

Servant Leadership as a Catalyst for National Development: Principles, Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of servant leadership as a catalyst for national development in Nigeria, highlighting its principles, challenges, and potential. It argues that the persistent issues of poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment in Nigeria are largely attributed to ineffective leadership. The author advocates for servant leadership—characterised by empathy, listening, and community building—as a transformative approach that can address these challenges. By situating servant leadership within the context of Fountain University, the paper illustrates its practical application and the positive outcomes achieved under the administration of the current Vice Chancellor, Prof. Olayinka Ramota Karim. Additionally, the author draws parallels with historical Islamic leadership principles, emphasising that effective leadership must prioritize the well-being of the populace. The conclusion calls for a collective commitment to adopting servant leadership principles at all levels of governance to foster sustainable national development.

Keywords

Servant leadership, national development, Nigeria, leadership principles, Islamic leadership principles

Prolegomena

It is an honour and privilege for me to be at the beautiful ambience of Fountain University, Osogbo, once again, for this important programme marking the first anniversary of our amiable Vice-Chancellor of many firsts, Prof. Olayinka Ramota Karim, in office. It is auspicious to thank the Almighty Allah for the gift of life and the abundance of His grace on the Vice-Chancellor in particular and the Fountain University community in general. *Alhamdulillah*.

I want to thank the Almighty Allah for her and the blessed Fountain University, which has demonstrated an uncommon capacity for magnetising transformational leaders. Right from the pioneer Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Hussein Bukoye Oloyede, who laid the solid academic foundation for this University, and during whose tenure I had an opportunity of addressing this

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community at a Da'wah Week lecture on April 22, 2012, to the current Amazon and amazing Vice-Chancellor, it has been a story of glory to glory. My prayer is that the Almighty Allah continue to make this University a model for others. After all, as you say, *Fountain leads, others follow!*

When the Vice-Chancellor contacted me a few days ago to discuss this anniversary lecture, she gave me the academic freedom to choose a topic of my preference. That was not to be a simple task as I realised that deciding on a topic was itself daunting as many issues would naturally be assailing one's mind. After some brainstorming and reflection on this occasion, coupled with what I experienced during the last convocation ceremony at which the leadership and social capital of Prof. Karim stirred the psyche of the perceptive audience, I opted to discuss the theme of leadership, a multidimensional concept, with a specific focus on the type that I believe has defined our dynamic Vice-Chancellor's administration.

Since servant leadership puts leadership within the reach of everyone, I hope to indicate that the problems of Nigeria begin from each and everyone of us just as the solutions to the hydra-headed challenges confronting the country also start from us. This is connected with the *change begins with me* mantra of our recent memory, which aligns with what Allah tells us that He would not change the condition of a people until they change what is in them (Qur'an 13:11).

As Nigerians face the reality of survival and they hang on to hope for a better tomorrow, there are prospects that we can overcome the problems and challenges confronting us if we do our bits in our corners and contribute our quota to the development of the country. After all, everyone is a leader and my observation is that servant leadership, which is rooted in the hadith of the Prophet (SAW) that the leader of a people is their servant, is at work in this great University.

As the Prophet (SAW) would not speak out of his volition with everything he said being a manifestation of revelation (Qur'an 53:3-4), the theory of leadership he propounded has been found to be powerful and compelling such that Ken Blanchard, formerly of Ohio University, Ohio, asserted that it is the foundation for effective leadership. As he contended, "I truly believe that Servant Leadership has never been more applicable to the world of leadership than it is today... *Servant Leadership works*. Servant Leadership is about getting people to a higher level by leading people at a higher level" (Adedimeji, 2023a).

Introduction

In Nigeria today, the singsong on many tongues is that life is difficult especially with the multidimensional poverty that is the lot of people as a result of recent policy decisions made by the Federal Government to return the country to the path of sanity. In reality, life is becoming increasingly

Hobbesian for tens of millions of Nigerians. It was Thomas Hobbes who wrote in his *The Leviathan* that the state of nature as we seem to witness is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Desperation is the lot of many in the country and this is symbolised by the story of a 70-year-old man, Theophilus Ede of Abia state, who recently shot dead his son, Cosmos Ude, for eating the remaining cooked food in the house (Nwakanma, 2024).

Almost everywhere is enmeshed in trouble as kidnapers and ritualists hold sway, ambushing vehicles and abducting men, women and children for ransom. The middle class is being completely wiped out as people's salaries are now tickets to their penury. Hunger is in the land and the prices of goods and services are beyond the reach of the average Nigerian. As noted by Adedimeji (2020), all vices under the sun are part of our collective experience and every single day, someone is robbed, someone is kidnapped, someone is murdered and someone is raped. The list is endless and almost everything about Nigerians appears to be dysfunctional.

Rather than introspect and think out of the box, many young people are misguided to believe that the solution lies in migrating out of the country but the fact is that everywhere in the world is dealing with challenges. Instead of development, only the signs of underdevelopment are common and they manifest in low level of income, mass poverty, lack of capital formation, heavy population pressure, agricultural backwardness, unemployment problem, unexploited natural resources, shortage of technology and skills, lack of infrastructural development, lack of industrialisation, lack of proper market, mass illiteracy, poor socio-economic conditions, inefficient administrative set up and high level of insecurity and crime. To reverse the situation and turn Nigeria to an oasis of development, all hands must be on deck to save Nigeria from Nigerians because Nigerians are the major problem of Nigeria (Adedimeji, 2019).

In this paper, I discuss what national development is and the gap that defines it in Nigeria, which is attributed to failed leaderships that the country has been unfortunate to have for many years. In considering leadership as the missing link between Nigeria and development, servant leadership is advanced as the ideal leadership philosophy, model or style that is needed to catalyse Nigeria's growth and development. The servant leadership principles of listening, empathy, healing, self-awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, empowerment, building community, humility and integrity are briefly explained while its problems and prospects are highlighted. Then, how servant leadership is in action is situated within Fountain University with a focus on what the Vice-Chancellor has been able to achieve within a year. Context is also provided in Islamic history especially with how servant leadership undergirded the achievements of the Prophet (SAW) and his

companions. The paper is concluded on the note of emphasising leadership as the bane of Nigeria while recommending that leadership must be taken seriously and the principles of servant leadership should be imbibed for success to be achieved at all levels of governance and leadership.

Nigeria at the Border of National Development

In Nigeria and the rest of the world, the overarching aim of organisations and governments is to achieve development in all its ramifications. No one is comfortable with being static and retrogressive. It is part of the human desire to progress, develop and move from one positive stage to another in order to achieve fulfillment.

At the individual level, development is about “the ability of an individual to have greater control over his environment and increased realization of the values of the society, its political destiny and self discipline” (Inayatullah, 1967). At a general level, it is “a widely participatory process of social change in the society, intended to bring both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining control over their environment” (Rogers, 1976).

The notion of development with reference to a nation is premised on three questions. What is happening to poverty? What is happening to unemployment? What is happening to inequality? Accordingly, “if all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result “development” even if per capita income doubled” (Oloyede, 2016).

Meanwhile, national development is simply the ability of a nation to improve its citizens’ lives. The measures through which this improvement can occur include various strands such as the political, the material, the social, the educational, the cultural and of course, the religious. The overarching goal of all national development is to add value to, and positively change the lives of the citizens within the context of a growing economy. In essence, national development is about bringing progress and improvement to bear on the life of the nation (Oloyede, 2016). It refers to the sustained improvement in the economic, social, and political well-being of a country and its citizens over time. It involves comprehensive and integrated efforts to promote progress, growth, and prosperity on a national scale, with the goal of enhancing the quality of life and opportunities for all individuals within the country.

It is widely believed that national development encompasses various dimensions: economic, social, political, environmental and cultural; it is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional process that aims to promote the well-being and progress of a country as a whole. It requires coordinated efforts from government, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders to address

various challenges, seize opportunities, and create a sustainable and inclusive future for the nation and its people.

In Nigeria, various strategies have been deployed towards achieving national development. Interventions like Operation Feed the Nation and the subsequent Green Revolution, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Vision 2010, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the Seven-Point Agenda, Vision 20:2020 and the Transformation Agenda were all geared towards attaining the much-desired national development. The extent to which these strategies have succeeded is evident in the socio-economic reality of Nigerians.

Achieving national development in Nigeria is contingent on economic diversification (far from over-dependence on oil revenue to non-oil sectors like agriculture, manufacturing and services to improve economic stability and resilience), infrastructural development (enhancing transportation, power, water supply, utilities and basic services), human capital development (quality education, skills training, healthcare services), governance (strengthening government institutions, promoting accountability, reducing inefficiency, combating corruption and attracting investment), security (confronting various security challenges, including insurgency, terrorism, communal conflicts, and banditry that threaten peace, stability and progress through effective law enforcement, conflict resolution, and community engagement) as well as youth empowerment and entrepreneurship (prioritising job creation and providing access to capital and finance with supportive policy frameworks to make the youth drive economic growth). However, this is not the case yet and the reality is that development is still work in progress and the pace is not fast enough.

Leadership as the Missing Link: The Styles

It is irrefragable that leadership is the missing link between where Nigeria is and where it should be at the level of development. Defined as the process of guiding and impacting on others, leadership is also the act of moving people in a planned direction by motivating them to action through non-compulsive means (Altalib, 1993). As a role and a process, it concerns the capacity and the will to rally people towards realising a common cause and achieving a common goal.

A contemporary author and leadership consultant, John Maxwell, noted that all leadership is influence or impacting on people and the society. “The true measure of leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less” (Maxwell, 1998 p. 15). On Adedimeji’s (2023b) part, leadership is everything and it is an acronym that comprises the ten elements of love, example, action,

discipline, excellence, responsibility, sacrifice, honesty, integrity and planning. When these rings form a good chain, a leader emerges in the person.

Nigeria is a nation blessed with abundant human and material resources. However, the country has suffered from a chronic disease of acquired leadership deficiency, which has been responsible for all indices of underdevelopment like poverty, corruption, crime and injustice that had permeated the Nigerian society. That a fish rots from the head applies to the centrality of leadership, which reflects in creating a vision, having a mission, developing a passion, evolving a strategy, enlisting cooperation, motivating action and avoiding distractions (Adedimeji, 2023b).

There are many leadership styles but ten of them are briefly explained thus:

1. *Transactional leadership*: This is where the leader establishes reward and penalty systems in a setting and sets out clearly defined expectations from the subordinates.
2. *Transformational leadership*: Here, the leader is open to change and motivates the followers to innovate or bring up new ideas with which remarkable progress is achieved.
3. *Democratic leadership*: This is where team members and followers are actively involved in the decision-making process with the leader using participatory methods to get everyone involved.
4. *Autocratic leadership*: The opposite of democratic leadership, this style arises when the directive approach is used and the leader sets out what is to be done while also prescribing how it is to be done with minimal or zero input from the followers or subordinates.
5. *Bureaucratic leadership*: This is where the leader presents his list of responsibilities, establishes clearly defined structures, rules and systems while requiring people to take decisions by rigidly following the procedure.
6. *Laissez-faire leadership*: The leader provides the environment to operate and steps back to let followers make decisions and solve their problems.
7. *Charismatic leadership*: This arises where the leader uses personal charm and communication skills to unite team members around a common cause.

8. *Ethical leadership*: This is where the leader acts according to the established principles and norms which ultimately motivate others to do the same. It emphasises moral values, fairness and integrity.
9. *Visionary leadership*: This is the type of leadership that is endowed with originality in ideas and thoughts about what the future should or will be like and then inspires followers towards seeing that vision and working towards its attainment.
10. *Servant leadership*: In this leadership style, the leader invests energy and resources in elevating and developing people, building their trust, boosting their morale and serving their interests (Adedimeji, 2023b; Oloyede, 2023; Olagbemiro, 2023).

Servant Leadership as a Catalyst

Servant leadership is what is required to catalyse Nigeria as well as various institutions and organisations to the pinnacle. Though it is based on the hadith of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the leader of a people is their servant, **سَيِّدُ الْقَوْمِ خَادِمُهُمْ** the concept became popular some 54 years ago through Robert K. Greenleaf. Greenleaf, an American businessman and author, coined the term in his 1970 essay, "The Servant as Leader".

In the essay, Greenleaf emphasised a shift in leadership philosophy, suggesting that leaders should prioritise serving others rather than seeking power and control. He posited that a servant leader is someone who puts the needs of others first and works to empower and develop their team members. His publication gained attention and sparked further research and development with various scholars and authors contributing to its understanding and application, expanding and refining its principles.

According to Greenleaf,

The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader first*, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature (Greenleaf, 1970).

Greenleaf further noted that the difference between the leader-first and the servant-first manifests itself in the care taken by the latter to ensure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. According to him, "the best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?"

Scholars and researchers of leadership and development like Stephen Covey, Anne McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammel, M. Scott Peck, Peter M. Senge, Margaret Wheatley and Ken Blanchard all agreed that development anywhere today is contingent upon the type of leadership style adopted.

Defined as "all about making the goals clear, and rolling your sleeves up and doing whatever it takes to help people win" by Ken Blanchard, servant leadership is seen as a distinct leadership style that fosters trust, collaboration and engagement within teams. It continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of organisations and society, with an increasing emphasis on value-based leadership, ethical decision-making, and the holistic well-being of individuals.

Servant leadership has also been incorporated into leadership development programmes and training courses, aiming to cultivate compassionate and effective leaders who contribute to the success and growth of their organisations while serving the greater good. For Muslims, servant leadership comes naturally because they know that Islam is all about service and sacrifice (Murad, 1985).

Principles of Servant Leadership

Based on the writings of Robert Greenleaf, some principles of servant leadership have been identified as follows:

1. *Listening*: A servant leader actively listens to team members, giving them full attention. By understanding their perspectives, needs, and concerns, the leader can make informed decisions.
2. *Empathy*: A servant leader connects with team members on a personal level. He seeks to understand their feelings, experiences, and challenges. This approach builds trust and fosters strong relationships.
3. *Healing*: Addressing conflicts and problems within the team is essential. A servant leader promotes healing by facilitating open communication, resolving issues, and creating a positive work environment.
4. *Self-Awareness*: Knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, and impact on others is crucial. Self-awareness helps leaders adapt their behaviour and align it with their staff's needs.

5. *Persuasion, Not Coercion*: Instead of using authority or force, a servant leader influences through persuasion through which he builds consensus and encourages collaboration.
6. *Conceptualisation*: A servant leader envisions the purpose, mission and values of the organisation, institution or society he leads. He creates a shared vision and inspires others to work toward it.
7. *Foresight*: Anticipating consequences and outcomes is part of effective leadership. A servant leader thus considers long-term implications and plans accordingly to achieve what is remote and forestall dangers impending, not seen by followers.
8. *Stewardship*: As leaders are entrusted with resources and responsibilities, a servant leader manages these wisely, ensuring the team's well-being and success.
9. *Serving First*: By putting others' needs before his own, a servant leader prioritises service. The servant leader's focus is on helping followers to grow and succeed. He believes that people have intrinsic values beyond their tangible contributions as workers, and on this basis, he is deeply committed to the growth of each and every one.
10. *Empowerment*: A servant leader empowers team members by providing opportunities for their development and autonomy. He encourages growth and promotes self-improvement so that people are better positioned to help themselves and others.
11. *Building community*: A servant leader identifies the means for building community among those who work within a given environment and builds a community among those who work in institutions. As Greenleaf once observed, "All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group."
12. *Humility*: A servant leader understands that true humility is to recognise his value and the value of others. To be humble is to serve others and work for their good. It is also to have a realistic appreciation of personal strengths and weaknesses with a view to converting them to value.

13. *Integrity*: As a concept concerned with the consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations, and outcomes, integrity is regarded as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one's actions. Integrity requires an inner sense of 'wholeness' and consistency of character. Integrity allows people to see a servant leader through his words, actions, decisions, methods and outcomes (Correlli, 2021).

Problems of Servant Leadership

Though servant leadership is a highly effective leadership approach, there are some potential challenges and problems that leaders may encounter when practising it, some of which are briefly examined as follows:

1. *Misinterpretation as weakness*: Servant leaders are susceptible to being perceived as weak by the uninformed based on their emphasis on serving others and putting others' needs first. This misconception can undermine authority and influence especially in certain environments where traditional and autocratic leadership style is common.
2. *Difficulty in decision-making*: As servant leaders prioritise consultation, collaboration and consensus-building when making their decisions, this can sometimes lead to delays or indecisiveness. In situations that require quick and decisive actions, servant leaders may struggle to balance the needs of others with the need for timely decision-making.
3. *Resistance from team members*: Not all team members may be receptive to the servant leadership approach, particularly those accustomed to more authoritative or directive styles of leadership. Some team members may resist or challenge servant leaders, leading to conflicts, and misunderstanding.
4. *Balancing servant leadership with organisational goals*: Servant leaders must navigate the tension between serving the needs of individuals and achieving the objectives of their organisations. Though balancing the interests of staff with the strategic goals and priorities of the system or organisation may be challenging, deploying effective communication and decision-making skills will help the servant leaders in achieving their set targets.
5. *Burnout and self-sacrifice*: Servant leaders may be at risk of burnout and self-sacrifice. This is a result of their tendency to prioritise the needs of others to the detriment of their own well-being. It is essential for servant leaders to practise self-care, set boundaries, and delegate effectively to avoid exhaustion and sustain their own health and resilience.

6. *Limited scalability*: Servant leadership may be challenging to scale in large or complex organisations like universities where hierarchical structures and formal processes are predominant. Adapting servant leadership principles to diverse and geographically dispersed teams can pose logistical challenges and require customisation to fit the specific needs of specific work environments.

Despite the problems that may be associated with it, servant leadership remains a valuable and effective leadership approach that fosters trust, engagement, collaboration, and positive outcomes in a variety of ways. By addressing these challenges proactively and leveraging the strengths of servant leadership, leaders can create a supportive and empowering environment that benefits both individuals and the systems.

Prospects of Servant Leadership

The prospects of servant leadership are huge for Nigeria at large and for institutions and organisations in particular. The bane of development in Nigeria at all levels is the obsession with self at the expense of the other. If leaders are impassioned by a sense of service, they would appreciate the need to advance their followers' interests, not exploit them. Apart from generally allowing increased service to others, promoting a sense of community, sharing of power in decision-making as advanced by Chandaruba (2019), other key prospects of servant leadership include the following:

1. *Followers' engagement and satisfaction*: Servant leaders prioritise the well-being and development of their team members and followers as they create a positive work environment where people feel valued, respected and supported. This makes followers happy and motivated, an antithesis of the reality of most Nigerians.
2. *Trust and loyalty*: Servant leaders build trusting relationships with their team members and followers through open communication, empathy and integrity. This trust fosters loyalty and commitment among people, leading to stronger team cohesion, collaboration, and loyalty. If Nigerian leaders truly serve the people, people will in turn trust them.
3. *Enhanced teamwork and collaboration*: There is often a gulf between the leaders and the followers in the Nigerian public service. Servant leadership has the potential of promoting a culture of teamwork, mutual support and collaboration. By focusing on the needs of others and

fostering a sense of community, servant leaders motivate people to work together towards common goals and objectives.

4. *Innovation and creativity*: Servant leaders inspire creativity, innovation, and problem-solving among their team members. By empowering individuals, providing autonomy, and acknowledging diverse perspectives, servant leaders create an environment that stimulates new ideas, experimentation and continuous improvement.
5. *Personal and professional growth*: Servant leaders prioritise the growth and development of their team members, providing opportunities for learning, skill-building, and career advancement. Nigeria will be a better place for all if people know that leaders are genuinely interested in their growth and development.
6. *Organisational performance and success*: As servant leadership is associated with improved organisational performance, including higher productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction, the notion of civil service connotes the need to serve. By putting the needs of others first, servant leaders create a culture of excellence, service, and continuous improvement that drives overall success for different layers of the society.
7. *Ethical leadership and social responsibility*: Servant leaders demonstrate ethical behaviour, integrity and a commitment to social responsibility. By leading by example and upholding ethical standards, servant leaders inspire trust, respect and admiration among their team members and stakeholders.

The prospects of servant leadership are huge as this leadership approach aligns with the changing preferences and expectations of the new generation of Nigerians who prefer compassionate, ethical and value-driven leadership. By embodying the principles of servant leadership, there will be a culture of trust, engagement, collaboration and innovation that makes everyone have a sense of belonging in activities spearheaded by the leaders (Greenleaf, 1996; 1998).

Contemporary and Historical Perspectives of Servant Leaders in Action

Within one year of assuming office as Vice Chancellor, Prof. Karim has succeeded in getting approval for eleven new undergraduate and six postgraduate programmes by the National Universities Commission (NUC), she has attracted full scholarships for 25 students, obtained 50 million naira scholarship for brilliant students, secured scholarship for the first 20 students

admitted to the Arabic and Islamic Studies programme and got additional 10 million naira for the indigent students.

The University has witnessed tremendous growth in infrastructural development in projects such as Public Health and Environmental Laboratories and Museum, College of Arts Building, Jubrila Ayinla 292-bed space hostel accommodation and many others. More than 2,000 titles of books have also been received from international and national organisations to boost the University Library. Staff have also been motivated to win competitive international and national research grants while others have benefitted from staff development, leading to seven PhDs and four Master degree holders between her assumption of office and now.

Since the passion is on service, a 35% salary increment was effected and the inaugural Waleematul Quran programme of the University took place while the hosting community has benefitted from the Corporate Social Responsibilities of the University under her leadership. As a matter of fact, the Vice-Chancellor's address delivered at the 13th convocation ceremony on January 14, 2024, provides an insight into the fortunes that have befallen the University staff and students by the servant leader Vice-Chancellor.

By doing all that she has done, Prof. Ramota Karim is following the footpath of the leadership model of the Prophet (SAW) regarding serving others, showing compassion, and leading with humility. The Prophet Muhammad is the ultimate example of a servant leader in Islam as he dedicated his life to service till the end of his life, at which point he was still concerned, saying "ummatii, ummatiii" (my people, my people). His teachings emphasise the importance of kindness, empathy, and generosity towards everyone, regardless of their backgrounds.

His companion, Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab's leadership style was also based on service, justice and compassion. He prioritised the welfare of the people, made efforts to address social injustices, and established a system of accountability for himself and his administrators. He was approachable to all members of the society, regardless of their status, and he led by example through his simplicity and humility.

I learnt from a reliable source that during the preparation for the last convocation that Prof. Karim was even moving chairs and arranging tables, not sitting in the office and expecting reports on how the preparations were going. This reflects what the Prophet (SAW) did during the Battle of Badr in Islamic history. A natural servant leader, he personally helped to fetch water from a well to quench the thirst of his companions. The Prophet did not hesitate to engage in physical labour and serve his followers.

While Uthman ibn Affan, the third caliph, was known for his generosity, kindness, and dedication to serving others, he used his wealth to benefit the

community, supported the needy, and actively engaged in charitable works. His servant leadership style earned him the reputation of being a just and compassionate ruler. Like these historical figures and exemplars, all signs point to the fact that Prof. Karim has been leading with integrity, empathy and a genuine commitment to service.

Another Muslim leader that the Vice-Chancellor appears to be taking after is Umar ibn Abdul Azeez, also known as Umar II, a servant leader *par excellence*. Umar II led the Umayyad Caliphate from 717 to 720 AD and is remembered for his compassionate leadership style, which prioritised the welfare of his people and emphasised ethical governance, social justice and moral integrity. He implemented reforms during his brief reign that showcased his servant leadership credentials. These reforms centred around fair and just governance, welfare programmes and charitable projects, humility and accessibility, promotion of education and knowledge as well as compassion and empathy.

Not only men, women like Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, wife of the Prophet (SAW), Aisha bint Abi Bakr, also wife of the Prophet (SAW), Umm Salama, a female companion of Prophet Muhammad known for her compassion, kindness, and dedication to serving others, and Nusaybah bint Ka'ab (Ummu Ammarah) were servant leaders. Ummu Ammarah was a courageous and dedicated companion of the Prophet Muhammad who actively participated in military campaigns and defended the early Muslim community through her bravery, resilience, and a strong sense of duty in protecting the vulnerable and upholding justice. These were servant leaders in action and they continue to inspire leaders till today.

Conclusion

Some 20 years ago, a Nigerian lawyer, Mike Ozekhome, disclosed in an interview granted a newspaper that Nigeria had only three problems and he identified them as “leadership, leadership and leadership” reiterating that leadership is the only problem that is behind the challenges facing Nigeria (Ozekhome, 2004). Then, in early September 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu also underscored the same point while speaking at the G-20 summit in India. According to him, he vied for the highest office in order to end poor leadership in Nigeria. He said, “We are not poor in knowledge. We are not poor in human resources. We are only poor in management and leadership, and that is why I ran for president, to help us mould the soul of our country in the right direction” (Olaoye, 2023; Adedimeji, 2023).

It is an irrefragable truism thus that leadership is everything and until the right leaderships emerge at various levels in Nigeria, there won't be a change and the situation will be getting worse. Leadership begins from each and every one as everyone is a shepherd with some flock in his or her care. The relevant leadership model, philosophy or style that will revolutionise Nigeria is servant leadership, which is ultimately transformational. A servant leader, as

Greenleaf (1997) contends, is a person who is seriously committed and devoted to being a servant first with an inner feeling to serve others. However, this is the type of leadership that is becoming rare as an average leader in Nigeria and elsewhere considers leadership as an opportunity to feather his/her nest or lord it over others to project a sense of importance. The need for paradigm shift in this regard is urgent and necessary.

If all universities are run with the model that has engendered the tremendous development that Fountain University has witnessed in the past one year under Prof. Karim, the difference would be remarkable. If all government agencies are run the way a former Pro-Chancellor of this University, Prof. Is-haq Oloyede, is running the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), there will be a significant difference. If government is operated on the basis of the servant leadership principles, the country would work as a haven of peace, security and development for all (Adedimeji, 2023c). Leadership matters because the quantum of development is directly proportional to the quality of the leaders that drives it.

Lastly, I congratulate the Vice-Chancellor on her transformational servant-leadership philosophy and like her, I believe that all leaders should appreciate that:

- people are insecure; give them confidence;
- people like to feel special; let them know they matter;
- people look for a better tomorrow; give them hope;
- people need to be understood; listen to them;
- people like direction; show them;
- people are needy; speak to their needs first;
- people get emotionally low; motivate them;
- people want to succeed; help them to win;
- people desire relationship; encourage them; and
- people seek models to follow; be an example.

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