



INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS
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S 50th ANNIVERSARY
VER JUBILEE
LECTURE

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP:

BY THE
CHIEF SERVANT,
DR. MU'AZU BABANGIDA ALIYU OON,
(TALBAN MINNA)
THE GOVERNOR OF NIGER STATE

At Transcorp Hilton, Abuja
On Tuesday, February 10, 2009.



**NIGER STATE
OF NIGERIA**

Chief Servant
Dr. Muazu Babangida Aliyu
Talban Minna
The Governor, Niger State





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**SILVER JUBILEE
LECTURE**

**SERVANT-LEADERSHIP:
A Path to Progressive
Governance in Nigeria**

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SERVANT-LEADERSHIP:

*...a Path to Progressive Governance
in Nigeria*

PROTOCOL:

Let me start by congratulating the Institute of Directors - Nigeria, on this silver jubilee celebration of its existence as an organisation. I want to most sincerely thank the Institute for finding me worthy to stand before you today as the Guest Speaker. To have spent twenty-five years in existence is in itself a no mean achievement. Indeed, it is an indication that you have been relevant through your network of activities, nationally and internationally, in enhancing the professional competence of directors and in bringing about corporate governance

and best practices in the management of investment portfolios. There is no doubt therefore that IoD Nigeria should be the most appropriate organization to set and regulate standards for all directors in the private and public sectors, particularly at a time when ethical and moral values are very low as reflected by insider trading, indiscipline and corruption.

2. I consider the theme of this presentation "Servant Leadership: A Path to Progressive Governance in Nigeria" as most apt, for it provides us the opportunity to discuss and interact on the concept of servant-leadership as the ideal approach to progressive governance in Nigeria today. We all seem to agree, I believe, that the absence of purposeful and genuine leadership has been our

greatest challenge since independence, and this may possibly explain the reason for IoD's choice to explore new insights into how servant-leadership may be helpful in turning around our fortunes as a nation as well as in the corporate world.

3. Unlike other leadership models which, I do not intend to bore you with, I shall also not bore you with the arguments whether leaders are born or trained but I can say with certainty that whether you are a President, a Governor, a legislator, a Council Chairman or Councilor, Chairman of Board of Directors, or the Cleaner who sweeps the Boardroom, indeed whatever your position, you exercise some leadership roles, the style of which shall affect how you perceive

your role, your work and your relationship with colleagues and the whole atmosphere of the work place - whether school, a company, a state or a nation. A servant-leader therefore perceives his role as a humble employee, a servant, a steward who forgets his personal interests. He is more genuinely concerned with the welfare and development of others; he supports colleagues and co-workers to excel, especially people at the lower cadre of the organization. He is more concerned with the greatest good for the greatest number. The guiding principle of the servant leader is *selflessness*, and his principle is "God first, others second, and I last". Indeed, servant-leadership is more concerned with service, excellent

service delivery in the most humble and unassuming manner.

4. Indeed, the two great world religions, Islam and Christianity attach very high value to the sense of accountability and humility in leadership as illustrated in the scriptures. For instance, a well known Hadith of Holy Prophet Muhammed says "*Kullu kum ra'in was kullu ra'in mas'ool an rai'yatay-hi...*" meaning "Every one of you is a caretaker, and every caretaker is responsible for what he is caretaker of", and the Holy Bible also decrees that "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all..." (Mark 10:42-45). Therefore, as a servant-leader, the servant-Director should be more

concerned with the interest and progress of his customers or clients; he must be ready to sacrifice his personal comfort while he ensures better fortunes for his investors, his employees and the consumers of his services and products. At the international arena, a servant-Director is he who is most willing to accept a slashed jumbo package in the face of the global economic meltdown and plummeting investments. Indeed, he also comes clean to his shareholders with information that can help them decide their fate.

5. However, it is regrettable that for a very long time in this country, people in leadership roles both in the public and private sectors have been self-centred, exploitative and insensitive

to the aspirations of the common people. Most often, the approach is top-down and dictatorial, with the perceived leader appearing to know all the problems of the people and having the solutions, taking decisions without consulting with the people or involving them to get their input and perspective on issues which are likely to affect their lives. This approach to leadership often leads to misplacement of priorities as there is usually no synergy between the people's real needs and the leader's choices or decisions. The effect is chaos, confusion and frustration for all concerned. For instance, such a scenario only leaves a Board Director frustrated from inability to achieve results for the company and its

shareholders through his employees, who are themselves disenchanted, demotivated and demoralized resorting to rumour-mongering and gossiping at coffee breaks, lunchtime or at car parks, thus looking for shortcuts to wealth.

6. In the political arena, the insensitive and non-consultative leadership approach results in the electorates and the generality of the people being distrustful, suspicious and disrespectful, always looking at their leaders as *masu chin amana*, a Hausa expression for 'betrayers of trust'. This is most unfortunate and it negates the essence of government and governance.

7. In Niger State, we have found this approach as antithetical to the socio-economic and political progress of our people, indeed as an impediment to the realization of our vision of becoming one of the three most developed States in Nigeria in all ramifications by the year 2020. Servant-leadership provides us with a common vision which becomes a guiding light for the community to move to higher goals. We have therefore evolved a number of ways of involving the stakeholders in the governance process, in order to get the people's buy-in and to avoid any communication gap in our transformation efforts. We believe that effective communication and the people's ownership of the decisions we

take are very crucial in a democratic environment, for it enhances cooperation and participation of all concerned. We ensure that we carry everybody along and have something for every segment to do to contribute to the development process, - from the idle ward politician, the local government political activist, the elite politician, the astute politician, the enlightened public servant, the retired but active city dweller, to the elderly and influential groups in the State. The idea is to radicalize the people to appreciate their rights and privileges and to enable them demand for quality service and good representation from the people they elected or appointed. That is also the reason why we have embraced

servant-leadership as the cornerstone of government in Niger State because we believe we cannot be superior to our employers (the electorates), who we literally begged for a job. We have therefore resolved to be more concerned with the often neglected majority by providing them with the basic needs and necessities of life. Yes, there are challenges, sometimes strong opposition, from those who have been free-riders at the expense of the common people.

8. We believe that like some of our past political heroes, people like Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, we should work to enhance the welfare and well-being of majority of the people so that we can carve a

positive image and identity for the servant-leader. To achieve this, we believe we must serve the people with passion, with humility and with the genuine fear of Allah (SWT) bearing in mind that if we do not account for our actions to the people here on earth, we shall not escape accounting to God in the hereafter; we must show that leadership is not an opportunity for the leader to plunder the people's resources to the extent, in some cases, that it becomes a burden for some people to find a place to hide the wealth for their children and grandchildren. We must learn from the legacies of our heroes past who I have cited earlier and from many other unsung heroes across the country. Many of them served the

people and left no big houses, no fat bank accounts but left good names and durable legacies.

9. SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGER STATE

Permit me to share with you at this juncture some of our initiatives and approaches to progressive governance in Niger State using servant-leadership principles. We believe that governance must be participatory at all levels in order to build consensus and forge common grounds to realise our collective aspirations. We therefore introduced the *Jama'a Forum* (the People's Parliament), which affords the people, along with community leaders and elected

representatives, the opportunity to relate and share their views on socio-political and indeed all matters of concern to the people in a conducive atmosphere. The Chief Servant is usually available to discuss freely with the people during these regular sessions which we hold at different locations throughout the State. I am happy to note that the *Jama'a Forum* similar but slightly different in composition, frequency and organization from the Annual General Meetings (AGMs) called by members of the IoD, has provided the opportunity to get valuable insights into what the people need and expect of government, governance and public servants. We have realized, for instance that the average illiterate

village dweller is not after all unintelligent; most times, the people know their problems and even have ideas on how to solve those problems, but they only require assurance, guidance and confirmation from us that they are on the right course.

10. Further to that, as servant-leaders, we thought we must empower the people at the grassroots to articulate their problems and to solve them. Thus, we introduced the concept of the Ward Development Committees (WDCs), charged with the responsibility of providing purposeful leadership and delivering services at the smallest political unit, that is the ward level. At that level, the WDCs are autonomous in conceiving and deciding on the projects that are of

priority and that would add value to the lives of the people. At the moment, these 274 ward committees are doing impressively well with the monthly grant of Five Hundred Thousand Naira each to them for their projects. This success story has necessitated the need to increase the grant to One Million Naira monthly, while a state legislation on the WDCs is in progress. The essence of this approach is to create a sense of community participation, ownership, transparency and accountability in the management of resources. This is also outside what the federal, state and local governments may decide to do in those areas.

11. While we are recognizing the need for input from the bottom-up, we are also

conscious of the huge reservoir of knowledge, experience and wisdom of our elder citizens, many of who have meritoriously served or are still serving Nigeria and humanity in different endeavours. We therefore established and strengthened the Niger State Economic and Social Advisory Council (ESACON), made up of eminent and respected Nigerlites to advise Government and to add value to what we are doing because most of these people have seen and have been through a lot in life. Like the Board of Directors, but only with advisory responsibilities, the ESACON has assisted our administration in so many areas, articulating our State's position on issues of national concern, like the Electoral Reforms, the Constitution

Review and proposing roadmaps for the revitalization and reinvigoration of vital sectors of education, health, agriculture, commerce and investments, infrastructural development, security and a host of others. We have had to engage our senior citizens in the most productive manner because servant-leadership represents service to all segments and members of the society, both the active and visible and the retired or withdrawn.

12. At the governmental level, we have instituted a culture of regular meetings to discuss issues of concern to the progress of the State. These meetings cut across all strata of government, including all levels of

political appointees who meet monthly with the Chief Servant to exchange ideas on how best to serve the people. Political appointees use these fora as points of feedback on what the people are feeling about government and its programmes, on the progress being made in respect of development activities at the local government areas. This has proved to be a good mechanism for effective communication, as political appointees are now required to submit quarterly reports of their activities to the office of the Chief Servant to justify the expenditure on their salaries.

13. The apex level of this governmental activity and coordination is the

regular weekly State Executive Council meetings, being held to discuss State matters. Routine as it may seem, our approach is unique in a way, because we have an enlarged Exco with Permanent Secretaries and some Heads of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in attendance on a regular basis; the idea is meant to enhance the quality of discussions and to facilitate the smooth implementation of decisions taken in the interest of the people. Many people do not realize that more often the answers to many problems of an organization may lie in the middle and lower cadres of the organization or society.

14. THE DIRECTOR-SERVANT LEADER NEXUS

As Directors and members of IoD, we are the implementers of policies and programmes at the corporate and governmental levels. Our actions must therefore be guided by the tenets of servant-leadership, as we must always be concerned with how our decisions impact positively on the welfare and well-being of the majority of our clients/consumers. We must always be conscious of ethical values and our social responsibilities to all manners of people who we serve. We need to remind ourselves that the capacity of our members to successfully play the roles expected of us depends on how best we serve the interest of the people whose trust we hold.

Unfortunately, our integrity and activities have been called to question many times in the past in Nigeria. Our experience on the unpalatable incidence of failed banks easily comes to mind here; so also is the recent experience with our stock market prices crashing to their lowest level as a result of alleged corrupt practices by some of our Directors. I think we need to do more as servant-directors to regain the confidence of our shareholders, our employees, our numerous customers and the public in general.

15. I also believe the IoD is in the best position to set the agenda for professionalism and excellent service delivery; in other words, the IoD has

the capacity to entrench corporate governance and adherence to ethical principles in the conduct of business in Nigeria, whether in the private or public sectors. This way we can also expect that it would sooner or later become mandatory for any Director employed by a Nigerian company or governmental agency to be an accredited member of the IoD. The IoD could also assist by being role models for public servants in relation to issues such as attitudinal change, time consciousness, objectives' setting and performance management. For instance, we need to have deeper understanding and behave in conformity with the oaths of office that we all swore to during our inauguration as political officer

holders or the oaths of secrecy which we took as public servants. We need to remind ourselves that we have sworn to discharge our duties to the best of our ability, faithfully and in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and that we will not allow our personal interest to influence our official conduct or official decisions. To succeed in this task, as members of IoD or those in leadership positions, we ought to uphold high ethical and moral standards and be aboveboard, in order to earn the confidence of the people we serve.

16. May I urge us all to support the rebirth of our nation, to embrace the concept and practice of servant-leadership in

whatever capacity we find ourselves and to contribute to national development for the future of our country and humanity at large. We are indeed very blessed as a nation to have at this time a visionary, focused and committed servant-leader in President Umaru Musa Yar'adua, GCFR, who has remained steadfast in his determination to give Nigeria a new lease of life through the propagation of servant-leadership. Let us join hands to salvage our nation; believe me, we can do it, if we re-dedicate ourselves to serve the people selflessly, transparently and in an accountable manner.

17. I thank you all for your attention and may loD continue to grow from strength to strength. Once more,

accept my congratulations on the silver jubilee celebrations of your Institute.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: A Path to Progressive Governance in Nigeria
