

The Concept and Practice of Good Governance: Lessons from Nigerian History¹

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Abstract

The crisis of the Nigerian state has largely been attributed to poor leadership and governance deficit. This is epitomised by the large-scale corruption, waste of public resources, misplaced priorities and sheer buffoonery displayed by public office holders. Poor leadership has been a bane largely because there are no benchmarks for leadership and governance. This paper interrogates the concepts of “governance” and “good governance” in comparative contexts and highlights attempts by some Nigerian leaders to conceptualize and actualize “good governance” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reflecting on the writings and leadership record of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and contemporary developments, this paper seeks to provoke a conversation on the vexed subject by proposing some yardsticks for engendering and benchmarking minimum standards of “good governance” in Nigeria at the national and sub-national levels.

Keywords: Governance, Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo, Mo Ibrahim, Leadership, Development

“A politician is a fellow who will lay down your life for his country.” –Mary Louise Cecilia “Texas” Guinan²

Introduction

Given the widespread political stability and a poor record of socio-economic performance by post-independence African countries, the issue of “good governance” has dominated popular and scholarly discourse since the 1970s (Obadare and Adebawo, 2016; Nyanhoga et al., 2010). The concept has raised a number of questions including those posed by the notable Africanist scholar, Issa Shivji (2007): ‘What is “good governance”? Who determines what is good and bad governance? What yardsticks are applied? And why are these yardsticks

applied only to Africa?’ The comment was made in the context of the award of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Leadership in Africa to former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano.³ “[I]t is naïve, if not mischievous,” Shivji argued, “to award a person - moreover with a cash prize - for bringing peace or democracy to his country.” He disparaged the idea of rewarding “good governance” and the award of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for some reasons. First, if indeed “good governance” had been attained, it was a collective achievement, not that of the leader. Second, the people of the country, in this case, Mozambique, were in a better position to assess and affirm the supposed good leadership of Chissano. Third, there was a disconnect between what the people knew about their President and what outsiders saw and rewarded. For good measure, Shivji detailed acts of misrule of the Mozambican President, which he felt rendered him unsuitable for the award. Finally, Shivji contended that if it was necessary to honour leaders, their own people could immortalise them by placing their images on a postage stamp or enrol them in a national honour’s roll.

In effect, Shivji questioned the idea of singling out African leaders for such awards – as if despotism, which the awards were meant to counter, was peculiar to Africa. If such awards were necessary, he asserted, caution and discretion should be exercised in selecting the honourees. While conceding without accepting the foregoing objections, this writer supports the idea of promoting and rewarding acts of good governance at all levels and in all spheres of public life in Africa. That said, it is necessary to interrogate the concept of “good governance” – to highlight what is good in governance - and propose benchmarks that can promote good governance.

Many commentators and analysts of the Nigerian debacle have reached a uniform conclusion: poor leadership and governance deficit have been largely accountable for our national crisis. A commentator summed it up as follows: “We do not have a leadership that coordinates collective energy and uses it as a resource to generate a more productive economy. Our leaders are more interested in the small picture, the immediate gains, and the consolidation of political order.” (Adelakun, 2018: 48) In the absence of clear benchmarks for leadership and governance, and given the steep decline in standards and quality of governance and leadership since Nigeria’s First Republic, this article presents preliminary thoughts on good governance, drawing lessons from Nigerian history. It aims to provoke a conversation on how to govern, and doing so properly, by proposing a template for engendering and benchmarking “good governance.” We proceed by clarifying

the commonly used but contested concepts of “governance” and “good governance.”

Contested Concepts: Governance and Good Governance

Although commonly employed in popular and scholarly discourse, “governance” and “good governance” have as many definitions as their users. The World Bank in a 1992 Report provided the following definition of “governance:”

...all of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good. This includes: 1. the process by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced 2. the capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies, and 3. the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. (Cited in Thebault Diagne, 2011:1)

A more recent and more comprehensive definition has been provided as follows:

Governance ... is broader than “government” or the relationship between the state (and its leadership) and society. It relates to all power relationships, including nonstate, substate, and supranational relations. Essentially, governance concerns the exercise of authority ... through structures (e.g., rule systems of governments) or social functions and processes (e.g., by nonstate entities). Persons may have authority because of who they are (their formal role is authoritative, such as government officers distributing grants according to rules); because of what they do (their informal action is authoritative, such as patrons distributing gifts as they choose); or a mixture of the two, where they use formal authority in informal ways (e.g., government officers distributing state resources to clients, supporters, or family members). In other words, governance entails overlapping spheres of authority, each with a set of norms, principles, and decision-making procedures that control how power is

allocated. Those exercising governance may be politicians, civic institutions, media, religious and cultural organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as well as government agencies. (Baker, 2017)

A striking feature of the concept of “governance” is its appropriation by different institutions and interest groups - politicians, academics, civil society organizations and the private sector - for a variety of purposes in different contexts. Hence, it could be perceived as a function of the state, projected in business mission statements or encapsulated in activities in delivering private services of a public nature. In relation to the state, businesses and organized citizens, “governance” employed as an analytical tool and instrument to ensure the following: “the protection, assistance and delivery of services; development and creation of infrastructure facilities; delivery of services and of the public and collective good; and regulation of relations between the public and the private sector, leading to public private partnership.” (Damiba, 2011: 3) In academic circles, it features in the following contexts: “governance of policies (economic, political & democratic), governance of spaces (local, urban, etc.), governance of institutions (parliaments, governments, NGOs, organizations, businesses, etc.), and governance of sectors (health, land, water etc.)” (Damiba, 2011: 4) In the business world, governance is invoked in codes of business ethics and charters of corporate governance.

From the generic definition of “governance” has emerged “good governance,” as a qualifier and derivative. It refers to:

the allocation and management of resources to respond to collective problems [and]... characterized by participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness, and equity. Economically, it lies at the heart of economic development, helping to harness and develop weak economies. It promotes economic efficiency through equitable rules, by promoting fair and well functioning markets, and it curtails corruption and ensures the fair delivery of services. Socially, it prevents exclusion, promotes peace, and encourages welfare programs. (Baker, 2017)

Conceived as an instrument of development, “good governance” is said to consist of the following elements:

an effective public service, an independent judicial system and legislation guaranteeing transactions, an administration publicly accountable in the use of public funds, elected monitoring bodies, respect for human rights and the rule of law at all levels of government, and the separation of powers and freedom of the press (Quantin, 2005, cited in Thebault Diagne, 2011: 2)

However, “good governance” is perceived in diverse ways.⁴ First, it is often taken as a normative concept, as a model or an ideal of governance. Second, it has been viewed as a ‘depoliticized’ concept, that is, it is regarded as a purely administrative or technocratic notion. Third, “good governance” is employed as a concept based on daily experience: ‘real governance’ unlike the one wished-for, one which starts from the gap that exists between the norm and the application of the norm. Real governance takes governance as an analytical tool, an ideological instrument and, finally, as political device, successively. A related concept is that of ‘legitimate governance,’ which underscores an important marker of “good governance” – legitimacy.⁵ Legitimacy derives from participation and representation (which speak to inclusivity in governance), transparency, dialogue and consensus building and ownership of the concept by stakeholders in governance.

The foregoing clarification of “good governance” suggests that the concept of governance and its derivative can serve as an analytical tool or a frame of reference for action, offer a paradigm change in power relations or function as a logical operator.⁶ It is applicable to all scales, levels and sectors of human endeavour. Good governance as a model of state policy and the management of a society’s human and natural resources for sustainable development is better described than defined. Those best placed to do so are its beneficiaries, the vast majority of the people, for whom good governance has been a catalyst for actualizing their potential as individuals and corporate entities. Key to good governance are purposeful, visionary and result-oriented leadership, good followership or mass participation and a developmental policy framework.

Governance Templates in Pre-colonial Nigerian History

The idea of “good governance” is not alien to Nigerian peoples, who readily associate particular leaders with “good” or “bad” times. For example, *Alaafin* Abiodun, ruler of Old Oyo during the eighteenth century, was said to have “secured peace at home and prosperity.” He participated in the trans-Atlantic trade and made Ajase port (Porto Novo) Oyo’s coastal outlet. “Peace and prosperity brought popular support to the monarchy,” two leading historians reported, “and Abiodun’s reign has remained in the popular myth of Oyo as the most glorious period.” (Akinjogbin and Ayandele, 1980: 138) The Oyo-Yoruba association of Abiodun’s reign with general prosperity from which common people benefited indicates pre-colonial Nigerian peoples’ understanding of being well governed, even in the era of monarchical rule.

Precolonial Nigerian society was dominated by preliterate and monarchical entities, in which modern ideas of governance were absent. However, in non-Islamic polities, such as Oyo and Benin, without indigenous written records, non-written sources, such as festivals, ceremonies (child-naming, weddings and funerals), traditions of origin, songs and aphorisms are repositories of the people’s thoughts and ideas on governance. In contrast, Islamic communities in Northern Nigeria with a long history of literacy in Arabic have written records of good governance templates in the contexts of their religion and culture, as three examples will show.

First, during the reign of *Sarkin Kano* Muhammad Rumfa (d.1499), the celebrated Muslim cleric Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Maghili al-Tlemsani (better known as Al-Maghili) authored a treatise, *Risalat al-Muluk (The Obligations of Princes)*, which spelt out Islamic standards of good governance for the guidance of Rumfa, who was a notable Muslim in his own right. The second illustration of the historical depth of the idea of a governance template in pre-colonial Nigeria was the treatise authored by the leader of the Sokoto jihad, Uthman dan Fodio. In the *Kitab al-Farq (A Book of Distinction)*, he distinguished the practices of non-Islamic polities from those of the standard Islamic polity. He emphasized equity and transparency in governance.

Third, in c.1807, in the early years of the Sokoto jihad, Uthman dan Fodio’s brother, Abdullahi, a specialist in law, was so disenchanted with the pervasiveness of corrupt practices among the jihaddists that he embarked on *hijra* from Sokoto for a pilgrimage to the East. However, on getting to Kano, the local jihaddists persuaded him to abandon his eastward journey and tutor them in the tenets of

Islamic governance. During his sojourn in Kano, where he also observed some deviations among his hosts, Abdullahi dan Fodio composed at their request a treatise on how to run the government according to Islamic principles. His *Diyā' al-Hukkām* (*The Light of the Rulers* or *The Principles of Government*) provided a governance template for the emergent Kano emirate (Muhammad, 2013).

As helpful as the foregoing examples may be, they are limited by their narrow religious and ideological underpinnings. This makes them inapplicable to modern Nigeria, a multi-religious state. Hence, a different (that is, secular) type of governance template must be created to suit the peculiar demands of modern Nigeria. A good case study or guide is the governance ideas and practice of a Nigerian political leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1909-87).

Obafemi Awolowo and the Developmental Decade in Western Nigeria

The choice of Awolowo as an exemplar of “good governance” is informed by two compelling considerations. The first is his acknowledged sterling record of public service as Premier of the Western Region (1952-59) and as Federal Commissioner (Minister) of Finance (1966-71) in the military government of General Yakubu Gowon (1966-75). Second, more than any other Nigerian leader, Awolowo had enunciated his thoughts on governance in several books, beginning with *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (1947). He has also been the subject of numerous scholarly publications. His first book written well before he occupied public office, is best known, not only for his trenchant critique of colonial rule but for a clear articulation of federalism as the best system of government for Nigeria. Making a case for federalism while his contemporaries espoused unitary or confederal constitutional systems, he wrote the famous lines, for which he has often been unfairly vilified: “Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no ‘Nigerians’ in the same sense as there are ‘English’, ‘Welsh’, or ‘French’. The word ‘Nigerian’ is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. ... [T]he best constitution for such diverse peoples is a federal Constitution.” (Awolowo, 1947: 47-48, 50) Subsequent events have confirmed the prescience of his position, stated over seventy years ago. At his death in 1987, Awolowo was described by one of his erstwhile adversaries as “the best President Nigeria never had.” Nigeria’s military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida, also paid him the following tribute: “It can truly be said that Chief Obafemi Awolowo has been the main issue in Nigerian politics during the last 35 years: The main political question has been whether you are with Chief Awolowo or against him.” (Cited in Oke, 2009: 147)

The giant strides of Nigeria's Western Region under the leadership of Obafemi Awolowo continue to serve as the benchmark for good governance. The landmark achievements of his government in mass education, infrastructure development, integrated industrial and agricultural development, including many "firsts," remain standards in governance depth and impact.⁷ As a great leader and manager of human and natural resources, he managed the finances of Nigeria during the civil war of 1967-70 without incurring external debts. The following discussion highlights the governance ideals that guided these accomplishments and provides a template for good governance in contemporary Nigeria.

To be sure, the political and economic development of Western Nigeria during the 1950s owed much more to a combination of factors than merely to the political and managerial genius of Obafemi Awolowo. For, he was assisted by a sterling cabinet of gifted and committed Ministers, a first-rate bureaucracy, an economically endowed region and an engaged electorate. Awolowo himself described his cabinet as "unexcelled," one "of which any head of government anywhere in the world would be proud. It was a well-knit, highly disciplined and fanatically loyal team. Each of them knew his subject well." (Awolowo, 1960: 260)

Still, he is justifiably lionised (or, sometimes demonized) as the real founder of the modern Yoruba nationality in the Nigerian State (Taiwo, 2016; Adebani, 2014; Oyelaran et al., 1988). "Awolowo," notes Professor Adebayo Williams, "was the single most influential Nigerian of the post-colonial period, a man greater and more admired in death than in his lifetime, a man who was not in government most of the time, but who was in power all of the time. Fifty years after he vacated the premiership of the old Western region the entire landscape still bears the imprimatur of his original and developmental genius." (Williams, 2009:318) Of all his path-breaking accomplishments, the democratization of education through the free primary education scheme from 1955 must rank among the most enduring and epochal. Free primary education in the region raised school enrolment from half a million in 1954 to 1,037,388 in 1959. (Oke, 2009: 150) The massification of primary education at state expense unleashed the creativity of the people and produced within a generation an enlightened citizenry that proved easier to mobilize, enlighten and lead, and increasingly difficult to hoodwink.

Next to this was Awolowo's uncanny ability to assemble the best and brightest of his generation, without feeling dwarfed by any one of them, and to develop a blueprint for the development of the region. One of his close associates stated this

about him: “Chief Awolowo was a natural team builder, a team leader and team player. His ability to elevate the confidence and capabilities of his followers was legendary, and the result was that his team’s capacity to achieve was always of the superior calibre. A man of great talents, he gloried in, and celebrated, the talents of others.” (Akintoye, 2009: 145) It can be argued that Awolowo’s Western Region government between 1952 and 1959 exemplified the capability of a developmental state at the sub-national level. This achievement is significant for two reasons. First, it was uncommon to witness such initiative and impact at the sub-national level. Second, these feats took place in the context of a fading but constraining colonial hegemony. Either of an overbearing national government or stifling colonial order could have hampered such initiatives.

Awolowo’s local government reforms were also path-breaking for two reasons. First, they achieved grassroots democratization or entrenchment of elective representation in place of the colonial native administrative system based on the nomination of chiefs and pro-establishment Nigerians. Second, the new system operated on the implicit principle that local governments must pay their own way – the principle of financial viability and autonomy. This was a local variant of modern fiscal federalism.

His agricultural reforms were also unique, if not ahead of his time. Awolowo’s government took advantage of the Israeli experiences in farm settlement to replicate the experiment in Western Nigeria. However, the results of that experiment have been obliterated by the passage of time and neglect by incompetent leadership. One might be guilty of over-romanticizing the Awolowo developmental decade in Western Nigeria but it is also fair to place it in context. A Nigerian scholar, Professor J. Olubi Sodipo, reportedly recalled an episode while lamenting the sharp decline in governance and development in Western Nigeria. When a Western Nigerian contingent (including Sodipo) visited South Korea in 1957 to understudy the Chaebol for possible adoption and adaptation, its members were surprised that the developmental strategies and trajectory projected for Western Nigeria were clearly ahead of South Korea’s at the time and the trip appeared to have been a waste of time and resources.⁸ We may note in passing that the delegation to South Korea was reminiscent of Meiji Japan’s missions to understudy the West in the nineteenth century. That said, it might be argued, however, that the mission to South Korea was not a futile exercise insofar as it brought into sharp relief the advances that the Western Region had recorded in less than a decade of self-government. But, as is well known, South Korea soon developed rapidly into a world economic powerhouse within another generation

while several adverse factors conspired to arrest progress in Western Nigeria. The region gradually lost its way in the thicket of national anti-developmentalism. The inheritors of the Gbadamosi and Odutola industries and the likes of Chief Chris Ogunbanjo, whose entrepreneurial legacies have fallen into abeyance, have sad stories to tell.

What is often overlooked by analysts of the Awolowo phenomenon was his political tolerance of the opposition. Even in the 1950s, with all the giant strides of his government and party, his regional government was the only one that suffered political defeat in the elections into the Federal House of Representatives in 1954. The NCNC won 22 seats while AG won 19 seats. In Ibadan, the capital city of the Western Region, the ruling party, AG, secured just one out of the five federal seats in contention. Commenting on this unprecedented occurrence, Professor Itse Sagay (2009:31) asked: “Can this happen at the federal level or in any state today?” With the benefit of hindsight, Awolowo’s strong belief in the concept of “loyal opposition” served to be his political undoing. Until the defeat of President Goodluck Jonathan in peculiar circumstances in 2015, Awolowo was the first of a handful of Nigerian leaders to have suffered the opposition to win parliamentary and even gubernatorial elections, while they wielded the power of incumbency. This was a reflection of his respect for the people as the final arbiters of political contests and the sanctity of the ballot box. Others in his position, especially those wielding federal power, routinely declared themselves and their parties overwhelming winners even in states and constituencies where they were known to be overwhelmingly unpopular as was the case with the NPN in 1983 and PDP in 2003. In his time, votes counted and the electorate freely expressed its political preference unlike in many instances since then when cast ballot papers outnumbered registered voters!

Paradoxically, the fate of Western Nigeria was sealed by Awolowo himself. His decision to abandon the Premiership of the region for the centre (where he ended up being Leader of the Opposition in 1959) was a strategic political miscalculation. The resultant political crisis that followed the split in the AG spelt doom for his region, ethnic nationality and his otherwise well-laid plans. The region then became a playground for unregulated political fight to the death. In the realm of counterfactuals, Nigerian history would most likely have taken a different turn if Awolowo had remained Premier of the Western Region for another decade. In that event, Western Nigeria before 1963 would most likely have continued on its developmental trajectory like South Korea and Singapore. This might also have averted the travails of the 1960s – census controversies, the

Action Group crisis and the electoral malfeasance of 1964 and 1965. The economic structures of the region would probably have survived the fall in produce prices and economic crisis. This supposition is predicated on Awolowo's famed expertise in economic management. For example, as Nigeria's Federal Commissioner of Finance, he managed the prosecution of the civil war without incurring debt. There is the strong possibility that, given these scenarios, the civil war might have been averted. In that event, the Political West would probably have gone ahead to develop its human, natural and mineral resources to consolidate its leading position in the Nigerian nation.

Back to the realm of reality, the foregoing scenario never materialised. Awolowo lost the 1959 General Elections and ended up being Leader of the Opposition in the Federal House of Representatives. The crisis in the Action Group, exacerbated and manipulated for advantage by the federal government, snowballed into a conflagration that consumed Awolowo's pre-1966 political career, the lives and careers of several of his contemporaries, and, ultimately, Nigeria's First Republic. By a twist of fate, Awolowo did serve at the federal level, where he had always wanted to showcase his acclaimed organizational and state-building acumen. But he only did so in a subaltern position in a non-democratic setting. His attempts in 1979 and 1983 to return to the federal level on his own terms in a democratic setting proved a mirage, no thanks to the enduring obstacles that he faced all his political life.

Whatever might have been his failings as a politician, Awolowo remains the only Nigerian that is acknowledged across generations as a model of good governance (Olukotun, 2012). He espoused his ideals of good governance in his numerous publications but his inability to be Prime Minister or President of Nigeria did not permit the demonstration of his acclaimed managerial and leadership qualities at the national level. It may be said that he combined "brick and mortar" developmentalism (landmark infrastructure) with political, social and economic transformation, especially the empowerment of the people (different from modern day banality called "stomach infrastructure"), hallmarks of good leadership. This accounts for the resilience of his brand even in death. An analyst has attributed his success in government to a combination of the following: "practical good sense," "man as the building block," "the local government as base" and "leadership as a crucial factor." (Oke, 2009: 159-67)

Reflections on Awolowo, Leadership and Good Governance

Given the foregoing discussion on the Awolowo governance template and against the background of the dismal record of most of post-independence Nigerian rulers, it is imperative to place good governance at the centre of public discourse in Nigeria. Accordingly, the issues raised in the rest of this article are intended to serve as markers and signposts to benchmarking performance in public office. Our argument is that “good governance” is not an abstract concept: it can be reduced to measurable human activities, which can be benchmarked and rated. The parameters for evaluating performance at any level of administration may be regarded as the public policy equivalent of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) adopted by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The benchmarks proposed can be developed further with a rating scheme to evaluate performance.

As Awolowo’s example has shown, leadership is an all-important fulcrum around which good governance rotates. Such was his leadership record that a former British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, declared that Awolowo “could lead the United States or Britain; he came too soon for Nigeria.” (Adebanwi, 2009: 40). Consequently, we posit that leadership should not be left to chance but should be carefully selected and nurtured. Recruitment and training should be done systematically rather than haphazardly. This addresses the concern that Nigerians are “perennially deprived of good leadership and thirsty for a semblance of hope.” (Adelakun, 2018)

The first issue that arises from the foregoing is the leaders’ personal qualities, attitudes and style. Persons in leadership positions should possess mental depth, savvy, gravitas and grounding with the people. They should be able to define, appropriate and internalize the concepts of “development” and “governance.” In addition, they should have a grasp of local and world affairs, be steeped in the history, culture and aspirations of their communities or constituencies, and understand, appreciate and canalize the people’s expectations. Awolowo, for example, dispassionately and clinically appraised the people he was elected to serve: the differential worldviews and expectations of the Yoruba and non-Yoruba in the Region, the attitudes of traditional rulers and the response of the people to his party. “A large section of the community whose affairs I was to administer,” he recalled, “had no faith in my party [T]he Obas and Chiefs ... were very jealous and sensitive about their traditional rights and privileges. ... The roads in the Region were in a most sorry state” and school enrolment was a mere 35 per

cent. (Awolowo, 1960: 261-62) Such clear-headed appraisals should make a government devise appropriate strategies to make it inclusive and responsive.

Leaders should, therefore, be visionary, enunciate novel and compelling ideas and ideals, and communicate them effectively. Their words and deeds should command respect, and they should inspire confidence, even in the face of adversity. Again, as Awolowo recalled, “[i]t was in full recognition of these and other handicaps not related here that ... [we] took office. Rather than dampening our enthusiasm, these handicaps had only steeled our hearts.” (Awolowo, 1960: 262) This means that a vision that is clearly articulated and embraced by the leadership cadre will inspire courage and total commitment in the followers toward actualizing it.

A strategic plan is critical to the promotion of good governance. Where there is no strategic plan, the government gropes, and dissipates energy and resources. Such a plan should have short, medium, long-term components. The strategic plan is, in effect, a series of plans that are integrated, well thought out, locally relevant and engenders the participation of its end users and beneficiaries in its conception and implementation

Consequently, agenda-setting and effective communication are additional personal attributes that leaders should bring into government service. Leaders should state clearly how to achieve developmental governance, outline what they intend to do with accompanying timelines, and the specific ways to get this done through robust and forward-looking ideas. Within the first month in office, leaders should make public the total public debts/liabilities and assets inherited by the government, and explain how they will deal with the debt burden and raise revenue. In addition, they should disclose details of contracts (including identities of successful bidders), cost and magnitude of specific projects, and expected delivery dates. The electorate would thereby know who to hold accountable if things did not go according to plan.

People and resource management is another attribute of leadership that will deliver good governance. As we have seen in the case of Awolowo, a competent leader should assemble a competent and self-assured team. Such a team can be inspired to produce outstanding results by a leader who exhibits integrity, vision, hardwork, people management and resilience. In making appointments, merit should be combined with equity, gender and geographical representativeness or affirmative action. Equity and geographical spread should guide the allocation and

distribution of resources and amenities. But merit should never be sacrificed for political expediency.

Consensus-building within the government is another requirement of good leadership. This promotes inclusiveness within the government. However, the leader should be assertive while yielding to superior argument, even from subordinates and adversaries. This demands humility and a willingness to learn from persons across national, political and sectarian lines.

Strategy for resource management is the next plank after the personal qualities of prospective leaders in government service. On assuming office, it is important to assess the government's strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. "When I took charge in the Western Region on 6 February 1952," Chief Awolowo recalled, "I made a careful survey of all the advantages and disadvantages of my new venture, and I tried to count them one by one. The advantages I discovered were few in number but inestimable both in their contents and potentialities." (Awolowo, 1960: 259) This entails a comprehensive audit of human and natural resources, infrastructure, equipment and amenities – to identify and address lapses. The government should identify and harness its comparative advantage or local resource endowment to generate employment and create wealth. Periodic reviews against benchmarks will track progress.

The revenue base of any political entity is critical to its survival and efficiency in service delivery. This calls for prioritizing and setting achievable targets. Proportionate percentages of resources should be committed to priority sectors: education, health, social and physical security, and infrastructure. The allocation to these sectors indicates the importance attached to them. For example, in the Western Region of the 1950s, the bulk of the budget was committed to education. As Awolowo (1960: 266) stated: "there are certain matters which were particularly dear to my heart, and to which I devoted the closest personal attention. ... I placed the utmost premium on (1) education, (2) health, (3) economic development, and 4 (democratisation of local government (Native Authority) councils."

A corollary of this is fiscal discipline, which strikes a healthy balance between revenue and expenditure, plugs leakages, minimizes waste, and optimizes resource use and deployment. Fiscal management governed by economic rationality and prudence will ensure the delivery of social goods. Hence, there should be clear understanding that it is capital expenditure – if well managed –

and not recurrent expenditure that generates development. Accordingly, projects for which public loans are taken, and public funds committed, should be determined rationally with an eye on the rates of returns and duration of amortization. The key consideration in embarking on capital projects is how such facilities impact or impinge upon current and future generations. Consequently, the government should not embark upon costly and prestige projects of dubious value – no matter the pressure of party leaders and even the grassroots.

Simplicity and cost effectiveness in operation should be the watchword of holders of public office. A businesslike leader should model simplicity in dress, in the number of aides, and in the number, brand and cost of official vehicles. Good governance demands due process, cost-cutting and a lean government. The leader's personal example is critical to achieving this. It is also the only way that unreasonable demands by party leaders and members, which undermine the success of the government, can be held in check. Leading by example, leaders should be the first to openly declare their personal assets, as President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua did in 2007. They should compensate citizens and aides who uphold integrity at various levels of government with national honours and recognitions.

That said, given the rising expectations of the electorate, the chief executive should be seen as achieving success in meeting some immediate needs. This is also an indication of prior preparation before assumption of office. The accomplishment of short-term targets – “quick-wins” and “low-hanging fruits” - within the first three months of accession will engender confidence. Examples of such initiatives are the provision of palliatives pending a permanent solution; the construction of a link bridge or culvert to connect isolated communities; and a road that shortens the distance between farm and market, or connects border communities in different states/local government units. Immediate impact in office serves to galvanize both the government and the populace in a positive synergy. However, the ultimate aim of leaders is the enduring impact or legacy of their service. For, in the final analysis, it is only striking, enduring accomplishments aimed at the greater good of the majority that will preserve their legacy. In Western Nigeria, the legend of Awolowo was built on seminal ideas and legacy projects. As he reminisced: “In the course of my eight years of office, I gave my personal attention to the formulation of every major policy, and the execution of practically every important programme. It was the greatest joy of my life to watch the Region grow from a little acorn into a promising oak.” (Awolowo, 1960: 266) Consequently, emerging leaders should strive to be

innovative and strategic in planning and delivering the dividends of good governance within their term in office.

Success in significant human endeavours depends on collaboration with various stakeholders in strategic partnerships. In the governance of states, for example, chief executives should create an enabling environment for “win-win” partnerships with the private sector and other stakeholders, especially as government by itself cannot fund or manage all projects. At the national and state levels, such mutually beneficial local and international partnerships will contribute to addressing the nation’s challenges. A vital component of this partnership is the involvement of the people to ensure community ownership of ideas and projects sited in the local communities. Getting the people to participate through self-help and grant-aided projects, and voluntary community service will foster a sense of ownership of the governance process. The government should also obtain regular feedback, input of ideas and results of project monitoring through regular town hall meetings.

Leaders must know and master their constitutional responsibilities. They must operate strictly within the ambit of the law and respect boundaries between tiers of government and between coordinate jurisdictions. Yet, they need to build partnerships and synergize their efforts across and beyond constitutional, legal, political and other boundaries. They should exchange ideas and execute joint projects (with attendant cost-sharing). Regional blocs have begun this initiative, most notably, the Southwest states which collaborate formally across party lines on the platform of the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN).

Within the framework of the Nigerian Constitution which allocates responsibilities – Exclusive, Concurrent and Residual – to different tiers, each unit of government should have a “Must-do- List.” This list of top priorities will vary by tier and location. Local governments, for example, should focus on drains; markets; abattoirs; house numbering and street naming; collection of rates and licences; street and rural access roads; acquisition or hire of equipment (for road construction and waste management, for example); maintenance of historical monuments; mobilizing for community development (partnering communities with matching grant scheme); nurturing artisan, agricultural and rural cooperatives; and the sensitization and implementation of sanitation, maternal health, immunization and tree plantingschemes.

Governments should seek to achieve gainful employment, but not by the populist and uneconomical means of bloating the bureaucracy. They should rather promote skills acquisition and foster micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by supplying seedlings, facilitating access to land and start-up capital, assisting farmers', traders' and artisans' cooperatives and providing extension services. Those in charge of rural and remote communities should invest in low-cost, relevant technology, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), battery- and solar-powered sources of energy, water purification technologies, and in battery-powered online processes. They should institute procedures and mechanisms for tracking and monitoring public service and public projects and delivery timelines.

Development-focused succession planning is imperative to ensure continuity of good governance. Hence, making due allowance for personnel, party and policy changes, a reliable development-focused succession plan should be pursued. This appears to have been achieved in Lagos State from 1999. The Tinubu-Fashola-Ambode smooth transition means that each governor built on the gains of his predecessor(s). This contrasts with the Awolowo-Akintola feud in Western Nigeria of the First Republic. It is alleged that Premier Akintola departed from the script by unilaterally fixing the price of cocoa, the region's economic mainstay, an act that made him very unpopular and eventually led to the demise of his regime (Oyeyemi, 2003; Dawodu, n.d.).

Conclusion

This article has examined the concept of good governance in Nigeria from a historical perspective. It has considered instances in Nigerian history when leaders developed templates for governing their people. In the precolonial period, various leaders of the emirates of Northern Nigeria wrote treatises on good governance while Chief Obafemi Awolowo's writings and record of public service served as template for the modern period. The discussion was rounded off with the author's reflections on, and proposals for, effective governance.

In all, this essay has underscored the pivotal role of leadership and followership in achieving good governance. In addition, it proposed minimum standards and parameters for assessing governance at all levels. It emphasized the following leadership benchmarks: requisite personal qualities, vision and blueprint, teamwork, respect for the law, working with the people, providing a platform and benchmark for successor governments, and leaving an enduring legacy. Moreover, the paper has underlined the imperatives of institution building and sustainable

development in every sphere of life. Yet, it has underlined the overarching importance of the human element – leadership (with vision, passion and integrity that are consistent with the “Omoluabi” concept⁹) and followership (that is well informed, mobilized and engaged). This is why, though this proposal appears to focus on the leadership as such, it makes due allowance for the people as the co-drivers of the process. The people are important, not just in s/electing their leaders, but in the conception, implementation and assessment of development plans and projects.

In the final analysis, a (good) governance template adopted and widely disseminated in various languages and media, might achieve the following purposes. First, it will return a measure of power and autonomy of action to the people by empowering them to make a rational choice of leadership and undertake a fair assessment of performance. Second, it should impose a measure of restraint on otherwise rapacious leaders, knowing that the people now have a template for assessing performance and making specific demands.

Notes

1 Paper presented at the 19th University of Lagos Conference and Research Fair, 15 August 2017. Many thanks to participants in the Arts Panel, Dr. Sunday Akinola Olukoju (Winnipeg, Canada) and the anonymous readers of this journal for their comments on the paper. But I take full responsibility for subsisting inadequacies.

2 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/581273-a-politician-is-a-fellow-who-will-lay-down-your>, accessed on 30 June 2018.

3 A Nigerian newspaper lamented the embarrassment and humiliation caused by the inability to find suitable candidates for the award instituted in 2006 by the Sudanese billionaire, Mo Ibrahim. It was particularly incensed that Nigeria never produced any worthy candidates in spite of its prodigious potential. See Hardball (2012: 64).

4 This paragraph summarises the submission in Damiba, 2011.

5 Ibid, p.5, citing Sy, 2009.

6 Summary of a discussion in Discussion Paper No.1, African Governance Institute, Dakar, 2011, p. 7.

7 For a listing of his achievements as Regional Premier, see Oke (2009: 150-56).

8 Oral communication: Professor Bolade Eyinla, University of Ilorin, 2013.

9 Olajoku, 2011.

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