

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP: A VERITABLE  
TOOL FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN POST NIGERIA'S  
CENTENARY

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**Abstract**

This study examines effective leadership as a veritable tool for achieving sustainable development in post Nigeria's centenary. Since amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914 and fifty-four years after independence, Nigerians are disillusioned about their leaders who have failed to deliver the good governance, secure the welfare of persons on the principle of freedom, equity and social justice and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of the people. A questionnaire containing 16 items relating to effective leadership and sustainable development concepts, traits and approaches was developed for the study. The study was a descriptive survey research. 150 Social Studies and Civic Education teachers were purposively selected from thirty randomly selected secondary schools in the five local government areas of Ogbomoso division in Oyo state. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and rank. The study revealed that since gaining political independence in 1960, Nigeria like many developing countries of the world has virtually become poorer and under-developed. This is so, because, Nigeria has experienced ineffective leadership

which leads to bad governance vis-a-vis lack of best practices, a myriad of problems and differing forms of conflicts that border on a variety of factors and magnitude. The study argues that, ineffective leadership is at the heart of Nigeria's problems and opines that effective leadership will go a long way to help achieve sustainable development goals which are obtainable in developed countries of the world. The study further revealed that, there is incontrovertible evidence of the failure of successive governments in the process of leadership in Nigeria and other developing countries. The paper concludes by charging successive governments in Nigeria to adopt leadership style that is conducive to optimal human resources productivity to achieving the much desired sustainable development in Nigeria and that bad and ineffective leaders should be made to face the consequences of grave penalty for their ineptitude.

Key words: Centenary, Effective Leadership, Nigeria, Sustainable development

## Introduction

The issue of achieving effective leadership have become herculean task in Nigeria and other emerging nations of the world. Since amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914, Nigeria has struggled to fashion out a political system and leadership that would guarantee an orderly defined methods for settling conflicts and for sharing whatever that collectively belongs to the people.

Leadership can be understood as the ability to provide direction for others to follow in order to achieve stated goals. Leaders are expected to demonstrate traits that would distinguish their abilities to provide knowledgeable and well thought out directions for their followers. Essentially, within the context of our contemporary world, leaders are needed to provide vision and confidence in such a way that encourages followers to support the achievement of the stated objectives. Adair (2002) agrees with this view as he submits that

“people will look to their leader for direction in their common enterprise”. For Adair, the concept ‘leader’ can be seen as a road or path one follows in the course of a journey.

In Nigeria, we are confronted with a worsening poverty, hunger, ill health, unemployment and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystem on which our wellbeing depends. However, efforts at integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standard for all, better protected and managed ecosystem and a safer, more prosperous future, this to a greater extent is referred to as sustainable development (UNCED 1992). Nevertheless, achieving sustainable development requires particular attention given the myriad of social, economic, political and environmental challenges regularly experienced in Nigeria. These challenges have been exacerbated by leadership failure since independence.

Ogundare (2002) affirmed that some specific citizenship responsibilities have been abandoned by Nigerian political leaders while the followers have also thrown most of their social responsibilities to dogs culminating into economic and political woes in the nation. The implication of the above on the nation’s development is grave. This therefore calls for development of patriotic orientation and value re-orientation especially on effective, responsible, responsive, proactive and improved leadership and followership. Therefore, this piece assessed social studies teachers’ views on effective leadership as a tool for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.

### Statement of the Problem

Nigeria’s struggle for development predates the independence era, having suffered centuries of slavery and colonialism. With this in mind, even since Nigeria independence over 50 years ago, it has been a struggle to establish a system that would handle promotion of culture and identity, unemployment, protect the basic rights of citizens, provide basic infrastructure and services, electricity, health-care, water, establish shared aspirations and how those aspirations would be pursued (Usua, 2010).

Meanwhile, in contemporary Nigeria today, effective leadership is a prime-value, the most valuable good but yet the most elusive. It is obvious that Nigeria is painfully in need of quality and effective leadership in order to achieve the aims, objectives, visions and aspirations of the founding fathers vis-à-vis achieving sustainable development because, since amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914 and fifty four years after independence, Nigerians were disillusioned of their leaders who have failed to deliver the good governance, secure the welfare of persons on the principles of freedom, equality and social justice and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of the people.

In the same vein, the painful reality that over the past few decades, there seems to have been a dramatic leadership vacuum in Nigeria and in the third world countries, generations have produced a poor quality of characters that fade in the presence of true leadership and leave our present generation in the same leadership vacuum. Meanwhile, the recent fall of governments in several African countries, the exposure of corruption and unethical activities among political leaders and the covert conspiracies of government betraying their own people is evident that this lack of quality leadership is affecting every sphere of our lives (Munroe, 1984).

### Effective Leadership and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The discourse of the concept: effective leadership should start with the meaning of leadership itself. Leadership is the most visible aspect and highest prospect of management. Newstrom & Bittel (2002) define leadership as the process of influencing and supporting others to follow you and to do willingly the things that need to be done. With this, leadership is impossible without a guiding vision and purpose that generates passion for accomplishment. Leadership derives its power from values, deep convictions and correct principles. Leadership is an act of leading others and coordinating their activities which are designed to benefit the general populace. Such a leader plays a dynamic role in directing and coordinating the activities of the group towards achieving the aims and objectives of the group.

From the foregoing definitions of leadership, a common trend to be seen among the various interpretations of leadership is that, it relates to exerting influence among a group of people so that, the collective purpose of that group will be achieved optimally. Regrettably, this factor is a scarce commodity among the self-acclaimed leaders especially in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

To this end, an effective leader, therefore, is one who is capable of persuading others to move enthusiastically towards the achievement of the group goal. Nwachukwu (1988) identifies some leadership styles namely: autocratic, *laizzes-faire* and democratic. The democratic leader gets members involved in decision making by guiding them to determine how the group functions. The autocratic leader provides the direction and determines policy, while the *laizzes-faire* leader allows people in the group to determine their own direction and function without involvement.

The culture of poor and ineffective political leadership in Nigeria has kept jumping from one problem to another. The citizenry have over the years been experiencing the worst, compared with their counterparts in developed countries of the world. This is so because, virtually all the means that could be exploited to extricate Nigeria from her diverse problems are being blocked with the undoing's of Nigeria self-appointed or elected leaders.

Meanwhile, the concept of sustainable development has become popular in the past three to four decades owing to the realisation that man and his environment have drifted apart owing partly to the activities of the former. Thanks to the findings of leading scientists who provided the initial impetus for galvanizing awareness on the increasing damages to the environment, we are now aware of the grave dangers we have inflicted on nature. As a result, major international and local efforts have been put together, to ensure we mitigate the damages. Meetings and conferences have also been held to facilitate global responses. Amongst these, the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment in 1972, and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio in 1992 are major references for pooling global attention to the issue of the environment and development (Obasanjo, 2012).

However, between these years, the concept of sustainable development received massive impetus given the report of the UNCommission for Development popularly known as the Brundtland reports published in 1987. The often-cited definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” was provided by that report. This definition is arguably the most common definition for sustainable development since it captures the essence of ensuring that not only the current generation, but also those of the future, have access to necessary resources to sustain life. With this definition, international commitments such as those emanating from conferences and meetings are framed to ensure better understanding of what needs to be done. For instance, in the Rio Declaration of 1992 containing 27 principles that should guide the direction for sustainable development, world leaders agreed that the environment needs to be treated with respect in order to ensure that development is done in a sustainable fashion (Rio Declaration, 1992). Likewise, as succinctly stated in Agenda 21 of the Rio Conference, humanity stands at a defining moment in history (Obasanjo, 2012).

Ugoh (2008) also describes sustainable development as a construct, which envisions development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future. It is a conglomeration of the four factors (ecological, political, social and economic) as overall social development is only sustainable if no deterioration occurs in the medium and long term in the sectors referred above. One can understand the concept of sustainable development better if one considers the various dimensions of development identified by Chiaka (1989). This includes economic growth, distributive justice, social-economic transformation, modernisation and redemptive hope. Thus, sustainable development is a rapid and sustained rise in per capita real output, reducing poverty level among the masses, transforming a country's mode of production, including wealth oriented behaviours and values in individuals and making them to be more “at home” with one another and with oneself in the community.

### Research Questions

With developments of various maladministration, poor leadership, corruption and every form of sharp practices displayed by our past and incumbent leaders at the local, state and federal levels which may have affected sustainable development in Nigeria, the following research questions are hereby generated for this study:

- i. To what extent can effective leadership promote sustainable development in Nigeria?
- ii. What type of leadership style promotes effective leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria?
- iii. Which approach could be suitable for achieving effective leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria?

### Method

The study was a descriptive survey research. A total of 150 participants from social studies and civics education teachers were purposively selected from thirty secondary schools in the five local government areas of Ogbomoso division in Oyo state (i.e. Ogbomoso north, Ogbomoso south, Oriire, Surulere and OgoOluwa local governments). A questionnaire of 16 items drawn on effective leadership vis-à-vis sustainable development was designed for the study's instrument. The instrument was trial tested on 40 social studies and civic education teachers in ten randomly selected secondary schools in Oyo town. The Cronbach co-efficient alpha formula was used and reliability estimate of 0.86 was found. The face and content validities were obtained through two social studies experts' examination of the items. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and rank. Any mean less than 2.5 is considered not significant.

### Data Analysis and Result

The analysis in this segment of the study focuses on the research questions generated to guide the study. The responses have been graduated while criterion mean weight is set at 2.50; therefore any response below this is regarded as not significant while those above 2.50 are regarded as significant.

Research Question 1: To what extent can effective leadership promote sustainable development?

Table 1: Effective Leadership and Sustainable Development

S/N	Items	Mean Weight	Rank
1.	Order Ensure promotion of national integration and cohesion	2.75	3rd
2.	Enhance good governance in a democracy	2.70	4th
3.	Fosternational unity in diversity	3.25	1st
4.	Ensure promotion of socio-economic life of the citizen	2.76	2nd
	Grand Mean	2.87	

The extent to which effective leadership can promote sustainable development is indicated in the above table. Effective leadership foster national unity in diversity ranked first with mean weight of 3.25 while enhance good governance in a democracyranked 4<sup>th</sup> with mean weight of 2.70. In all, all the variables identified tend to be significant with the grand mean of 2.87 and since none of them falls below the criterion mean weight of 2.50 hence, effective leadership is germane to national sustainable development in Nigeria.

Research Question II: What type of Leadership style enhances effective leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria?

Table II: Effective Leadership and Leadership Styles/ Concepts

S/N	Items	Mean Weight	Rank
1.	Autocratic style of leadership	1.87	4th
2.	Democratic style of leadership	3.76	1st
3.	Laizzes-faire style of leadership	2.42	3rd
4.	Enthusiastic towards achieving group goals	3.61	2nd
	Grand Mean	2.92	

Table II revealed that, through the use of concepts/styles of leadership, democratic leadership will go a long way to achieve sustainable development goals like good governance, fulfilled basic needs, improved living standard better protection and managed ecosystem. Democratic style of leadership ranked 1<sup>st</sup> with mean weight of 3.76, while autocratic style of leadership ranked fourth with mean weight of 1.87. However, three out of the four variables were significant though the grand mean of 2.92 obtained is greater than the criterion mean weight of 2.50.

Research Question III: Which approach could be suitable for achieving effective leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria?

Table III: Approaches for Effective Leadership

S/N	Items	Mean Weight	Rank
1.	Effective leadership can be enhanced through organization of seminars and conferences for political leaders	2.63	3rd

2.	Leadership concepts should be infused into social studies and civic education curricula	2.60	4th
3.	For effective leadership to triumph there should be grave penalties for ineffective and bad leaders	2.89	1st
4.	Leadership training programmes should be organized for our youths and every categories of leaders in Nigeria	2.70	2nd
Grand mean		2.66	

From table III above, effective leadership can be achieved through incorporating grave penalties for bad and ineffective leaders. This will go a long way to serve as deterrents for others. All the four variables were significant with the grand mean of 2.66. This finding is in line with the notion of Achebe (1983) that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. He pointed out that, there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character, land, water, air or anything else but leadership. He posits that effective leadership can be achieved through selflessness, leadership training programmes and effective punishment for bad leaders.

### Discussion of Results

From the foregoing therefore, it is evident that effective leadership is a tool for achieving sustainable development. It is also revealed in this study that Nigeria state is currently beset with a myriad of security, economic, environmental, political and social challenges. Among these, the violence in the north must be resolved as soon as possible in order for normalcy to return to the region. The increasing rate of armed robbery and kidnaping have also risen, with these, peace and security which are some of the goals of sustainable development requires effective and proactive leadership. The above findings have been corroborated by other studies, such as Ogundare

(2002) Adam (2002), UNCED (1992), Achebe, (1983), Dike (2011) among others.

Again, a number of effective leadership training for sustainable development are embedded in social studies and civic education curricula in Nigeria among which are patriotism, effective leadership and followership, virtues of tolerance, selflessness, honesty and integrity, respect for others opinion among others (Udo 2009, Ngada, 2001, Ogundare, 2002). With this and for Nigeria to experience meaningful sustainable development, our leaders at the local, state and national levels should be selfless, honest, patriotic, respect other people opinions and tolerate opposition.

The study also shows that, the political class lacks good governance, discipline, equality and social justice in the administration of the country and does not embark on any meaningful problem solving toward making the country a developed nation. Rather, it concerns itself with embezzlement of public funds so as to corruptly enrich itself. The effect of these is the suffering, poverty and general deprivation on the mass majority of the people. There is also infrastructural breakdown in form of very bad roads, non-functioning railway system, water transport is neglected and air transport is expensive and grossly unsafe. There is erratic supply of electricity, education and health care are beyond the reach of the poor.

To the issue of approach of instituting effective leadership in Nigeria, having realized the fact that, the lack of selfless, non-corrupt and committed leaders have contributed immensely to the socio-political and economic predicament facing Nigeria today. Thus, some of the approaches to be employed in instituting effective leadership include: organizing leadership training programmes for our young ones and every category of leaders, instituting grave punishment against bad leaders and infusing good leadership concepts into social studies and civic education curricula. Supporting this view are studies such as Achebe (2002), Odunga (2011), Asua (2010), Okpaka, (2011), Albert, (2012), Balewa, (1994) and others.

## Conclusion

Leaders make things happen, they are wave maker. A society without proactive, disciplined, talented, God fearing and committed leader will retrogress or at least remain stagnant. That has been the problem with Nigeria. A careful assessment of the attitude and behaviours of our leaders of post-colonial Nigeria shows that majority of the civilians as well as military leaders were selfish and always in pursuit of personal goals at the expense of broader national interests or needs. Therefore, in order to secure a sustainable future for all in post-Nigeria's centenary, this study seeks to emphasise effective, visionary, proactive, disciplined, God fearing and action-oriented leadership at the individual and institutional levels which is germane to achieving sustainable development. With this, Nigeria as popularly referred to as giant of Africa will again resume her enviable position, as she will worth proud of. Also, there should be stiff penalty on Nigerian leaders at the local, state and national levels who have misruled the country in one form or the other.

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