducts were put in place to achieve the objectives of the state. He was of the view that "the acid test of any legal system is not the grandeur of its ideal concepts, but whether, in fact, it is able to produce order and justice" (Allison, 2015: Capital punishment to vices such as corrupt practices, trafficking in drugs and narcotic was instituted. Comparing Singapore with other nations he was quoted: "they are not clean system; we run clean system. Their rule of law is ...; we stick to it. We become reliable and credible to investors"(Juma, 2013: 1). Lee Kuan Yew was of the belief that the ultimate test of the value of a political system is whether it helps that society establish conditions that improve the standard of living of the majority of its people (Allison, 2015).

Equal opportunity: He believes in a competitive society but with level playing ground that allows citizens to achieve results.

Discipline: Economic achievements of the East Asians were to a certain extent related to the cultural based idea of Confucianism. This value was enshrined in Lee Kuan Yew principles and accordingly included in the educational curriculum of Singapore (DuBois, 2011). He however did not believe in democratic principles. His argument was that the acid test of leadership is performance, not promises (Allison, 2015).

Stability and strength: Lee Kuan Yew believes in the leader's strong will and emotions. This principle was reflected in his policies and decisions.

No doubt, Lee Kuan Yew laid the foundation for the economic development of Singapore and implemented it accordingly, before retiring from politics in 2011. His successors, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, son of Lee Kuan Yew have continued to sustain this legacy with impressive economic performance.

Discussion and Conclusion

The significant economic breakthrough made by the Asian Tigers is highly attributed to the quality of leadership provided by the ruling class, specifically in the case of Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew. This proves a significant relationship between leadership and economic development. Although this was achieved under strict authoritarian regimes that built strong institutions, resilient to pressure that restricted social and political liberty, but it guaranteed the realization of the objective of the state. The leadership ideological based of Singapore redefine the purpose of the state by taking advantage of the potentials of the people to give both social and economic life more meaning. The discipline enshrined in these ideologies and the culture created through human and capital investments provides quite a model for countries like Nigeria that lacks all these even with its enormous human and natural resources.

Recommendations

Creating an environment that would ensure recruitment of the right citizens to public service even within the present democratic framework should be given high priority if Nigeria desire to produce good leaders. Citizens should develop the culture of being analytic and objective in their choices by disregarding primordial sentiments. Nigerians should think about what quality leadership can do for the country by stimulating economic development rather than personal gains. The society should as well strive to build strong institutions that would guarantee level playground within the polity as well as the economy for all citizens. Finally, there should be massive investment on the Nigerian people by identifying their potentials and believing in them.

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