



UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

**SERVANT LEADERSHIP  
IN AFRICAN  
EMERGING DEMOCRACIES:  
LESSONS FROM NIGER STATE OF NIGERIA**

**REMARKS**

BY THE  
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NIGER STATE OF NIGERIA



## SERVICES LEADERSHIP IN AFRICAN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES:

Lessons from Niger State of Nigeria

**D**istinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen; it is a tremendous pleasure to be at this event, which affords me the opportunity to be back to a place where I share excellent memories. I thank you very much indeed, Professor John T.S. Keeler, the Dean of this School and all members of the GSPIA community for inviting me and my small entourage to be part of this memorable occasion. Let me recognize and express gratitude to Professor Michael Brenner and all faculty members who have one way or the other assisted me to fulfill one of my ambitions of acquiring functional



knowledge that is now contributing to my modest successes and accomplishments in life.

2. I must also pay special tributes to the faculty and students of GSPIA for the outstanding contributions in making the world a better place by promoting the ideals of good governance and effective leadership, which are now at the forefront of the public service reform agenda, especially in the emerging democracies.

3. Today, my remarks will dwell on what I call "Servant leadership in African Emerging Democracies: Lessons from Niger State of Nigeria", the essence being to share with you some of our initiatives in governance in Niger State, where I have the privilege of providing what I consider purposeful leadership with a determina-



on to transform the lives of about  
million population.

4. I have chosen this theme for my remarks because some of us share a deep concern about the reasons holding back Africa from progress and economic development. I believe this is an opportunity to underscore the importance of good governance and responsible leadership as core components of progress especially in African emerging democracies, which we as conscientious Africans have the capacity to provide with the genuine support and encouragement of the more advanced democracies.

5. It is rather sad that while emerging democracies in Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America as well as South-East Asia are witnessing economic



progress and political stability, most countries in Africa are still left far behind the rest of the world. I am sure the picture I am trying to paint and the problems are very clear for all to see – excruciating debt burden, diseases, poverty of conscience in the leadership, weak governments, low volume and unfair conditions of international trade, hunger, illiteracy, and so on and so forth. Whereas this may not be the appropriate occasion to trade blames, it suffices to say that there is compelling moral obligation on the part of the international community, especially the established and developed democracies to take realistic steps to support Africa to find its bearings, while we, Africans of this generation work hard for the emergence of strong leadership in our various countries based on strong democratic principles and values.



Probably, this is the historic moment and place to call for an OBAMA PLAN for Africa.

6. Why focus on the servant leadership model at this critical period? I am sure we all agree that there is a global desire to focus attention on promoting effective, efficient, accountable and transparent governance in the developing democracies in order to reduce poverty, eradicate official corruption, strengthen government at all levels and entrench sustainable development as well as to ensure global peace and security. This effort has been accentuated, I believe by the understanding amongst some world leaders that Africa's failure is a disaster not only to Africa but to the rest of the world.

7. Servant leadership is therefore of crucial importance to the developing



world because its thresholds of transparency, accountability and participatory decision making, which are indeed some of the universal democratic values, are seen by many as the much needed antidotes to corruption and embezzlement which otherwise undermine effective service delivery and good governance. What this portends and suggests is that instead of a leadership culture that has kept most African countries and people poorer than they were at independence some 40 – 50 years ago, where the political elites fight tooth and nail to grab political power for their selfish interest, where the electoral process for the emergence of credible leaders is still a problem in most places, it is only appropriate to recommend and adopt a leadership model that emphasizes a leader's role as steward of the resources of



the Country, State or organization – human, financial and otherwise and that focuses only on service and excellent service delivery to the people in the most transparent, accountable and unassuming manners.

A servant leader, in this context therefore perceives his role as an employee, a servant, a steward, who is more concerned with the welfare and development of others. He is more focused on the greatest good for the greatest number and on achieving results in line with the values and integrity of the organization or Country. The dominant feature of servant leadership is 'selflessness', as the servant leader considers "God first, others second, and I last". He sees leadership as an opportunity to render service and not to plunder the



resources of the people or loot their funds. A servant-leader equates service to worship of his creator, to the almighty Allah (SWT) for the Muslims. Thus, service to humanity is service to God

9. The servant leader does not claim to have monopoly of wisdom, he involves people and creates the enabling environment for all to realize their full potentials and excel. He encourages their participation in decision making and involves them effectively in the implementation of policies and programmes. The servant leader submits himself to the wishes of the people and does not have a separate agenda from that of the people. Hence, the elected servant leader considers himself as subservient to the electorates whom he had gone, literally to beg for a job, to ask



for votes during election, often with promises and pledges. He constantly relates, consults, and considers the electorates as his masters, whom he treats with respect and honor because they gave him their mandate and trust. Dialogue and continuous feedback are the building blocks of this relationship.

## 10. LESSONS AND CHALLENGES FROM NIGER STATE OF NIGERIA

Permit me to share with you some of the initiatives we took and the challenges we are encountering with the servant leadership approach. First, we set for ourselves a Vision to be among the top three most socio-economically and politically developed States in Nigeria by the year 2020. We know it will not be easy, especially in a nation of 36 States and about 140 million populations; coupled



with the vagaries of the international economy. But as a path that we have chosen, we are determined to make the best use of our vast human and natural resources to realize our aspiration. Certainly, it won't be easy but we are prepared to make the sacrifice and to succeed.

11. We started with attitudinal change and value reorientation, by trying to make people understand what government and governance really means. We made the elected and appointed public officers appreciate their position as a trust, a privilege and an honor from God and their fellow citizens. We also radicalized the citizens understand that it was their right to demand for quality services from those in leadership positions.



12. We entrenched due process and respect for the rule of law in all facets of the administration. With a new Due Process Department in the Governor's Office, we brought sanity and probity in public procurement and expenditure, as all transactions must now go through established procedures in line with budgetary provisions and open competitive bidding.

13. I am pleased to note that through the activities of the Due Process Department we have been able to restore probity and accountability in public expenditure as contracts are no longer awarded whimsically, sometimes by words of mouth, without records nor documentation. All local government councils are also complying with Due Process requirements in the execution of capital projects, to ensure



value for money. We were determined to set minimum standards of accountability and due diligence in public service. In our attempt to put records straight therefore, we set up a Debt Verification Committee and later a Commission of Inquiry to ascertain the totality and veracity of the State Government's indebtedness to local and international contractors during the previous administration.

14. This was also to send a clear signal that it would not be business as usual during our tenure. By now, everyone serving with us is aware that he/she would be held accountable for his/her actions and inactions after our tenure. This is meant to safeguard public funds from misappropriation, embezzlement and minimize corruption.



15. In addition, we established the Public Private Partnership (PPP) Department with the mandate to facilitate the participation of private sector investments in the implementation of our sectoral development programmes, using international best practice standards in project financing and risk management. We appreciate the fact that the private sector is the engine of growth and efficient service delivery. Hence we have been able to attract private sector investments in the Housing sector where we are building 5,000 housing units to reduce the housing deficit in the State, in infrastructural development, where we are constructing new inter and intra city roads and rehabilitating many, in the health as well as educational sectors, where we are building and equipping new health facilities and schools.



16. We are also reinvigorating and repositioning the Niger State Development Company with a New Board of Directors and new executive management structure to enable the company operate with a great measure of autonomy and operational efficiency as a one-stop investment promotion and development agency.

17. Furthermore, we ensured that all public officers comply with the Code of Conduct Bureau requiring all political appointees and public officers to declare their assets upon assumption of office and at the expiration of their tenure. The idea being to give interested members of the public the chance to compare the assets of elected or appointed public officers before and after office.



18. We also introduced for the first time in the political history of the country a 'State of Service Address' – an address to the people of the State through the Legislative Assembly distinct from the ritual of annual budget address, detailing our income and expenditure activities during the first year of our administration. We used it as a forum to review our performances against the set deliverables, especially our campaign pledges. An innovation that elicited and heightened the people's confidence in the leadership and challenged my colleagues in other States. Indeed, the National Assembly is considering compelling the President to give an annual State of Nation Address.

19. Given that everything is said to rise and fall with the quality of the leadership, we were determined to make the best use



of this opportunity to transform the lives of our people. We set out by commissioning a Development Action Plan (DAP) – again, the first State reported to do so in the present political dispensation- marshalling out our developmental blue print and roadmap for our first tenure (2007 – 2011). In the document we have provided a detailed plan for our targets and strategies, which we are convinced, will facilitate and guide us towards the realization of Vision 3:2020. The President of Nigeria, His Excellency, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'adua, GCFR has also called for the revival of the National Development Plans for the country.

20. Similarly, we appreciate the fact that in federalism the local government level is the tier of government that impacts most on the lives of the people, since that is



where majority of the people live. Therefore, in order to bring tangible progress to the lives of the people, we are strengthening the capacity of public officers at the local government levels to deliver quality services to the people in order to strengthen governance at these levels. We have entrenched a culture of budgeting and planning at the State and especially the local government levels. Government officials now understand the concept of budgeting circle and the need to adhere to budgetary provisions, because there cannot be any bright ideas in the middle of the budget circle.

21. We also discovered that an inherent problem impeding effective service delivery was the absence, or rather weak monitoring and supervision of activities at the local government levels. We therefore



the Chief Servant literally takes the government to the people, in the sense that the top functionaries of government both in the Executive and Legislative arms are led to an interactive session with the people at the grassroots level, across the State in a free and conducive atmosphere. Through this means, we discovered the tremendous goodwill and knowledge of the common people and rural dwellers which were hitherto not tapped for development. Many people at the village level get a chance to ask questions directly or raise issues that concern their lives. Some vital inputs are also made to the policy making process during these interactions, as the people are often courageous to express their acceptance or reservations about certain government policies. They also do not spare those public officers who do not go back to the



villages, except in three or four year's time, during elections or re-elections.

24. To further engage the electorates in governance, we introduced the Ward Development Projects initiative, which recognizes the Ward level as the smallest political unit and the target of our development programmes. Through a State Legislation, each of our 274 Wards receive monthly grants for the execution of capital projects that are considered relevant to the socio-economic life of the Wards. The funds are managed in each Ward by a seven-member Ward Development Committee (WDC) chosen by the members of the Ward, free of undue interference from the State or Local Government. The highest political office holder in each of the 25 Local Governments supervises the activities of



the WDCs. This is probably the most popular initiative of government that has been well accepted and appreciated by the people. Many States have been visiting us to understand the concept and its modus operandi; many have indeed applied and replicated the concept.

25. As the cornerstone of our administration in Niger State of Nigeria, we have been resolute in transforming the lives of the people we serve, through our strategic intervention and investments in the critical sectors of Education, Health, Agriculture, Infrastructural Development, Social Development, and Tourism. For instance, in order to get more children into the school system and to improve the quality of education in the State, we introduced free basic education in our public schools, with special focus on the



girl child so as to fight and discourage an old age practices of discrimination, early marriage, child abuse and general disregard for the girl-child. Government has also taken responsibility for paying the examination fees of students writing their final secondary school examinations in the public schools where majority of parents hitherto could not afford these fees.

26. We also have in place a free health care programme for children under five, pregnant women and the aged over 70, and various forms of subsidized healthcare services aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality in the State, as well as improving the quality of lives of the citizens. We are in effective collaboration with international development partners in taking healthcare to the hard-to-reach communities by strengthening the



activities of our Primary Healthcare Department in the Ministry of Health, construction of new General Hospitals, upgrading and equipping all existing healthcare facilities in the State.

27. We are also supporting our farmers to boost agricultural production in the State through timely delivery of fertilizers and farm implements. This led us to the position of best Rice producing State in Nigeria in 2008. We have just embarked on the reorganization of the State Agricultural and Mechanisation Development Authority to reposition the Agency for achieving our goal of becoming a major supplier of major food items to the nation and other parts of the world.

28. We also recognize the important role that transportation and other critical



infrastructure can play in our development agenda. We have therefore embarked on the construction of new intra and intercity roads, urban beautification, air transport links and we envisage participation in the impending rail projects linking the federal capital of Abuja to its adjoining States. We are also embarking on the Minna International Airport City project as an alternative commercial airport destination, to complement the Abuja International Airport, which had been designed to serve the needs of the political capital of the country. Already investors are indicating interest for partnership in this gigantic project, which is conceived to make Minna an investor's and Tourist's destination of choice in Nigeria.

29. However, we have a few challenges here and there, as would be expected



when people are being put through new systems, new thinking and new approach. People have to adjust to new ways of doing things – adhere to due process, transparency, documentation, continuous dialogue and communication between the elected officers and the electorate, openness in the conduct of government business, and accountability in a knowledge-driven administration.

30. Ladies and gentlemen, servant leadership is indeed the path to progressive governance in the African emerging democracies. We believe that with the commitment of African leaders through the African peer review mechanism of the New partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the genuine commitment of the international community, especially the developed



economies to support Africa, we shall become a success story within a short time from now.

31. I thank you all immensely for your attention. Let me thank the Deputy faculty members and the distinguished guests of this school for this wonderful opportunity. I must also express gratitude to God for the opportunity to attend CSPIA for my Masters and PH.D programmes, where I learnt many of the ideas I enunciate today. I welcome you all to Niger State, an emerging land of promise, limitless opportunities and prosperity, and indeed to Nigeria.