

Political Leadership and Development Crisis in Nigeria: The Case of Imo State

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Abstract

This paper was on political leadership and development crisis in Nigeria: the case of Imo State. The study examined the effect of political leadership toward the development crisis in Imo State. The study adopted the historical research method. The Data was gathered using the secondary sources like, journals, books, newspapers, internet materials etc. The analysis of the study was done using the content analytical approach. The study applied the transactional transformation of leadership theory to explain the effect of political leadership on the development of Imo State. The study revealed that the trouble with Imo State is squarely on political leadership failure which has resulted in corruption, unprecedented borrowing, hunger, poverty, high unemployment, decayed infrastructure etc. Also, the study indicated, that Imo State development crisis was made possible due to poor performance of political leaders in the state and it resulted into poverty, unemployment and inequality among the people. Arising from the findings, the study recommended that; political leaders should be held accountable with the view to providing quality and visionary governance to the people of the state.

Keywords: *Political Leadership, Development Crisis, Case of Imo State, Nigeria*

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Background to the Study

Leadership across the globe is expected to be a call to service and responsibility which should lead to meaningful development of any society. Therefore, anyone that desires to lead must not only be prepared to take full responsibility of the office, but be able to ensure that the economic wellbeing of the citizens is adequately delivered. In every society, there is a strong relationship between political leadership and socio-economic development. The Importance of political leadership in attaining sustained economic development cannot be over emphasized as each society is defined by a set of values, orientations, practices and norms that identify the context in which their political activities or governance take place. These sets of values and orientations, underlie and give meaning to political action, inputs or outcome in any society. Therefore, to understand the relationship between political leadership and underdevelopment an understanding of political leadership and underdevelopment became inevitable. Underdevelopment is result of Political leadership failure. That is to say Political leadership failure leads to underdevelopment. An effective political leadership gives rise to development of any society. Therefore, political leadership of any society or state is saddled with the responsibility of mobilizing the people towards the well-being of all. In other words, the type of policy and action plans of leaders goes a long way in enthroning an enduring or sustainable development.

Effective and vibrant political leadership is not only necessary to the actualization of government policies, programmes or party ideologies, but, the provision of veritable platform for the participation of the masses which indispensably guarantees the survival of the polity and of course, the legitimacy of that government (Egwu, 2017). Imo State just like many other States had the opportunity to become a super viable entity with the human and material resources at its disposal, but years of misrule, lack of commitment on the part of political leadership has continued to rub her of its potentials. Imo State has had several allocations, multi-billion dollars in revenue, and the money has always been misappropriated by the political leaders. Since the creation of Imo State in 1976 by the military, there has not been any well-coordinated development strategy to transform the State's economy and people's well-being. Imo State has been grappling with inept leadership, which tends to be at the root of the State's development crisis. The State is so endowed with both human and natural resources, yet she is as one of the extremely mismanaged state in the country.

For instance, there is massive lack of infrastructures and a significant percentage of her citizens living below \$1 dollar daily, poor budget implementation and corruption exhibited by the government in Imo State, have been identified as the cause to the unending poverty and unemployment situation in the State. Political leaders cannot be exonerated from the current predicament of underdevelopment in the State (Imo State). Poor political leadership has been the bane of development in the state. It is still a worrisome issue that Imo State after forty-seven years of its creation and NDDC State remains economically backward compared with States like Jigawa, Enugu among others. Amadi (2019) contends that the State is an example of incompetent and corrupt aristocracy.

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Report shows that Imo State, has the highest unemployment in the country. In contrast, Anambra State is the state with the least unemployment in the country with 13.1% unemployment rate. (Ifeanyi 2023:17). The national average for the unemployment rate is 27.1%. Imo State has an unemployment rate of 48.7% as at the second quarter of 2020 by far the highest when compared to any other State in the country (Ifeanyi, 2023:17). According to the report, 75.1% of the total employable people in the state are either underemployed or unemployed. The IGR of the State ranges from 20.48%-16.21% between 2021-2022. In Imo State, what is lacking is not the absence of laudable development visions, policies and plans but the political or leadership to turn things around. The political leadership class has been that of self-service as some of the leaders are after in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals at the expense of broader interest. The political leadership in Imo State has contributed to the economic stagnation and developmental quagmire it experiences. It is in the light of the foregoing, that this study seeks to examine the effect of political leadership toward underdevelopment of Imo State from 2011-2023.

Statement of the Problem

The period 2011-2023 had witnessed massive governance crisis in Imo State. Against the high expectations that followed the elections of the political leaders within the dispensation. The people had high hopes for massive infrastructural development, reduction in unemployment rate, as well as poverty reduction. The period witnessed lack of investment both national and foreign owing to high level of security challenges and government regulations which were antithetical to investors. The lack of political will to bring development to the people resulted in the underdevelopment of the state in many spheres.

The situation is pathetic due to the poor leadership challenge which has resulted in massive corruption, infrastructural decay, poor recruitment process of political leaders, high poverty growth rate, unemployment challenge as well as high level of insecurity in the state. The debt burden of the state has contributed immensely to the underdevelopment of the state: The political leadership in the state has led to excessive borrowing owing to reckless and misappropriation of the state resources. The security problem in the state has made investors relocate their businesses to safer states. This had contributed to the increase in the unemployment and poverty rate in the state. Also the inability of the political leaders in the State to increase the State's internally generated Revenue (IGR) among others, constitutes the yardstick for underdevelopment in Imo State.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the consequences of political leadership on the underdevelopment of Imo State, 2011-2023.

Specific Objectives Includes:

1. To identify the relationship between political leadership failure and unemployment, poverty and inequality in Imo state. 2011-2023
2. To examine the causes/effect of political leadership failure towards unemployment, poverty and inequality in Imo state. 2011-2023

Research Questions

The following research questions were adopted for this study:

1. What is the relationship between political leadership failure and unemployment, poverty and inequality in Imo State? 2011-2023.
2. What are the causes/effects of political leadership failure towards unemployment, poverty and inequality in Imo State? 2011-2023.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Leadership

Good leadership is pivotal as it brings the necessary changes that help the country to progress through the establishment of well-articulated focus on development for all. Leadership is a process of social influence by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs an organization in a way, that makes it more cohesive and coherent (Chemers, 2002). A leader therefore is expected to demonstrate qualities, which embrace but not limited to good character, vision, tact, and ability to lead by example because people basically ascribe leadership to those who they feel can most enable them achieve important goals or objectives. Bassey and Agbor (2015) observed that leadership is the capacity for exercising authorities, solving problems, resolving conflicts, and implementing programs and policies. Tom (2013) views leadership as "an expression of innate quality and trait that makes an individual leader".

The conception of leadership as expressed implied that; Leadership and development are two sides of the same coin, otherwise by nature, one cannot function without the other. The success of one is a function of the success of the other. There are difficult kinds of leadership ranging from traditional, religious, charismatic to constitutional leadership. Same goes to development which takes different dimensions such as political, economic, social etc in both leaderships and development, one is the determinant fact of the other.

Political Leadership

Political leadership refers to the ruling class that bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory (Ogbeidi, 2012), Broadly defined, however, political leadership goes beyond the ruling elites that directly manage the affairs of a territory, it embraces the totality of the political class that has the capacity to manipulate the machineries of government even from behind the scene (Ahmed, 2015). In his assertion, Ogar (2011) described political leadership as the ruling class that bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory. These decisions are based on well-thought-out mechanisms and strategies. Conceptualizing further on political leadership. Obikeze, Obi and Abonyi (2005) summited that political leadership class includes people who hold decision-making positions in government, and people who seek those positions, whether by means of

election, coup d'etat, appointment, electoral fraud, conquest, right of inheritance or other means. In broader perspective, political leadership goes beyond the ruling class that directly run the affairs of a territory; it includes the totality of the political class that has the capacity to influence the machineries of government even from behind the scene. Political leadership with basic ingredients like strong democratic values, rule of law, political stability, is development oriented. Political leadership is constitutionally embedded in democracy. Policies that lead to development are greatly influenced by the ideology of the leader (Sharma, Sadana and Kaur, 2011). Political leadership and personalities of the leaders are some of the several factors influencing policy. Therefore, the above postulations are inherent variables of sound political leadership.

Development

Development is a concept considered to be well known but the conceptualization tends to be problematic. It is a broad area of study. For this study, development is seen in terms of achieving sustained rates of growth of income per capita to enable a nation expand its output rate faster than the growth rate of its population (Todaro and smith, 2017). World Bank (1991) sees development essentially from the angle of improving the quality of life of individuals within the society. Seers (1972) tried to de-emphasize the relevance of per capita income in assessing development and instead raised the critical questions that should act as yardstick for measurement, and these revolve around the issue of poverty, Unemployment, and inequality. His conclusion is that when these three critical elements have declined from high levels, it can be said that the society is developing.

Theoretical Framework

Transaction/Transformational Leadership Theory

Thus, theory is better situated and apt in the analysis and explanation for this study. The theory was propounded by J. M Bums (1978) in an effort to explain the difference between successful" Leadership in Normal circumstances and successful Leadership in changing times. Bass (1985) expanded on this groundwork, as he identified two types of Leadership- Transactional and Transformational and gives the four areas features that a Transformational leader should possess, which are Charisma, vision, ability to stimulate followers, and ability to cave for their emotional needs. House (1977) cited in Odum (2017) sees charismatic leaders as those that are capable of having profound and extra-ordinary effect on their followers due to the force of their personal abilities. Such leaders have the ability to use their influence to cause their followers to accomplish, outstanding feats. In sum, a transformational leader is one that has vision of what needs to be done to cope with the situation, the ability to communicate this vision to followers and the capability to energize or inspire them to change their current way of doing things (Rollinson, 2008).

The view encapsulated in the Transactional Leadership narrative is very relevant to this study because it will serve as a functional guide in determining the kind of political Leader required to combat the challenge of crisis of development and transform the Imo State from its sham developmental status/level to a more viable and advanced stage. It will equally be helpful in

analyzing the kind of political leadership operating within Imo State's political system. It is quite agreeable that the onerous task of eliminating unemployment, poverty and inequality are achievable by a Leader who, among others, is opposed to the status quo, possesses an idealized vision of the future, is expert in using unconventional means to transcend the existing order, is far more sensitive to the task environment, articulates goals strongly, and can transform people in a way that they become committed to the radical changes he/ she advocates (Odum, 2017). Thus, the transformational leadership perspective will serve as the background upon which we make our analysis.

Political Leadership Failure and Development Crisis in Imo State, 2011-2023

From 1999 to 2011 under the leadership of Chief Achike Udenwa (1999 -2007 and Chief Ikedi Ohakim 2007-2011) there were allegations of widespread corruption among cabinet members, even though it is not as rampant as it is recorded during subsequent administrations. Amadi (2019:14) contended that Imo State is an example of incompetent and corrupt aristocracy. "Anyone who has even a passing interest in politics and governance will easily acknowledge that the state is witnessing gross mismanagement. Successive administrations have turned what was the fastest industrializing, state under Samuel Mbakwe (Late) into both a basket case and the exemplar of "leadership as theatre". This contention emphasizes that the political leaders were the reason for the state backwardness in terms of development.

Supporting the state of underdevelopment in Imo State, in 2011, Imo State Internally generated Revenue was N5.8bn, in 2017, it was N5.9bn, the same year 2011. Jigawa recorded IGR of 1.5bn and grew it to N5.1bn in 2017, Enugu in 2011, posted IGR 7.3bn and grew it to 24.bn in 2017 from the statistics, Jigawa state was better governed than Imo State in the period under review. It added over N4bn whilst Imo added only N100m. Enugu, a comparable state added more than 14bn in the same periods. In 2021 the IGR stood at 20.48% while it drops to 16.21% in 2022. IGR tells the story of the quality of political leadership in the state. An entrepreneurial administration will generate wealth, especially from a state like Imo State with Incredible natural resources and boasts of the highest literacy rate in Nigeria (98 percent). That Imo is one of the 12 states listed as bankrupt by the "Economics confidential" is not surprising (Amadi, 2019).

The statistics are the same for human capital indicators, especially in education attainment in Imo. Before 2011, Imo State was a leading performer in education in terms of WASSCE results. Today, Imo lags behind most South East States in Education attainments measured by examination results. The failure of governance in Imo and its concomitant impact on social and economic welfare of the people could be a pivotal to think about the adverse impact of and what it means for economic and social development. The youths are without jobs and no measure of empowering them. Equally, the period 2019-2023 in Imo state, have witnessed backwardness in terms of structural indicators of underdevelopment. According to Duruebube (2023) decayed infrastructure, bad roads, lack of electricity supply and underdeveloped manpower are the fundamental characteristics that have hung over the state. Socially there is no security of lives and properties. With very bad educational standard,

evidence of that statistically from practical experiences shows that, over 80% of tertiary institutional graduates do not just faced unemployment but they are not employable in the private sectors. In every angle of the State structure is backwardness in terms of development as a result of political leadership failure. Duruebube (2023) affirms that political leadership failure of the present administration in Imo state has slowdowns internal trade, encourages investment outflows, inflows, increases unemployment, poverty and hunger which on vicious cycle help in creating an environment for resentment and fertile ground for recruitment of youths into the bandwagon of kidnapping gangs, separatist groups and agitators.

The political leadership through excessive borrowing has thrown the state into debt servicing. The unprecedented debt hanging on the state amount to enslaving the future of state. The lack of development strategy and planning constitute a major impediment towards initiating policies geared toward uplifting the wellbeing of the people. As an oil producing state, the derivation fund of 13% has not been effectively managed. The political leadership in the state has misappropriated the state share by using political associates to embark on projects that have no value to reducing poverty among the people, such projects like, the Akachi Tower, the car park project in the capital city and the erecting of images of past leaders of Nigeria and Africa at the Hero's square Owerri. These projects are not relevant to the people but just a way to embezzle fund while the incidence of poverty continued, youth restiveness on the increase, pipeline vandalization resulting to loss of oil and gas revenue.

The Causes and Effects of Political Leadership Failure and Development Crisis in Imo State

Among the causes of political leadership failure that leads to underdevelopment includes:

Distortion of Governmental Expenditure

A noticeable cause of political leadership failure which has distorted the economic wellbeing of the people has been the distortion of governmental expenditure. This often results in diversion of public investment on large-scale projects, rather than on the provision of necessary public services such as health, roads, housing and education, nonpayment of workers and pensions. Development projects are made unnecessarily complex so as to justify the corrupt huge expenses on them. This situation makes it inevitable for the limited but valuable fund earmarked for development to go into private purse.

Embezzlement and Misappropriation of Public Funds

Indeed, it is difficult to think of any social ill in Imo State that is not traceable to the embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds particularly as a direct or indirect consequence of the corruption perpetrated by the callous political leadership class between 2011-2023. The cycle of poverty keeps growing with all its attendant consequences even as the rate of unemployment remains perpetually high by giving mediocrity advantage over intelligence through nepotism. Intellectual capital, which is the bulwark of development and advancement, has continued to drift abroad and other parts of the country in search of greener pasture.

High Level of Borrowing and Debt Servicing Effects

The level of borrowing and the interest accumulation by successive administrations implies that as allocation is received, the capital and interest are deducted at source. Whatever is not paid off each month is compounded and Interest paid on it sadly, debt servicing constitutes more than 30% of Imo's annual budget. This has contracted the state economy by more than 11% and raised inflation to more than 18%. The contraction of the economy, high debt servicing and spiral inflation are obviously clear indicators of recession, yet the political leadership in the state is not losing sleep, but rather they improve on debt rate, Amadi (2019).

Evaluation of the Research Questions using Documentary Method

The research Questions adopted for this study are evaluated below;

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between Political leadership failure and underdevelopment in Imo State, 2011-2023?

Research Question one seeks to identified the relationship between political leadership failure and underdevelopment in Imo State, 2011-2023. The results indicated that political leadership failure is the yardstick for underdevelopment in Imo State. The inability of the leaders to make and implement good policies that prompts human capital development. The corrupt nature of the political leadership in turn give rise to poor management of the state economy. The inept leadership failure to build on entrepreneurial capacity of the people. This result to massive unemployment, inequality and high rate of poverty ravaging the state. These assertions were justified by Amadi (2019) who opined that internally generated Revenue tells the story of the quality of political leadership in the state. An entrepreneurial administration will generate wealth especially from a state like Imo State with incredible natural resources and boosts of the highest literacy rate in Nigeria (98 percent). The poor performance of the political leadership in Imo State to effectively increase the state IGR is a minus to the growth and development of the state. Also, Duruebube (2023) affirmed that political leadership failure of the present administration in Imo state has slow down internal trade, encourages investment outflows, inflows, increases, unemployment, poverty, hunger which on vicious cycle help in creating an environment for resentment and fertile ground for recruitment of youths into the bandwagon of kidnapping gangs, separatist group and agitators.

Research Question two: Sought to examine the causes and effects of the political leadership failure on underdevelopment of Imo State, 2011-2023. The result of the inquiry affirmed that the underdevelopment which pervades Imo State especially the high level of poverty, unemployment and inequality was as a result of the government desire to indulge in high level of borrowing. The unprecedented borrowing goes with high rate of interest. What this implies is that state allocations from the Federation account are deducted at source. The state thereafter is left with little or nothing to pay workers' salaries, and build on the state infrastructures.

Also, the embezzlement and misappropriation of fund by the government contributed immensely to the backwardness and underdevelopment of the state. The little resources in the state coffers are either embezzled by the leaders or are appropriated to projects that do not have any bearing on reducing poverty, or reducing the high level of unemployment in the state. Amadi (2019) argued that and entrepreneurial administration will generate wealth, especially from a state like Imo State with incredible natural resources and boosts of the highest literacy rate in the country.

Moreso, the effect of political leadership failure gives rise to the high rate of insecurity in the state. The state is presently engulfed with security challenges owing to the fact that the government present insolvency created room for the non-state actors to continuously attacking the entire state, causing havoc and maiming the citizens. This situation has resulted in businesses closing down. Duruebube (2023) avers that the political leadership failure in Imo State has slow down internal trade, encourages investment outflows, inflows, increases unemployment, poverty and hunger which on vicious cycle help in creating an environment for resentment and fertile ground for recruitment of youths into bandwagon of kidnapping gang, separatists' groups and agitators. The siphoning of the state lean resources abroad by the state leaders has deprived the state developmental strides. The poor health care system, non-proper funding of the educational system is catalyst to underdevelopment of the state. This contention gives credence to the position of Otusanya and Adeyeye (2021) that argued that the economic interests of the political and economic elites from developing countries which results in capital flight, money laundering have aided underdevelopment in these countries

Conclusion

This study identified political leadership failure as the catalyst to underdevelopment in Imo State. With her natural and human endowments Imo State does not need any form of development aid. All she need is committed leaders who have a clear vision and understanding of what are the interests of the people. Hence, the occupants of leadership's position consequent upon the masses entrusting their will to be led on a "social contract", basis are obliged to demonstrate political doggedness that would elicit the masses confidence regardless of the composition of the state. The trouble with Imo State is squarely on political leadership failure. The leaders are not willing to rise to the responsibility of their callings. As a result, within the arrays of its corporate responsibility, government has been caught in the web of leadership quagmire. This to a large extent has inhibited development in Imo State and as such, poverty, hardship, loss of lives and property among others becomes so pervasive in the state.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

1. The political leaderships should be held accountable with the view to providing quality visionary leadership to the people of the state.
2. There should be the institutionalization of the electoral process towards having people-oriented leadership.

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