Upholding the Core Nigerian Values

By

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Delivered at the Summit for the Repositioning of Citizenship and Leadership as a Panacea for Achieving Economic Recovery and Growth-Plan, Organized by Citizenship and Leadership Training Center, held on March 15, 2019, at the Shehu Musa Yar Adua Centre, Abuja

Introduction

Universally, affirming and upholding identifiable core national values, by both leaders and citizens is necessary for national cohesion and development. Indeed, given its importance to national unity, national integration and development, upholding core national values is a task that must be done. In most countries, citizens are inculcated with, and mobilized on the basis of, core national values, whether these are explicitly articulated or implicitly assumed. Both formal educational and other public institutions, as well as informal channels are deployed for this purpose. Leaders then lead by example in not only articulating and upholding core national values but also in inspiring others to do so. In addition to leaders other role models whose actions are impactful add value to the effort.

National core values are, indeed, the radar, the roadmap, and the ideological framework of governance and for piloting state affairs to meet the core objectives of providing for and protecting human welfare and security in a polity. These values, ordinarily, should circumscribe state-citizen relations, inter-state as well as inter-

personal relations. Examples of notable countries, in which articulated or implicit core national values, upheld by both citizens and leaders, have played remarkable roles in their societal transformation and national development are Sweden, Singapore, China, USA and Cuba, to mention but a few. In Africa, countries where presently serious efforts are being made by leaders to uphold and get citizens to uphold defined core national values are Rwanda, Mauritius and Botswana. Virtually all countries recognize the need to have core national values and to uphold and utilize them. But only a few make the serious effort, which serves as a tipping point for national integration and remarkable development. Most countries are strugglers, with varying dispositions in defining, inculcating, upholding or utilizing core national values. The bottom heap, are lackadaisical, or indifferent, a disposition which constraints, or even obstructs their national development processes.

In Nigeria today, we often read, or hear, statements such as, "there is a crisis of value system"; "the value system is endangered"; "the value system has collapsed"; "the value system has been bastardized", and so on. In Nigeria, we do a lot of lamentation and fatalistic resignation, if not self-flagellation! In any case, these are serious statements of concern, given the significance of the value system in general and core national values in particular, for national regeneration and reproduction. In this context, the choice of the theme: "Upholding the Core Nigerian Values" is apt; it is both relevant and timely. Repositioning the roles citizens and leaders for national cohesion and development is desirable; indeed urgently desirable in our circumstances, where things have been left to drift from bad, towards

worse. Both citizens and leaders need to properly understand what Nigeria's core national values are, ingest and imbibe them, and make them the framework and guiding principles for their daily life engagements, interactions and actions. Doing so is, historically, universally, what helps to build united, cohesive, integrated, resilient and developed nations. Our national aspirations for unity, progress and development would be remarkably constrained if core national values are not properly identified, upheld and utilized in the governance sphere, as well as in all other spheres of individual, group and community interactions and interrelations.

I am, therefore delighted with the opportunity to speak on the chosen theme for today's deliberations: "Upholding Core Nigerian Values", because it is one of the major issues of concern in our country, which has been agitating my mind.

To address the chosen theme for today's discussion effectively, we would need to pose and answer three major questions: How are values conceptualized? What are core Nigerian values? How best could these core Nigerian values be upheld? To answer the second question in particular, we would need to dig into our religious and socio-cultural contexts to fish out universally accepted values commonly applicable as basic tenets for all citizens of contemporary Nigeria. We would also need to make reference to those values chosen and explicitly stated in our codified body of laws, in particular the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. To answer the third question, we have to do a situation analysis of the

contemporary state of core Nigerian values: how they are articulated, how they are internalized, imbibed and utilized, if at all.

Conceptualizing/Defining Values

The following definitions are indicative of how values can best be conceptualized and understood:

Values are said to be "principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life"

Also, values have been defined to mean "Important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Values have major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations"

BusinessDictionary.com

Additionally, values can be said to mean "the principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong and how to act in various situations"

Cambridge English Dictionary

Similarly, Values are "the moral principles and beliefs or accepted standards of a person or social group"

Collins English Dictionary

And, "Values are the things that you believe are important in the way you live and work. They (should) determine your priorities, and,

deep down, they are probably the measures you use to tell if your life is turning out the way you want it to"

Wikipedia

Deducing from all these, I have conceptualized core values broadly as, the most important aspects of principles, beliefs, ideals and norms, which a person, a group or a larger community holds dear and utilizes as basic tenets guiding individual and collective actions and activities, mutual coexistence, human security, progress and development. What we hold dear, logically, we must uphold. Hence, because we hold core national values very important to our human security and development, we must nurture them, popularize them, and uphold them. It is undesirable, indeed dangerous, to not have core national values, or to have them and ignore them, and to not uphold them. Any country that does not have core national values or has them but does not nurture, uphold and utilize them is willfully undermining its own capacity for progress and development.

Core Nigerian Values: A Situation Analysis.

What are Nigeria's core values?

Nigeria's core national values are identifiable in, and extractable from, religious and socio-cultural values and beliefs of the people, as well as other universally, widely recognized values, such as the those embodied in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Resolution 217, 10 December 1948). Indeed some of these have been embodied in the 1999 Constitution, Chapter II "Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy".

The defined core values (standards, ideals, principles, ethics, tenets) in Chapter II, Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy are:

- Democracy and social justice
- Security and welfare of the people shall be the purpose of government
- Freedom, equality and justice
- Popular participation in governance
- Federal character in appointments
- Promotion of national unity in the context of recognized diversity
- Recognition and reflection of diversity in governance
- Unity faith and progress
- Encouragement of national integration
- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic, linguistic association or ties

The Constitution also specifies other constituent elements of "the national ethics" as: "Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance and Patriotism" (Section 23).

These national values articulated in the Constitution, as well as those implicit in the socio-cultural values of the Nigerian peoples (such as truthfulness, honesty, hard work, mutual respect, prudence and so on), are no doubt, "positive roadmaps for national development and national integration", if sufficiently adhered to, as Gbadegesin (2016) has noted.

The clear intention of the makers of the Constitution is that, national life, especially all aspects of governance, as operated and managed by the "three arms of government" (i.e. the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary) will be subjected to compliance with the spirit as well as the letter of these foundational core national values and ethical standards set out in Chapter II, "Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy".

A situation analysis clearly indicates fading core national values in Nigeria Today. In the current Nigerian situation, national core values are more at the level of documentation, articulation and discourse than as properly utilized guides for action and interrelations. There is a wide gulf between the constitutionally articulated national core values and ethical standards and the reality of citizens and leadership predispositions and conduct. There is clearly a major challenge of none compliance with what has been constitutionally articulated. Leaders say things they don't mean or do. By their actions, inactions and quite often even by their statements, they do not inspire or instruct the citizens to recognize, imbibe and be guided by the stated core values. Even those who, socio-culturally, are perceived as having moral authority, such as religious, community and traditional leaders, are remarkably deficient in their compliance with the wider societal value systems, not to mention the constitutionally identified core national values. Hence there is remarkable empirical evidence to support the statements often heard, about either collapsed, or eroded, or bastardized value systems in Nigeria. Indeed, at no time, since the principles were first incorporated into the 1979

Constitution, were they taken serious by operators of the constitution for compliance. Spirited arguments were made by those in power to characterize the implementation of policies to actualize these core national values as "non-justiciable". Hiding behind such legal jumbo mumbo, political leaders and public officials who preside over governance institutions ignored or failed to provide leadership in instilling and imbibing these core national values. The citizens, left adrift, either due to ignorance or willful carelessness have followed suit. Without commitment, proper leadership, guidance, serious propagation and internalization, the constitutionally defined core national values have essentially been ignored with impunity as guides to policy-making, policy implementation and governance generally.

Not long a go, President Buhari himself has commented on the erosion of our value system, thus:

> Our value system has been badly eroded over the years. The long-cherished and time honored, time-tested virtues of honesty, integrity, hard work, punctuality, good neighbourliness, abhorrence of corruption and patriotism, have given way to in the main to dishonesty, indolence, unbridled corruption and widespread impunity" (September 2016).

Hence, Core national values articulated, may often be espoused and 'promoted' by leaders, but these are generally neither internalized nor utilized in the daily activities of both the leaders and the citizens. Indeed, the actions or inactions of leaders and public officials

generally with regards to compliance with core national values have systematically undermined unity, harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Perhaps the best illustration of this phenomenon is the issue of citizenship versus indigene. For example, Chapter II of the Constitution under which the national core values are enshrined, has categorically stated under Article 15 section (3) (b) that, it shall be the duty of the State to "secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation". In reality, however, there is a massive contradiction between perceived rights of "indigenes" and the constitutionally given rights of citizens. Public officials in virtually all states of the federation have continued to assign more rights to so-called "indigenes" than to citizens with impunity. This contradiction is at the root of most of the causes of instability, conflicts and violence in contemporary Nigeria. Nigerian citizens who are residents in states other than their "state of origin", invariably find themselves marginalized, excluded and disempowered, literally stripped of the rights conferred on them by citizenship. In no other country does such crass stripping and denial of citizenship rights occur with such impunity, yet without redress or consequences.

Citizens are constantly being called upon by leaders to uphold core national values, but those who make the call don't make good examples for others to follow! There does not seem to be inspiring leadership by example in complying with core Nigerian values. It is all about leaders saying: "do as I say", and "I don't give a damn" about what I do or what YOU think of it!!

Conclusion

In Nigeria, we have what represents core national values carefully articulated in the 1999 Constitution, which have been derived both from the local context of peoples' socio-cultural values and beliefs, and from the universal declaration of human rights. The challenge is how to get elected leaders and public officials to know them, imbibe them, uphold them, comply with them, and then inspire, or otherwise prod, or compel citizens to know, uphold and comply with them.

I agree with Gbadegesin when he pertinently observed that, a "nation that dreams of greatness needs to invest in the strategic inculcation of national values". So we need to invest heavily in the inculcation and upholding of core national values in Nigeria. In doing this, however, we should recognize that in our current situation, given the fact that things have been so bad for so long, inculcating or indoctrinating national core values in citizens and leaders would be a slow and patient endeavor. As Dare has stated, "It will take at least a generation to restore a collapsed value system" (2016). Therefore, not only patience, but also doggedness, planning, and meticulous execution of sustainable plans is imperative for success. However, the process must as soon as is possible.

But, perhaps more than any other country, in Nigeria we require appropriate "drivers of change" who are prepared to lead by example, for this to happen. Then we need to revive and revitalize some of our public institutions whose mandate it is to catalyze this.

As a starting point: public institutions, such as Ministries of information; Youths and Sports; and agencies or prastatals, such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre (C&LTC), etc., which have the mandate to play necessary roles of promoting national core values, need to be strengthened and empowered to be active and effective in the discharge of these important responsibilities. In Nigeria the significance of these public institutions has in the past been undermined by the appointment of political jobbers and charlatans, sometimes even unpatriotic bigots, to head these institutions. We need to change that and ensure that the right kind of personnel lead these institutions. We need to refocus the work of these institutions to not just the easier aspects of public enlightenment and sensitization, but to especially to the more difficult task of careful identification, grooming, nurturing and empowerment of change agents, what I prefer to call drivers of change at the lower levels, especially from our teeming youths population. It is unfortunate that public policy has not had the desired impact in addressing the concerns and aspirations of our youths, who have deserved much more than the little attention now thrown at them. We must change this situation to avoid turning the "youths bulge", which should actually be an asset, into massive liability to peace, stability and development of our country (see Jega, 2017 a and b).

The non-governmental, civil society organizations, which have historically, universally played important roles in citizenship and leadership training, and in the dissemination, inculcation and propagation of national values, such as Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls

Brigades, Man O' War, Red Cross and Crescent, etc., whose activities in our schools seem to have diminished, need to be revived, encouraged and strengthened. Many of us learned quite a lot growing up through participation in the activities of these organizations in schools. They are now being rapidly replaced by religious voluntary use groups, which quite often are not focused on national unity and cohesion, but rather on the mobilization of ethno-religious fervor for wrongly misplaced political engagements.

Additionally, a concerted serious effort needs to be made to integrate the teaching or dissemination of core national values into the educational curriculum, especially at the basic and post-basic levels. Many countries have found this beneficial to life-long citizenship and leadership training by, as they say, "catching them young". There is no reason why Nigeria should not devote energy and resources into these kinds of efforts.

Significantly, repositioning citizenship and leadership training in Nigeria will require a determined effort to expand the scope of the activities of the Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre (CLTC). The Centre's training activities in the states, which are targeted at character building and training for disciplined youths, engaged in community development activities, and imbued with leadership skills, are very important and need to be supported and expanded. But a situation, as is currently the case, in which the activities of the Centre are perceived as income generating, rather than essential public service must change. The Centre should be made to have a carefully developed Strategic Plan and then be adequately funded.

The physical endurance, which some of the CLTC training programmes provide, as well as the values of self-discipline, self-reliance, selfless service, and learning skills, inculcate in citizens, especially the youth, invaluable core values, which are the cornerstones of national cohesion and development. I strongly recommend that the nation focuses in expanding these programs in schools, especially through the Man O' War clubs, which help to "catch them young", when they are impressionistic and energetic and better placed to have learning experiences which would be impactful for life.

Finally, actualizing all these recommendations requires conscientious and patriotic leadership and drivers of change at all levels, in the public, private and civil society sectors of the Nigerian political economy. All hands have to be on deck to bring this about, because, as noted in the beginning it is a task that must be done. No doubt, only a remarkably improved governance system, populated with inspiring leaders at all levels can accelerate the inculcation and utilization of our core values for desirable national cohesion and development.

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