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The Address on Umueri Airport City Project: A Template for Leadership in Nigeria

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Abstract

In one of the episodes of his incisive and critically acclaimed public affairs commentary series, *Common Sense*, Senator Ben Murray-Bruce of Bayelsa State conducted a performance evaluation of governors in Nigeria in which he placed Governor Willie Obiano of Anambra State at the top bracket. Bruce concluded the episode with the recommendation that other State governments should emulate Anambra by striving for self-sufficiency towards departing from what has been referred to as *babiyala* syndrome of Nigeria federalism. By uncanny coincidence on April 11, 2017, as the sun let its light shine in a peculiar display of its kaleidoscopic effulgence from the centre of our solar system, Governor Obiano prayed that God should bless the shining light that Anambra people bear as he addressed the State on the proposed Umueri Airport City Project. The paper subjected the words, inferences and essence of the address to critical analysis from various perspectives of leadership, good governance and development studies; it discussed leadership and its capacity to motivate people towards striving for excellence and, ultimately, the achievement of collective goals. In

concluding, the paper held that the address is: (1) pivotal in the affairs of Anambra State especially given the realities of the current economic recession; (2) a powerful wakeup call on the people of the State urging them to let the light of their entrepreneurial and can-do spirit shine towards economic emancipation of the people and the State; and (3) a template that governors of other States, especially those who are obviously not performing effectively, should adopt and adapt towards efficiency and effectiveness in leadership and governance at the subnational level of Nigeria.

Key Words: Can-do spirit, self-sufficiency, economic diversification, Build-Operate-Manage-and-Transfer, *babiyala* federalism

Introduction

On April 11, 2017, the sun displayed its kaleidoscopic effulgence in a peculiar exhibition from the centre of our solar system. By uncanny coincidence, while this mysterious display of cosmic elegance took place billions of miles away from earth, Governor Willie Obiano of Anambra State delivered the Umueri Airport City Project (UAC) Address in which he prayed that God should “*bless the shining light that [Anambra people] bear*” and urged the people to let their light shine, like the sun, and let the illumination burnish across and beyond Nigeria.

This article subjected the words, inferences and essence of the Address to critical analysis from various perspectives of leadership, good governance and sustainable development and their capacity to motivate people towards striving for excellence and, ultimately, the achievement of collective goals. Towards this objective, the text of the Address shall be reproduced and various portions discussed within diverse aspects of development studies. Beyond these, leadership and good governance are discussed towards galvanizing the teeming human resources and harnessing the enormous mineral deposits for the self-sufficiency of the components units and a virile national economy that is adequately primed for competitiveness in a globalized world.

The Address on Umueri Airport City Project

I stand before you today to answer the call of history. In Christian numerology, the number 3 is the number of perfect manifestation. So, three years into my administration, the Lord God Almighty has given us a new VISION and a new SONG. Our elders say that *ugo gbuzuo ochakee*. Anambra State has finally hit the bend in the rivers and our famous can-do spirit has now taken over. From now on, we have nothing more to fear. Nothing! Not even ourselves.

When I took over the reins of leadership of this great State three years ago, I delivered an inaugural Address titled “Expanding the Frontiers of Excellence.” The historic ceremony we have gathered to perform here today is a very important step in expanding the frontiers of excellence in Anambra State.

Indeed, it is important to note that my Team and I have got a few things right in the past three years. Against all expectations and at a time of great economic recession, we have established our beloved State a compelling investment destination and attracted investments valued at over 5 billion USD. And with this airport city project, the figure now stands at 7.2bn USD. We have also successfully placed Anambra on the agricultural map and blazed a trail with the exportation of our farm produce to the UK. In addition, we have positioned

Anambra State as the safest State in Nigeria and completely re-engineered the social architecture of our beloved State. Finally, we have reawakened self-belief among our people and provoked their can-do spirit. Ladies and gentlemen, Anambra State is finally on the RISE! What we have come to flag off in Umueri today is not your usual airport project. What we are flagging off today is an Airport City Project with a model that will accommodate an airport with two runways, an aviation fuel dump, and airport hotel, an industrial business park, an international convention center as well as a facility for aircraft maintenance. The UAC project is conceived to join some of the most advanced airports in the world with a capacity to land any of the most sophisticated vessels known to man today. It sits on 1500 hectares of land with enough elbowroom for expansion from Ivite Umueri to neighboring communities such as Nando, Umunya, Otuocha, Aguleri, Nteje, Nsugbe and beyond.

The project is estimated to cost over 2bn USD. It is a partnership between the Government of Anambra State, Orient Petroleum Resources Limited and Elite International Investments Limited (Sinoking Enterprises Limited). Under the contractual agreement, Elite International Investments Limited will provide all the funds needed for the project under the Build-Operate-Manage-and-Transfer arrangement. However, under the same SPV agreement, the Anambra Airport City Infrastructure Limited has allocated 75% equity stake to Elite International Investments Limited, 20% to Orient Petroleum Resources Limited and 5% to the Government of Anambra State. The host communities are entitled to 3% of the profit from this project in perpetuity as a part of the standard corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Indeed, the economic benefits of the Umueri Airport City project are enormous. It is expected to generate 1,200 direct and 3,600 indirect jobs. We expect that our people will grab 70% of these jobs in continuation of our effort to create wealth and prosperity for our people. It will also provide an opportunity for training and skills transfer to our people. I have no doubts whatsoever that this project will have a tremendous impact on the ease of doing business in Anambra State as it opens a direct access by air to our vast markets. In particular, I hope that on completion, the UAC project will wipe out the difficulties our businessmen and women often encounter in exporting and importing goods and services and help in improving the entire supply chain.

Ladies and gentlemen, with this project and our subsequent plan for a light rail project, Anambra State will eventually assume its rightful place as a major commercial and industrial hub in the West African sub-region. As you are aware, my administration is intensely focused on building projects that have immense economic values. That is why we have concentrated efforts in building roads and bridges that either lead to industrial clusters or the oilfields or the agricultural belt of the State.

This UAC project follows the same trajectory. That is why we have established a strong synergy between Orient Petroleum Resources Plc and the Airport project with a view to operating an Aviation Fuel Segment that will attract both local and foreign airlines to refuel their aircraft in Umueri. This will no doubt

open a new economic corridor for our beloved State as it is expected to stimulate growth in the oil and gas sector and multiply our revenue sources. It is my candid hope also that when this airport becomes operational, the world will have a direct and easy access to the vast tourism offerings of Ogbunike Cave and Ogbaukwu Caves and Waterfalls as well as the timeless archaeological treasures of Igboukwu! Our beloved State is fast opening its doors to the world. Let us join hands and welcome the benefits that knock on our collective door.

My people, please, always remember that wherever you are and whatever you do, our ancestors left us with a timeless reminder that *aku luo uno, amalu onye kpaluya!* My colleagues and I are waiting eagerly to receive you, go through your business plan and offer you the assistance you need to make your enterprise sink deep roots in the soil of Anambra State.

Anambra people, it is dawn! Work has begun! God bless Anambra State! God bless the shining light that we bear! Thank you all!

Discussion

This analysis focused on the essence of the address; therefore, various portions will be lifted and subjected to critical analysis within the following topical subheadings: (1) Private Sector-Driven Economy, (2) Purposive and Patriotic Leadership that Inspires Followership (3) Collectivism (4) Diversification of the Economy (5) Corporate Social Responsibility (6) Economic Bases for Location of Infrastructure (7) Industrial Clusters (8) Plugging into the Global Economy (9) An Airport with Two Runways (10) Anambra is Home (11) Anambra at a Pivotal Point and (12) Self-determination within the context of the extant structure and system.

Private Sector-Driven Economy

Globally, it has been proven beyond an iota of doubt that government lacks the ability to effectively drive the economy through active participation. In view of this reality, informed governments engage private sector operatives through various forms of partnerships towards driving the economy. In the case of the UAC project, the Government of Anambra State went into partnership with Orient Petroleum Resources Ltd and Elite International Investments Ltd (Sinoking Enterprises Ltd). This guarantees the source of funding and shields the special purpose vehicle (SPV) from the whims and caprices of here-today-gone-tomorrow politicians and public office holders.

Purposive and Patriotic Leadership that Inspires Followership

Leadership has been metaphorically likened to the glue that holds together any organization, be it human or that of our lower neighbours in this animal kingdom. Without delving into defining leadership, we shall accept that purposive and patriotic leadership requires higher consciousness, a sense of the Divine and the realization that, in the end of the affairs of men, “what you keep [eternally] is what you give.” (Osai, 2015, p. 9) A major malaise in humanity is the lack of a leadership that has transcended the rule of law and arrived at the threshold of rule of love and is, therefore, service-driven (Osai, 2012). The substance of the speech is, by all standards, highly inspirational.

Collectivism

The name *Igwebuike* affirms the aphorism “united we stand, divided we fall.” Similarly, an adage of Egbema people holds that “if one ant ventures out alone, a lizard will eat it but if they be in group, the lizard runs away.” The lesson of the name and aphorisms is the efficacy of collective action. A censorious review of the word content of the address shows that Obiano used the word “we” twelve times, “us” four times and “our” eighteen times; these words signify the spirit of collectivism; note that the utilization of the words “I,” “me” and “my” was within the context of collective phraseology as in “my Team and I,” “my colleagues and I” and “my people.”

Basic human psychology teaches that recognition of the personal worth of individuals is fundamental in human nature and it plays a major role in human relationship. In the inner recesses of every human mind lies the statement “I am somebody.” Once an individual is accorded that recognition, he/she is sufficiently motivated and, therefore, gives his/her best towards the realization of the collective objective. Conversely, when the recognition is not given, individual input usually suffers. Giving that recognition to followers contributes immensely in separating the successful leader from the unsuccessful one.

Diversification of the Economy

A major malaise of the Nigerian economy is the parasitic dependence on petroleum resulting in a mono-economy that responds to the sways of the price of crude in the global marketplace. The averment,

against all expectations and at a time of great economic recession, we have established our beloved State a compelling investment destination and attracted investments valued at over 5 billion USD. And with this airport city project, the figure now stands at 7.2bn USD. We have also successfully placed Anambra on the agricultural map and blazed a trail with the exportation of our farm produce to the UK

is a clear departure from the mind-set of dependence on monthly allocations that basically come from oil - the *babiyallah* syndrome.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In recent times, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has dominated the discourse of corporate governance across the world; this is especially so in the Niger Delta geopolitical zone of Nigeria where communities have risen up against the State and tenant multinational oil companies (MNCs). From the peaceful but operationally debilitating demonstrations of Egbema Youths Association (EYA) in 1979 and the early 1980s, (Osai, 2007) through MOSOP, Kaiama Declaration, the Umuechem debacle, the Odi disaster and other community-based collective actions to extract concessions from the State and MNCs, the agitations for attention and development have precipitated a review and re-evaluation of the template of CSR amongst numerous MNCs and the Nigerian State has showed greater interest in it having been rudely confronted by social insecurity and operational shutdowns on the economy that is parasitically and paralytically dependent on oil. To guard against generating hostility amongst the host communities of UAC, the Address holds that “the host communities

are entitled to 3% of the profit from this “project in perpetuity as a part of the standard CSR.”

Economic Bases for Location of Infrastructure

[The] administration is intensely focused on building projects that have immense economic values. That is why we have concentrated efforts in building roads and bridges that either lead to industrial clusters or the oilfields or the agricultural belt of the State.

The general attitude of authority figures is to locate public infrastructure in their community without sparing a thought to the economic value of the location. As a result of this, roads are constructed to locations that add minimal value to the economy while locations that have the capacity of generating economic activities are inaccessible. “Building roads and bridges that either lead to industrial clusters or the oilfields or the agricultural belt of the State” is the right step in the right direction.

Industrial Clusters

The mere mention of industrial clusters stirs thoughts on a policy posture that had been advocated by numerous development economists for decades as a veritable strategy for emancipation from dependence on distant economies for basic commodities such as office pins, paper clips etc. That Governor Obiano is concentrating “efforts in building roads and bridges that...lead to industrial clusters” indicates clarity of understanding and appreciation of the need to depart from dependency such that the Third World is ensnared into by the machinations of the global economy.

Plugging into the Global Economy

“With the planned light rail project, Anambra State will eventually assume its rightful place as a major commercial and industrial hub in the West African sub-region.” Globalization has been defined as a stage of the global economy in which international interdependence has reached an unprecedented state of global oneness both in economic terms and in socio-political and cultural terms (Osai, 2004b). Globalization is the process through which the world is emerging one reference point in terms of shared values, access to information and practical geo-resources utilization. As Eleanya et al (2009) offered, this process took over 200 years to arrive at the present stage and may yet acquire more perplexing and complex forms in the nearest future. From the perspective of economists, globalization encompasses declining barriers to trade migration, capital flows, technology transfers and foreign direct investment; it is the new process of global integration engendering an increase in the density of contact between locations, affecting the economic, social, cultural and political lives of people, worldwide. This trend has culminated in a situation in which the whole world is looked at as a single communication system.

In practice, the global village entails wide spread communications, rapid transportation and shared community norms and values, which tie the world together in the same way that a village functions. Based on its dynamics, globalization widens the windows of opportunity of economic agents beyond the limits of the national economy as they seek greater choices in securing of inputs, such as labour, capital and technology and also new markets for output. According to Aluko (2004), the hallmark of globalization is the promotion of free market, industrial initiative and private enterprise; as the same

forces of world capitalism, globalization seeks to encompass all countries into one economic unit, possibly without governments and borders (Osai, 2009). Given this economic oneness of the globe, competing internally so as to be able to compete favourably in the world economy has become the economic mantra of every society that is desirous to plug into the essence of globalization and survive yet another phase of man's economic quest. Striving to become is plugging into the global economy beginning from the immediate global neighbourhood.

Self-determination within the Context of Extant Structure and System

“My colleagues and I are waiting eagerly to receive you, go through your business plan and offer you the assistance you need to make your enterprise sink deep roots in the soil of Anambra State.” In the global economic order, Third World economies share certain fundamental challenges that characterize underdevelopment; foremost amongst these problems and one that is relevant to this effort is hostile business environment. Having reminded the people of the hazards of investing outside home, Obiano, in the above statement, paints a portrait of a business environment that conducive to entrepreneurship. In what could pass as a variant of the Indian model of “Made in India,” Obiano invites the highly enterprising people of Anambra to come home and do business. Home in this instance is Anambra State; the call is therefore for indigenes of Anambra doing business outside Anambra and abroad to come home and “make your enterprise sink deep roots in the soil of Anambra State.”

An Airport with Two Runways

This is a constructively mischievous reference to the fact that an erstwhile administration of the national government of the most populous nation in *negrodom* built an international airport with one runway at the Federal Capital; this is against the backdrop of the fact that two runways is a standard regulation for international airports and a reference to the global standard and an allusion to the colossal and embarrassing mistake at Abuja Airport. As a result of this uninformed decision or administrative recklessness, the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja was closed for six weeks (March 8 to April 19, 2017) to enable a second runway to be constructed; a rather embarrassing reference point for leadership at the national level. Here, Obiano showed off his leadership and administrative effulgence just as the star of our solar system did on the fateful day.

Anambra at a Pivotal Point

“Ugo gbuzuo ochakee, Anambra State has finally hit the bend in the rivers.” Ugo gbuzuo ochakee translates to the fact that the eagle has to hunt and kill numerous and various preys up to a specified standard and timeframe before it turns white. In the above metaphor, Obiano says that Anambra State has accomplished the requirements and met the necessary standards and has, therefore, arrived at a pivotal point in the affairs of the State more so in the affairs of the Igbo nation.

Anambra is Home

“Anambra people, please, always remember that wherever you are and whatever you do, our ancestors left us with a timeless reminder that aku luo uno, amalu onye kpalu ya! In this double-barrel statement, Obiano (1) alludes to the experiences of the civil war with special reference to the contentious abandoned property saga in which

properties belonging to the people of the Igbo nation (including Anambra) were confiscated by the State governments of the locales of the structures. During that episode, many Igbo people who were successful in business and built structures in other parts of the country came home and had to bunk with relatives because they had no homes in their villages, (2) in view of that sad experience, Obiano uses the aphorism “aku luo uno, amalu onye kpalu ya”, which translates to “when wealth reaches home then the owner is known,” as an admonition against repeating the mistakes of the past.

Template for Leadership in Nigeria

A comic clip has it that during creation, the Creator allocated numerous gifts to various countries with Nigeria receiving an overwhelming majority of the gifts. The clip continues that when it came to allocating problems, the Creator gave away tornado, earthquake, cyclone, inclement weather, and typhoon and at a point an audacious human queried the Creator over the lopsided allocation of things with Nigeria getting the best of resources without any malady being allocated to it apart from occasional drought and flooding. The clip continues that in His eternal wisdom, the Creator said: “hold your horses my sons and allow me conclude.” In the end, the clip concluded, the Creator gave Nigeria bad leadership. Resultantly, every human and material component for building a socioeconomically robust nation is present in Nigeria; however, the extremely important and vital stimulus for achieving the objective is conspicuously absent. Since this paper is fundamentally on the subject of leadership, considerable time and space will be spent on the subject.

James McGregor Burns holds that “one of the universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership.” For Field Marshal Montgomery, “leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character, which inspires confidence.” Daft, (1999) informs that when Byrnes was hired as CEO of Corsair, the company already had a product, a multimillion-dollar contract with a cellular carrier, and a group of first-rate engineers. Everything was in place to build the new business—except the glue that would hold it together. The glue needed to hold Corsair together was leadership.

No wonder President Umaru Yar’Adua put the Nigerian predicament squarely on the shoulders of leadership as he offered that the “concept of leadership has been bastardized in Nigeria, and people use leadership positions to show arrogance, oppress others and misappropriate resources meant for the generality of Nigerians instead of serving them as directed by God.” (*Leadership*, 2008, p. 3) Ekekwe (2011, p. 1) has offered that “as Nigeria marked its fiftieth year of independence from Britain, one refrain could be heard from the citizens: the country’s leaders, whether civilian or military, have been a disappointment.” Ekekwe (2011, p. 5) furthered that “if we insist on referring to the present crop of rulers of Nigeria as leaders, we would be donning them with a toga too dignified for what they have represented so far” and added that

one of the tests of leadership is the ability to persuade people to follow you freely and not make their world in your own image, no matter how well you mean for them” “A leader must have a vision of where he/she wants to take the society (Ekekwe, 2011, p. 3).

For Bruce (2015:30), “leadership is pure and simply the ability to translate vision to reality.”

Worrisome and worthy of note is the fact that on the other side of the coin of leadership is a frighteningly debased lot about whom the literature of Judeo-Christian theology states thus:

All ye *beasts of the field*, come to devour, yea, *all ye beasts in the forest*. His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, *they are greedy dogs which can never have enough* and *they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain*, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant (Isaiah 56:9-12)

If we take the italicized portions of the above statement, it would read thus: “*beasts of the field, come to devour, beasts in the forest; they are greedy dogs which can never have enough; they are shepherds that cannot understand, all look to their own way, every one for his gain.*” These chilling words and phrases are reminiscent of the words of Gandhi (1919) who poetically deposed thus: “There are enough resources on earth for everyone’s need; but not enough for one man’s greed.” Taken against the backdrop of the biblical averment: “when the righteous people are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Proverbs, 29:2) it becomes clear that morally bankrupt charlatans who masquerade as leaders are responsible for the suffering in the land.

Excellence and effectiveness in political leadership are products of the burning desire and passion to actualize the dreamer’s dreams of community development through ensuring the actualization of the potentialities of individuals in the community; this involves striving to attain new heights of human accomplishment and reaching out for greater heights and future. It takes a patriotic, genuine and dependable leader who is consumed by the zeal for collective human flourishing and the realization of lofty objectives to lead the people in the right direction.

Good Governance

The objective of politics is to generate possibilities and create enabling socio-political and business environment for every individual to participate in the polity and to realize their potentialities within the framework of policies and programs aimed at enabling the community to realize its potentialities. Ultimately, the definitive duty of government is to enact laws and evolve public policies and programs that would enable every individual to participate in the polity and economic activities and to realize their potentialities and in so doing to enable the community to attain its potentialities. Wariboko (2011) offered that “every individual has been endowed by God (gods) with certain gifts to bless his or her community, and the community needs to help the individual to fully realize this potential” (p. 62). Good governance is, therefore, a collective; all hands must be on deck to ensure the realization of the lofty objectives of the political system.

Analysis

In an episode of the incisive and acclaimed commentary series *Common Sense*, Senator Ben Murray-Bruce focused on Anambra State within the context of federalism as a structure of government and capitalism as a mode of production. Bruce compared the

state of affairs in Anambra State vis-à-vis a worrisome majority of the States of the federation and crystallized how and why other State governments should emulate Anambra by striving for self-sufficiency and, therefore, depart from *babiyala* federalism. It is said that “a system charges a position with certain powers and puts an individual in charge; what distinguishes one incumbent from the other is the capacity to take charge.” (Osai, 2000, p. 5) A major malaise in humanity is the lack of a leadership that has transcended the rule of law and arrived at the threshold of rule of love and is, therefore, service-driven. (Osai, 2012) As stated earlier, leadership has been metaphorically presented as the glue that holds together every organization.

Performance evaluation of governance in Anambra State has consistently been impressive as the State has been blessed with a string of conscientious helmsmen in a row. The UAC project as announced, the inherent call to patriotic duty in the Address under reference and the consistency in the impressive record of service of governors of the State have combined to add credibility to the charge by Governor Obiano for entrepreneurs and venture capitalists from Anambra to come home and open shop. Beyond the confidence, which prospective investors may repose on Obiano, the record of consistency in the development-driven disposition of the helmsmen of the State would serve as a factor that reassures investors of the stability of the economic environment and the consistency of the policy thrust of the State. Therefore, it behoves the electorate of Anambra State to be consistent in their demonstrated departure from political passivity and docility, which is an unfortunate feature of Third World societies. Anambra people should persistently insist on protecting their ballot, making informed choices at the polls thereby electing leaders who would keep the flag of progress flying and not bleeders who would masquerade as leaders and connect a complex network of underground conduit pipes from the State treasury to their bank accounts.

Conclusion

The mark of a true leader is the passionate desire and quest to truthfully assist others identify and build up their capabilities towards attaining excellence in their endeavors. It is incumbent on the leader to systematically inspire and stimulate individuals, the group or community to attain heights beyond their imagination and achieve a future that positively confronts them and engages them to aim at and work tirelessly towards accomplishing higher ideals and levels of progress.

In aspiring for Anambra to become “*a major commercial and industrial hub in the West African sub-region,*” Obiano has prepared the business and social environment of Anambra State for competitiveness in the ever-expanding international marketplace within the constantly shrinking global village; in so doing, he wetted the ground and appetite of the people especially those in the Diaspora to come home and invest in Anambra. Beneath this is the desire for viability and self-sufficiency of the State towards departure from the ignominious *babiyala* frame of mind of Nigerian federalism.

A succinct summa of Governor Obiano’s Address on the UAC project and a review of the performance of Anambra State under his charge reflect the major attributes of effective leadership and good governance with special reference to vision, discipline, wisdom, courage, humility, decision-making, friendship, tact and diplomacy, executive

ability and inspirational power. The phenomenon of the slogan “Willie is working” and the demonstrable validity of the statement in terms of visible performance transcend the empty *sloganiarism* that characterize the recital of chief executives of national and subnational governments in Nigeria; they are reflective of the concept of “walk the talk.” Obiano’s developmental strive of are reminiscent of the records set by Governor Diете-Spiff of Rivers State in the early seventies and Governor Donald Duke in Cross River State from 1999 to 2007; it also stands on the same pedestal with the performance of Governor Nyesom Wike of Rivers State. If the governors of majority of the States in Nigeria borrow a leaf from Obiano, the federating States will galvanize the abundant human and material resources at their disposal and aggressively and purposively drive towards self-sufficiency and a virile national economy.

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