

OPINION

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



By Fusi Akinkugbe

Nigeria at 61: Time to Change

future hold?

Independence denotes a freedom from control or support. In normal circumstances it is what a parent prays and wishes for their child – to become independent and be able to stand on their own and make their own decisions. It doesn't always end up like this but I'm sure we will agree that this is the ideal. Nigeria has independence, but do her citizens feel they are part of a country standing well on its own? Can we genuinely say 'Happy Independence' to each other?

Nigeria has problems, which unfortunately over the years have become progressively amplified. For a nation to be successful the people must have a shared purpose as a fundamental basis for coexistence and mutual progress. We have failed here as there seems to be no shared purpose among the disparate groups that make up Nigeria – instead the fault lines increase. Other problems include poor management of our diversity; human development indices that are concerning, severe security challenges threatening life and economic prosperity, inadequate investment in education, an exploding population and unsustainable public debt among others. These have spawned problems of their own such as

the agitations for the 'unbundling' of Nigeria and what I call 'nationhood divestment' - the consistent migration of people especially young professionals who we desperately need to build a new nation.

What then can we do? These problems set the agenda for

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leadership: now and in the future. First, how should we live? We should live by a shared purpose – everyone must have equal reason to invest in this union. This is the basis for managing our diversity. But if we aren't ready to live by a purpose shared by all, then we need to have a conversation with each other about what next. Organisations where people don't have a shared purpose either fail or at best perform far below their potential. It is no different for nations. A shared purpose once agreed, helps set values which once everyone buys into, guides the conduct of every member of the entity.

Secondly, we must live disciplined lives. Singapore's

founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was asked by a French President why Singapore was so successful. He said their society had "stability and cohesion". Cohesion comes only when there is a shared purpose. He also said the people were "a thrifty, hardworking

tributed significantly to our not fulfilling our potential. Discipline requires sacrifice, but people will understand if the benefits are worthwhile, and leaders lead by example.

What should we do? The third thing Lee told the French President was that Singapore had "a great reverence for education and knowledge". We must make education a priority. We now live in a knowledge economy and our priorities and investments must reflect this if we want to be relevant. Technology is key as it will give us the opportunity to leapfrog our development. This is aligned with education. The talent to grow this sector is already here; we just need the enabling environment. We must also develop our productive capacity by looking beyond the extractive industry to value added

products and services. This will give value to our falling currency and attract required capital. There must also be a system of law and order that is independent and does not favour anyone. Unrestrained population growth must be addressed. This is highly political but if it is not dealt with it will always neutralise initiatives that bring progress.

We must now set higher standards for who should qualify for leadership. This can however only work when there is a shared purpose, so all will accept the new standards and adhere to them. Leaders with both character and capacity are needed. We must find them and develop a pipeline to produce such leaders to ensure the sustainability of progress made.

Finally, starting with our leaders we must all put to ourselves the words of late American President John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country". For Nigeria to change, it will require mutual sacrifice by leaders and the people, and some very radical steps. Are we ready?

Thank you and until next week, let me challenge you to begin to lead from where you are.

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