

# Leadership and Good Governance: Catalysts for Nigeria's Economic Growth and Development

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## ABSTRACT

The economic development trajectory of Nigeria, since its transition to democratic governance on May 29, 1999, has witnessed sharp oscillations under different elected leaders. While some of the leaders, in the face of negative exogenous variables, leveraged the country's abundant human and natural resources to positively advance it on the economic development ladder, others faltered in the selected performance indices. The observed differential in performance metrics seems to point to the pivotal role of quality leadership in the economic development process. To validate this view in the context of Nigeria's democratic experience, this exploratory longitudinal study used an *ex post facto* research design and qualitative research methodology which involved the review of existing literature and secondary data from Nigeria and Rwanda over a 24-year period spanning 1999-2022. The findings from their comparative performance analysis in 4 development indicators, reinforce the findings of previous studies that leadership can make or mar the economic performance of nations. Accordingly, it recommends that the electorate in Nigeria should diligently appraise political office seekers based on universally acceptable leadership criteria of competence, capacity and character, rather than the subjective criteria of ethnicity, tribe, region and religion, before exercising their franchise as their choice has long term implications for the nation's economic development. It also recommends a review of the country's constitution to provide for independent candidates as the structures of existing political parties have tended to inhibit the emergence of credible candidates.

**Key words:** accountability, economic development, economic growth, good governance, leadership, life expectancy, standard of living

## BACKGROUND

Nigeria and many other countries in Africa, are going through developmental challenges, not for lack of human and natural resources, but due, largely in part, to the lack of commitment by most of its leaders (both elected and unelected) to the ideals of good governance which include integrity, accountability, transparency and commitment to the public good. Although politics was defined by Easton (1965) as "the authoritative allocation of values", it has become an investment instrument rather than a platform for public service such that the citizens, ironically, are expecting "dividends" of democracy from political investors. Such expectation is both misplaced and unrealisable, because, faced with existential threats, many citizens have "sold" their franchise for pittance while many of the elected politicians act as merchants seeking for profit from their "investments" rather than the public good. So, they can pay any price to be and remain in the saddle. Since the choices made by citizens have long term implications for national policies and by extension, economic development, only the best, should be elected to govern any nation. Well-endowed nations will develop and flourish if they have the right leadership. Whereas, with poor or bad leadership, economic development will be long in coming to well-endowed nations. There is need to re-validate this truism in the context of Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999. This is the thrust of this study.

The remaining part of this paper is segmented into 6 parts: Section 2 is on the concept of economic growth and development while section 3 contains the methodology. Section 4 is on the literature review while Section 5

deals with the comparative performance analysis of the leadership and developmental experiences of Nigeria and Rwanda while the final section contains my concluding remarks and recommendations.

## The Concept of Economic Growth and Development

Economists, see development as an improvement in the quality of life of a people defined in terms of their access to education, healthcare facilities, potable water, good roads, shelter, decrease in child mortality rate, improved life expectancy rate, security of lives and property. These indicators of development, and many more, are what the United Nations (UN) has diligently encapsulated in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[\[i\]](#). For these laudable goals to be achieved, there must be investment in productive and value creating activities which will cumulatively result in aggregate output which economists call gross domestic product (GDP). Any sustained increase in the volume of these goods and services over a given period of time can be described as economic growth. If this output (i.e., GDP) is shared amongst the entire population of a country, you will have what is called the per capita income. If the sustained rate of growth in GDP is greater than the rate of population growth, the per capita income will be on the increase with the possibility of enhanced standard of living evidenced by citizens' ability to meet their basic existential needs.

The implication of the above simple narration is that sustained economic growth will lead to economic development if the benefits of economic growth are equitably distributed such that the lives of the people are positively impacted. According to the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Development Plan (1975: 29), “development is not just a matter of growth in per capita income. It is possible to record a high growth rate in per capita income while the masses of the people continue to be in abject poverty and lacking in the basic necessities of life...”. This will happen if the benefits of economic growth are not equitably distributed.

Sen (2000:3) agrees with this perspective when he defined economic development as “a process of expanding the freedoms that people enjoy”. According to him, economic development should be measured in terms of its impact on the citizens' wellbeing and their ability to make choices. Citizens who have been positively impacted by economic development should have greater access and freedom to make choices amongst the basic things of life. Thus, the ultimate rationale of economic development is to eliminate poverty and inequality, improve living standards and people's welfare. From the above, it can be inferred that economic development cannot occur without economic growth.

Over the years, the concept of economic development has been expanded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through its Human Development Index (HDI)[\[ii\]](#) which comprises life expectancy, education and per capita income. These indices are designed to measure the health of the citizens, their standard of living and the quality of human capital of countries. While the health dimension is measured by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured in terms of the number of years spent in school by adults and children. The standard of living is measured by the income per capita.

In the context of this study, therefore, the following indicators should characterise environments where economic growth and economic development have occurred:

1. Sustained increase in GDP and by extension, per capita income. This increase in GDP must exceed the rate of population growth to be meaningful.
2. Sustained rise in the standard of living of the people due to equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth.
3. Increased access to education and healthcare facilities which will lead to improved literacy rate, life expectancy and quality of the human capital.

## METHODOLOGY

As an exploratory work, this study used an *expost facto* research design and qualitative research methodology which involved the review of existing literature, secondary data from previous articles, statistical bulletins and

audited annual reports of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Macrotrends publications and working papers issued by multilateral agencies like the World Bank. The secondary data from Nigeria and Rwanda covered a 24-year period spanning 1999-2022. This method was chosen not only because the data are audited and from credible sources but also, it facilitates trend analysis in a defined time period as well as free from subjectivity associated with responses obtained through questionnaires.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years, economists and other social scientists have sought to establish the causes of the disparities in the wealth of nations and by extension, differentials in the quality of life of the populace. These research efforts were precipitated by the fact that the rates of economic growth and economic development between nations were not only different but they also have pervasive effects on the social and political environments of nations. The title of Adam Smith's treatise published in 1776 was "An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations" to underscore the criticality of the search. While differential in natural resource endowments and state of technological development were the previously identifiable key factors, it was subsequently realised that the quality of leadership and adherence to good governance practices have made and facilitated more the pace of economic growth and sustainable development of nations (Slimane, 2012; Sen, 2000).

In the book titled, "Why Nations Fail", Acemoglu and Robinson (2012: 68) argued that, "poor countries are poor because those who have power, make choices that create poverty. They get it wrong not by mistake or ignorance but on purpose". To them, nations fail because of demented value systems, weak institutions, absence of rules and system of accountability and more importantly, because of bad leadership which manifests in how decisions are taken and who makes the decisions (and their driving force).

Another advocate of the quality of leadership school of thought is Jones and Olken (2005: 26). From their empirical study, they asserted that, "We find that countries experience persistent changes in growth rates across these leadership transitions, suggesting that leaders have a large causative influence on the economic outcomes of their nations... We find that leaders do matter, and they matter to something as significant as national economic growth." They also asserted that leaders appear to affect policy outcomes, particularly monetary policy which suggests that individual leaders can play crucial roles in shaping the growth of nations.

To reinforce these findings, Sifat (2019:13) observed that there is no development without leadership especially in the social, human and cultural dimension. According to this study, the performance of any country in quest of achieving SDGs to a significant extent is determined by leadership. The study further notes that "effective leadership interprets practical public policy formulation and implementation as well as good public service delivery, to satisfy the wants and aspirations of the citizenry".

In a Foreword he wrote to the book, "From Third World to First- The Story of Singapore: 1965-2000" authored by Lee Kwan Yew, Henry A. Kissinger (former US Secretary of State) asserted that, "but history shows that normally prudent, ordinary calculation can be overturned by *extraordinary personalities*. In the case of Lee Kwan Yew, the father of Singapore's emergence as a nation state, the ancient argument whether circumstances or personality shapes events, is settled in favour of the latter". It is therefore a truism that great leaders shape events and may sometimes alter the course of history and by extension, the development trajectory of their entities or countries. The creation and positioning of Adam, the first man on earth, in that blissful Biblical Garden of Eden best illustrates this.

In the Holy Writ (See Genesis Chapters 1 & 2), Adam was created and given the powers to dominate the earth. God made him head and gave him authority to manage the Garden of Eden. In that capacity, he was expected to provide leadership to ensure order and good governance. However, despite his brilliance, Adam failed to provide adequate leadership by not controlling and setting boundaries for all animals and this gave the serpent the leeway not only to be wandering about but also, to engage Adam's wife, Eve, in the test of knowledge, obedience and resilience. Eve's failure to pass the test, negatively impacted Adam and entire mankind! This underscores the importance of leadership in any setting.

Extrapolated to corporate settings, therefore, leaders make or mar organisations. Rhetorically, what is Dangote

Group without Aliko Dangote? What is Zenith Bank without Jim Ovia? What is Facebook without Mark Zuckerberg? What is Apple without Steve Jobs? What is Microsoft without Bill Gates? What is India, without Mahatma Gandhi? What is Singapore without Lee Kwan Yew? What is Rwanda without Paul Kagame? What is the old Western Region of Nigeria without the legendary Pa Obafemi Awolowo? What is the old Eastern Region of Nigeria without Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe? What is the old Northern Region of Nigeria without Sir Ahmadu Bello? What is the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) without Mr. Akintola Williams, CBE, the Doyen of Accountancy Profession in Africa? What these leaders have in common are vision, integrity, the drive, commitment to selfless service, excellence and the ideals of good governance. Expectedly, their footprints have remained indelible in those entities, sub-nationals and countries.

The literature on leadership shows that there are different kinds of leadership theories and styles: Great Man theory (Carlyle, 1847); Trait theory (Allport, 1961 & Stogdill, 1948); Contingency theory (Fiedler, 1958); Behavioural theory (Blake & Mouton, 1969.); transactional theory (Max Weber, 1947; House & Shamir, 1993); and transformational theory (Downton, 1973; Burns, 1978 & Bass, 1985). Evidently, leadership theories and styles have evolved over centuries from the Great Man theory which espoused the view that leaders were “born and not made” to Trait Theory which believed that leaders had certain unique traits which distinguish them from non-leaders to the production-driven transactional and transformational people-focused leadership styles. This evolution points to the dynamic nature of human behaviour and his attitude to resource and people management in the context of rapid organisational changes and the drive to achieve predetermined corporate goals. While the various leadership styles have their respective pros and cons, the success of any leadership style depends on the context, timing and the environment (Khan, Z.A; Nawaz, A & Khan, I.U., 2016). In essence leadership is situationally sensitive: it may be effective in one situation and ineffectual in another. It is neither hereditary nor gender sensitive. Leadership skills can be acquired through training and practice by any human being irrespective of gender.

However, what seems commonly accepted are that a leader must be visionary, entrepreneurial, creative, emotionally intelligent, ready to teach, supportive, motivate, inspire and serve as role model to followers. At the level of a country, the leader must demonstrate patriotism and passion for the country and its people, be committed to their shared values, ready to serve rather than be served, must be transparent in all dealings and be accountable to the citizens. The decision-making processes must be inclusive and people-focused while the welfare and security of life and property should be the focus of purposeful leadership. The leader must represent ideals of the country and a beacon of hope, be committed to the common good and adhere to good governance principles not only to earn the trust of the people but also, to enhance his legitimacy.

The United Nations provided [\[iii\]](#) the globally accepted indices of good governance: transparency, accountability, integrity, rule of law, participation, consensus-orientation, equity, inclusiveness, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, absence of corruption and wrong doing. In the opinion of Obasanjo (2016), good governance refers to, “legitimate, accountable and effective ways of obtaining and using public power and resources in pursuit of widely accepted social goals.” It is about following due process in decision making and implementation. Since it conforms to acceptable practices, good governance engenders socio-economic stability without which inflow of foreign direct investment cannot be realized and the economy cannot develop. Good governance eliminates information asymmetry, enhances trust, acceptability and the legitimacy of leadership. The United Nations (2015) noted persuasively that “the quality of national leadership for good governance is key to creating nations that are at peace with themselves and that can offer a better life for their citizens” [\[iv\]](#). These views are still valid nearly a decade after.

The instructive messages embedded in these good governance indicators are that: leaders must be open in all their dealings, objectively follow due process and carry everybody along irrespective of gender, tribe, race, religion and level of education. Merit and public interest should drive recruitment processes and governance.

From the above, what role has the quality of leadership played in the development of Nigeria especially in this 4<sup>th</sup> Republic? Will it be fair to say that economic growth and economic development had taken place in Nigeria in the last 2 and half decades, under its successive leaders, given the prevalence of multi-dimensional poverty, diminishing per capita income, poor infrastructural facilities (including health and education) and high unemployment rates especially amongst the youths? Can the observed successes or poor performance in certain

years be attributed to the quality of leadership?

## COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA AND RWANDA

Using the indicators of per capita income (SDG 8), life expectancy (SDG 3), percentage of public health expenditure to GDP (SDG 3) and percentage of public education expenditure to GDP (SDG 4), Table 1 shows the comparative performance of Nigeria and Rwanda over a period of 24 years spanning 1999-2022. Rwanda was selected not only because of its leadership-driven impressive performance in these developmental indices but also because, Year 2024 makes the Genocide 30 years. It is instructive to mention that, in terms of size of GDP, Rwanda was ranked 32 out of 54 countries in Africa while Nigeria was ranked second during this period.

**TABLE 1: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF TWO COUNTRIES (1999-2022)**

KEY: NIG= NIGERIA; RWA= RWANDA

YEAR	NIG GDP GROWTH RATE	RWA GDP GROWTH RATE	NIG PER CAPITA INCOME(US\$)	RWA PER CAPITA INCOME(US\$)	NIG LIFE EXPECTANCY(YRS)	RWA LIFE EXPECTANCY(YRS)	NIG PUBLIC HEALTH EXP(%GDP)	RWA PUBLIC HEALTH EXP(%GDP)	NIG PUB EXP. ON EDUC(% GDP)	RWA PUB EXP. ON EDUC(% GDP)
1999	0.58	4.35	496	269	46.19	46.15	0	0	0	17.25
2000	5.02	8.37	565	255	46.38	47.22	3.2	3.58	0	18.84
2001	5.92	8.48	587	239	46.56	48.28	3.19	3.32	0	25.31
2002	15.33	13.19	734	235	46.75	49.35	2.49	3.13	0	0
2003	7.35	2.2	787	250	46.94	50.41	5.05	6.93	0	0
2004	9.25	7.45	993	270	47.5	52.33	4.63	7.51	0	0
2005	6.44	9.38	1,250	325	48.07	54.26	4.47	7.73	0	0
2006	6.06	9.23	1,652	358	48.63	56.18	4.26	7.61	0	0
2007	6.59	7.63	1,876	427	49.2	58.11	3.91	7.86	0	17.7
2008	6.76	11.16	2,228	530	49.76	60.03	3.7	7.57	0	17.79
2009	8.04	6.25	1,884	565	50.2	61.18	3.58	7.81	0	15.59
2010	8.01	7.33	2,280	594	50.64	62.33	3.3	8.09	6.17	17.55
2011	5.31	7.96	2,505	651	51.07	63.49	3.32	7.94	7.88	15.34
2012	4.23	8.64	2,728	706	51.51	64.64	3.36	8.11	8.55	15.82
2013	6.67	4.72	2,977	704	51.95	65.79	3.42	6.78	8.68	16.86
2014	6.31	6.17	3,201	725	52.4	66.32	3.35	6.99	9.04	13.73
2015	2.56	8.86	2,680	734	52.84	66.85	3.58	6.65	9.26	12.54
2016	-1.62	5.97	2,145	729	53.29	67.38	3.65	6.96	6.65	12.28
2017	0.81	3.94	1,942	757	53.73	67.91	3.75	6.39	6.12	11.08
2018	1.92	8.54	2,126	769	54.18	68.44	3.09	6.7	5.94	10.8
2019	2.21	9.46	2,334	806	54.49	68.75	2.99	6.33	5.86	11
2020	-1.79	-3.37	2,075	774	54.81	69.06	3.38	7.32	5.13	10.78
2021	3.65	10.88	2,066	821	55.12	69.38	0	0	5.14	11.32
2022	3.25	8.16	2,184	966	55.44	69.69	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>118.86</b>	<b>174.95</b>	<b>44295</b>	<b>13459</b>	<b>1217.65</b>	<b>1453.53</b>	<b>75.67</b>	<b>141.31</b>	<b>84.42</b>	<b>271.58</b>
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>4.95</b>	<b>7.29</b>	<b>1845.63</b>	<b>560.79</b>	<b>50.74</b>	<b>60.56</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>5.89</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>11.32</b>

Source: Various-Macrotrends, World Bank, CBN, UNDP Reports.  
<https://www.macrotrends.net>

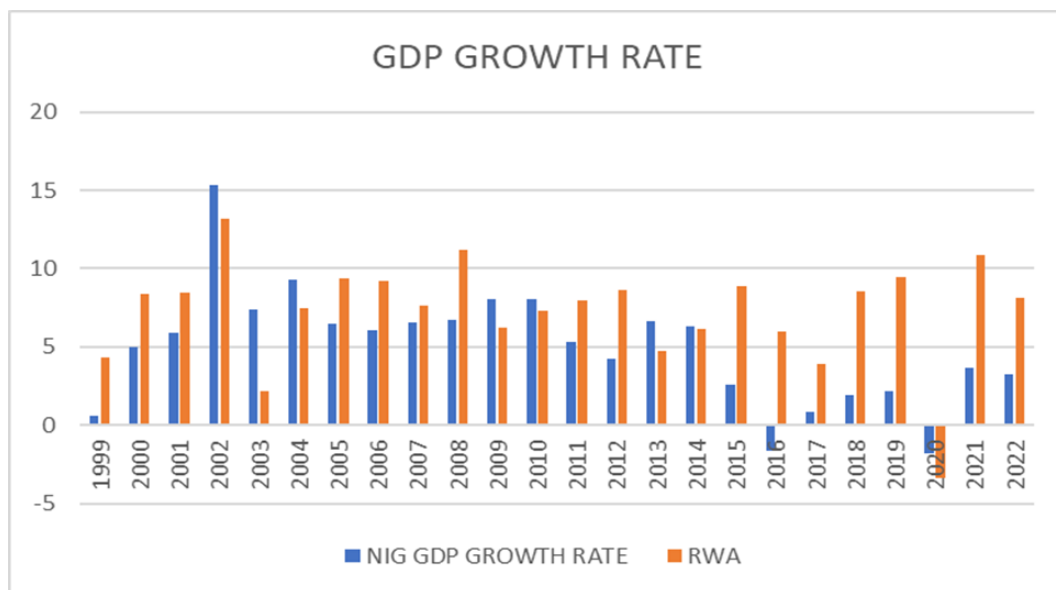


Figure 1: GDP Growth rate

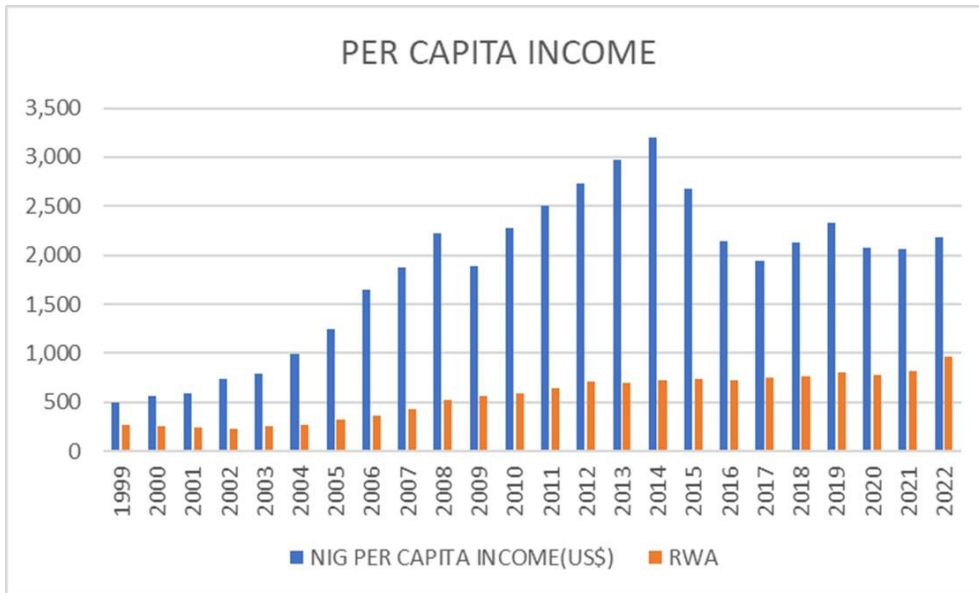


Figure 2: Per capita income in USD

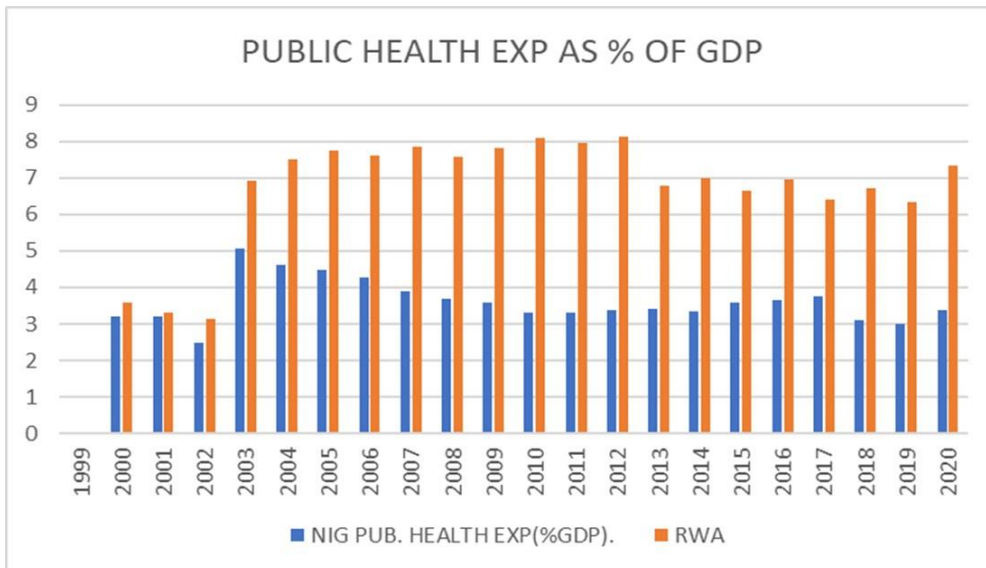


Figure 3: Public Health Expenditure as % of GDP

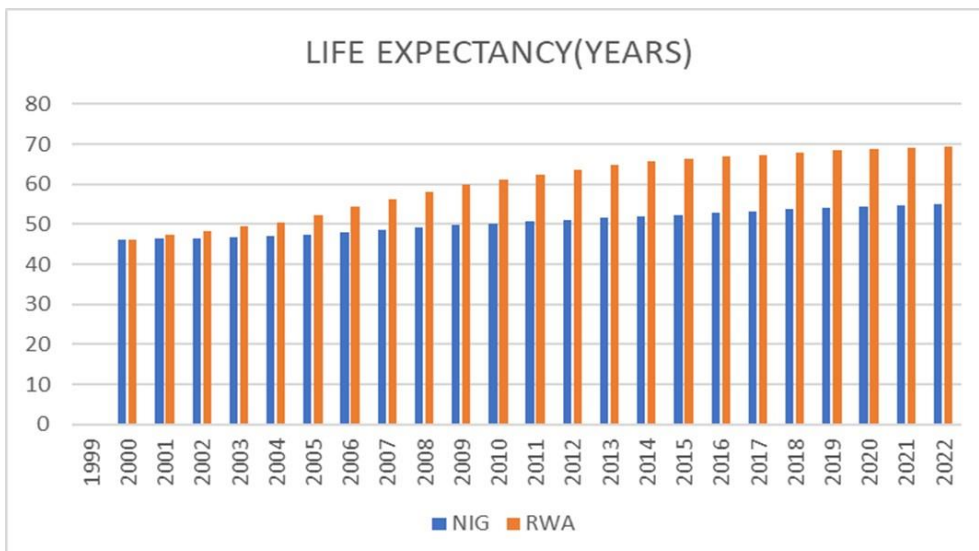


Figure 4: Life Expectancy (Years)

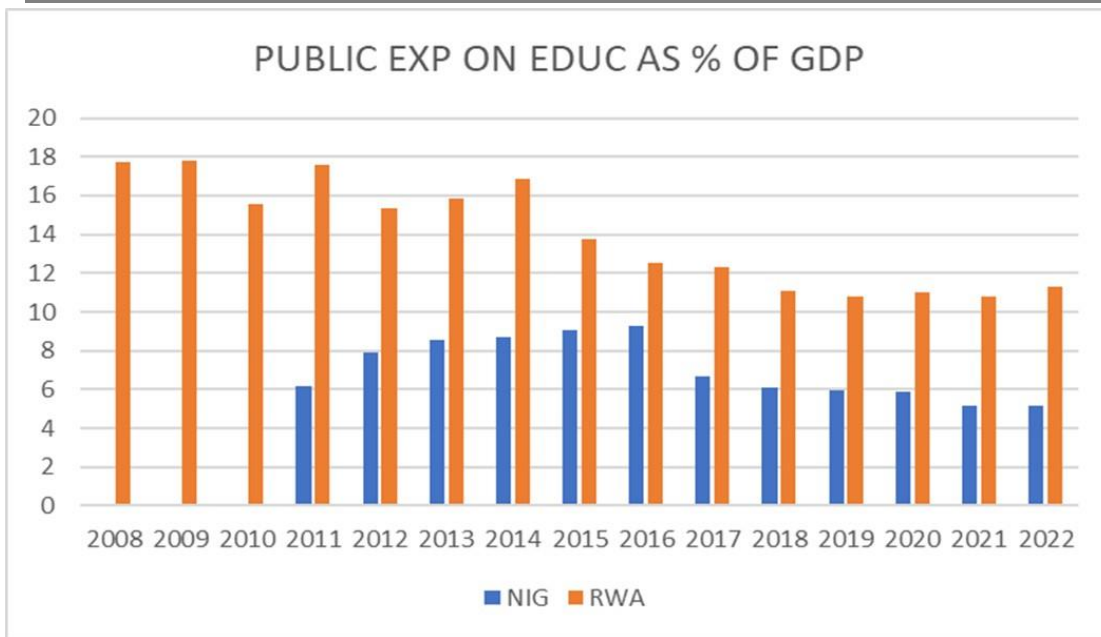


Figure 5: Public Expenditure on Education as % of GDP

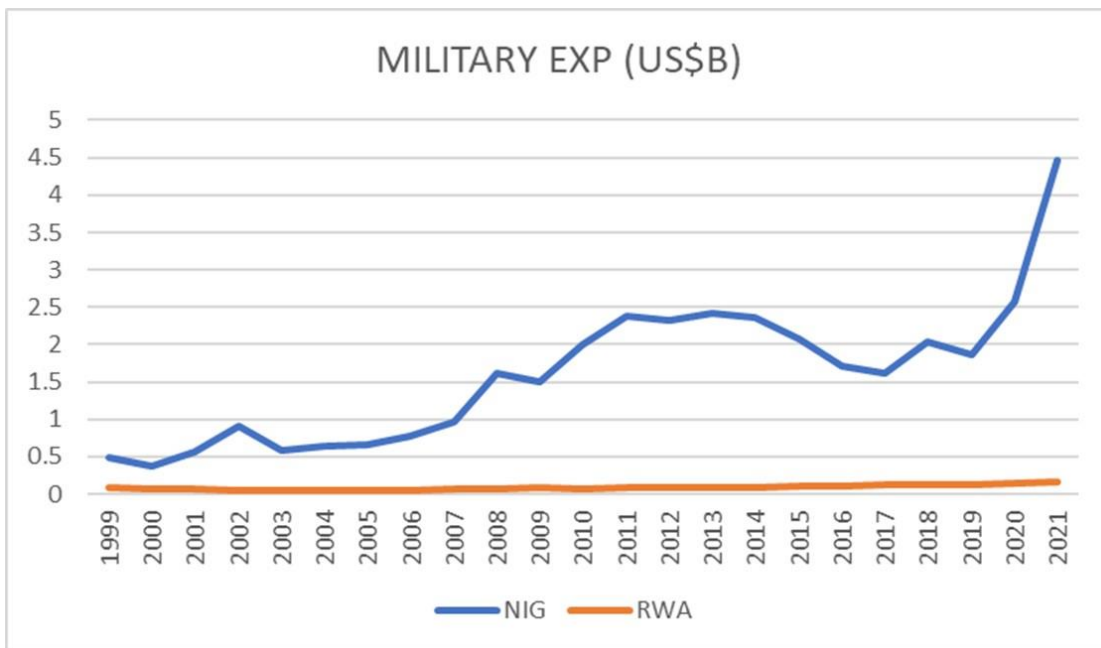


Figure 6: military expenditure in US\$b (graph)

## THE RWANDA EXPERIENCE

In 1994, there was genocide in Rwanda during which millions of persons were killed in addition to the massive destruction of property. But soon after the genuine reconciliation, economic activities started to pick up. The ranking of Rwanda under the UNDP HDI in 1994 was 146 out of 193. Under the transformative leadership of President Paul Kagame, Rwanda became the construction site for economic progress, attracting investors, donor agencies and multilateral institutions. In the last 24 years, the average GDP growth rate of Rwanda was 7.29% compared to Africa’s average GDP growth rate of 3.7% in the last 10 years. Presently, Rwanda has one of the fastest GDP growth rates in Africa. With a population of 13.8m in 2022, Rwanda’s per capita income rose from US\$269 in 1999 to US\$966 in year 2022 representing 259% increase. This improvement in per capita income positively impacted life expectancy of citizens as this moved from 46.15 years in 1999 to 69.69 years in 2022 representing 51% growth. The percentage of health care expenditure to GDP averaged 6.0% all through the 24 years while that of education expenditure averaged 11.32% of GDP. Rwanda is rated as the cleanest country in Africa! Effectively, the focus of Rwanda’s leadership was on the enhancement of its human capital required to

drive developmental activities in the post-genocide years.

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame is driven by a zero-corruption philosophy and the African values of hard work, integrity and communal living. Penalty for corruption is several years in jail without option of fine! From the ashes of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has become a resilient and caring society attracting a lot of foreign direct investments estimated at US\$2.9b in 2021. According to the New African magazine of February 7, 2020, President Kagame "is a man of action rather than words; he believes in results rather than promises; he is pragmatic rather than idealistic; he eschews the trappings of power rather than cultivate them; he refuses to kowtow to big powers and insists on being treated as an equal; he is a fierce defender not only of Rwandan but also, of African rights and aspirations". President Kagame believes strongly that transformation and development do not just happen. They happen because the people want them to happen. What is obvious from his success story is that the leader must understand the mechanics, social, cultural and industrial set-up of his people to be able to bring about the desired transformation.

## THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Within the 24 years under review, which covered 3 administrations, the Nigeria's GDP growth rate averaged 4.95% while it committed a paltry 3.15% of its GDP to health and 3.52% to education. These values underscore the little premium placed on the quality of life of the average Nigerian. Despite Nigeria's huge resource endowments, the rate of economic growth of Rwanda (7.29%) exceeded that of our country (4.95%). Indeed, the nation's life expectancy increased from 46.19 years in 1999 to 55.44 years in 2022 representing 20% improvement compared to 51% of Rwanda. The average amount allocated to health care was only 3% of GDP whereas Rwanda allocated 6%. In terms of percentage of GDP allocated to public education expenditure, Nigeria allocated only 3.52% compared to 11.32% by Rwanda.

However, broken down into tenures, Nigeria's performance analysis will present a different pattern. For instance, under President Obasanjo's leadership, the GDP grew from US\$59.37b in 1999 to US\$278.26b in 2007 representing a 369% increase. The average economic growth rate during the 8 years was 7.82%. The per capita income consistently increased all through his tenure rising phenomenally from US\$496 in 1999 to US\$1,876 in 2007 representing a 279% increase. This had positive impact on the quality of life of the citizens as reflected in the changes in the amount allocated to health care per citizen and life expectancy rate. Inflation rate was tolerable in the lower 2 digits while exchange rate started with US\$1=N21.89 in 1999, rose to a peak of N132 in 2005 before declining to US\$1=N120 in 2007. The number of out of school children was estimated at 8.0m in 2007. With the Prof Soludo-led bank consolidation of 2005, the financial services sector and indeed, the economy was set for huge investment and accelerated growth. All Share index of the then Nigeria Stock Exchange grew from 5,266.4 in 1999 to 57,990.2 in 2007. During this period, Nigeria was classified amongst the NEXT ELEVEN countries<sup>[v]</sup> by Goldman Sachs investment bank as having the potential of becoming one of the world's largest economies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century along the BRICS<sup>[vi]</sup>.

It is instructive to mention that under Yar'adua and Jonathan, that is, between 2008 and 2014, the GDP grew from US\$339.48b to US\$574.18b representing a growth of 70%. The per capita income increased from US\$2,228 to US\$3,201 representing a growth of 44%. A Sovereign Wealth Fund was created to protect the nation from instability in the oil market through investment of excess crude oil revenue. The modest gains of the era were, however, threatened and almost vitiated by the global financial meltdown and locally, by the rise in insecurity caused by the activities of Boko Haram. In the twilight of the administration, the nation's GDP was rebased to US\$550b thereby making Nigeria's economy the biggest economy in Africa at the time.

When President Buhari took over the reins of leadership in 2015, the nation's GDP was US\$493.03b while the growth rate was 2.56%. After eight years of governance, the GDP declined to US\$477.39b while average growth rate was 1.385% in addition to experiencing two economic recessions. The point must also be made that the rebasing of the nation's GDP in 2014 accounted for the relatively huge size of GDP during the Buhari years. The per capita income fluctuated and tended towards a decline. Indeed, it fell from US\$2,680 in 2015 to US\$2,184 in 2022 just as its value diminished with growth in inflation rate from 9.01% to 18.85%. Military expenditure enjoyed more premium than investment in education and health as shown in Figure 6 whereas Rwanda invested more in human capital development than the Military. This poor level of investment in



education manifested in more out of school children in Nigeria

According to the Demographic Health survey (DHS) conducted by United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the number of out of school children increased from 13.2m in 2015 to 20m in 2022. This Boko Haram-induced phenomenon has implications for poverty, hunger and insecurity. As noted by Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General noted [vii], “Poverty begins when even one child is denied his or her fundamental right to education. What begins as a failure to uphold the dignity of one life, all too often ends as a calamity for the entire nation”. The President Buhari tenure ended with Nigeria becoming not only highly indebted and corruption-ridden but also, it became the global capital of poverty with over 130m multi-dimensionally poor citizens. If his administration’s performance is compared to those of Obasanjo and Yar’ Adua/Jonathan administrations, it would be fair to conclude that in relative terms, the nation performed poorly under President Buhari.

While there might be unpredictable exogenous factors which influenced economic activities during the various tenures, it is fair to say that the quality of leadership positively affected the macroeconomic management which elicited varying degrees of trust both from the citizens and the international community. For instance, during the Obasanjo era, a lot of institutional and legislative reforms took place resulting in the creation of bodies like Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent and Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Public Complaints Commission, Code of Conduct Bureau, Office of the Ombudsman, Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), Fiscal Responsibility Commission, Due Process Office, Bureau of Public Procurement, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) and several others which were manned by seasoned professionals led by the President himself.

There was demonstrable evidence of a commitment to anti-corruption crusade as the then Inspector General of Police was arrested, tried and jailed for corruption. A Debt Management Office was also created to centrally coordinate Nigeria’s debt. Through various debt financial re-engineering initiatives, the country was able to secure debt relief of about US\$18b and created an Excess Crude Account (ECA) with which the nation weathered the storm during the 2007/2008 global financial crises. As noted by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), “countries differ in their economic success because of their different institutions, the rules influencing how the economy works, and the incentives that motivate people”. This paper posits that good leaders espouse great values which provide the motivational incentives for the people to excel.

The Obasanjo administration had a cohesive approach to governance while the economy was coordinated from one Ministry even when the various institutions created were given the statutory freedom to operate and flourish. The positive economic indices of the tenure attest to these assertions. However, these bodies were made ineffectual under President Buhari with negative impact on economic growth and development.

From the above analysis, it is fair to assert that leaders can actually be anti-development by constituting an obstruction to economic growth and development (Jones, 2008: 7). This would happen if they make wrong policy decisions or fail to make any decision; if they steal or misallocate public resources in the name of constituency projects that are never implemented; if they inflate contracts; if they indulge in budget padding; if they commit various unethical, corrupt and sharp practices; if they fail to comply with due process and rule of law; if they use public funds to purchase exotic SUVs to ply bad roads rather than fix those roads; if they initiate bad policies that encourage talents to migrate or illegally migrate; if they prefer to give fishes to the citizens rather than teach them how to fish (e.g. through provision of palliatives rather than investing in infrastructure); and if leaders choose to go to war unjustifiably to promote their personal agenda.

Thus, leaders matter as much as the decisions they make. Policy choices make the difference between good and bad leaders. Whether in the family setting, community, organisation and country levels, good leadership is crucial. Based on their visions, leaders set the tone, direction of activities, drive the agenda and mobilise the people to achieve the desired outcome. They make the difference by providing a roadmap based on shared values. They ingeniously take people from the valley to the mountain top by their values, charisma, drive and emotional intelligence. They walk the talk and lead by example. They ascribe success to the team and take responsibility for their shortcomings or failures. They listen more than they speak. They hear the cries of the poor and commit to taking actions. They encourage followers to take ownership of initiatives or policies. They do not pass the

buck like the Biblical Adam or endlessly blame their predecessors in office like PMB did for 8 years. As President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR said recently, “I inherited the assets and liabilities of President Buhari”. Do not pity me, he declared. He courageously admitted that the buck stops on his table while the bell tolls for him as it does for all true leaders! These attributes drive or complement good governance.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To change this narrative, citizens must change their passive attitude to political governance and leadership recruitment processes such that the choice of leaders is driven by competence, capacity, character and verifiable track record of commitment to the public interest. In the words of Obasanjo (2016), leaders should be “paragons of propriety, rectitude and integrity”. As a people, Africans especially Nigerians, must take their destiny in their own hands by putting away all those bad governance practices that have held them back as a nation. They must re-chart their path and address the critical challenge of leadership in their homes, communities, religious places, local government areas, the state and national levels. Since only political parties can present candidates for elections as provided in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, they have the obligation to make merit, rather than parochial factors like tribe, religion, region and pecuniary gains, as the prime criterion for selecting their flagbearers. Good people abound in the country and in all tribes and so, the requirements for contesting elections should provide a level playing field to enable both rich and poor candidates to present themselves for elective office. Second, the 1999 Constitution should be amended to provide for independent candidates. If this window is created, more good people would be encouraged to take on the leadership challenge for the benefit of this and future generations. They would hopefully arise to be the moral compass of the society in addition to promoting the African values of hard work, honesty, accountability and communal progress.

In conclusion, the view of this paper, in line with numerous research findings and the Rwandan experience is that the quality of leadership is a critical success factor in every developmental process. It is a catalyst for development and a game changer. It can stall or inspire a nation to greater heights. Virtuous societies are built by leaders who are accountable to the led and are driven by the altruistic desire to improve the lot of the highest number of their people. Sadly, politicians do not want to be accountable for the public resources they control even when they know that where there is no accountability, development will inevitably be stunted.

Currently, many people in Nigeria go to bed daily in fear and frustration, without food, potable water, shelter and other basic things of life. They are awake, hungry and angry. The looting of warehouses and trucks loaded with foodstuff across the country by the hungry attest to the anger and misery of the citizens. This is evidently a sign of cumulative years of poor leadership and failed governance. In these extraordinary times of economic crisis, the country’s development prospect hangs delicately on the strength of its leadership. The leadership must be accountable and demonstrate in words and deeds, a commitment to the ideals of good governance.

The citizens should set the tone for the country and collectively define the quality of politicians they covet and the standard of success they desire. Since ultimate sovereign power rests with them, citizens as a collective should question the current status quo, current governance model, that is not serving them well. The erstwhile three or four regions in Nigeria made great progress before and after Independence in 1960 due to the quality of their leadership. The country needs to go back to competition-driven regionalism. There lies the key to the much-expected nation’s accelerated prosperity. To cut the bloated cost of governance, the nation can consider adopting a unicameral legislature with part-time members instead of the bicameral legislature with full time membership. Furthermore, there is need to continue to strengthen public institutions for transparency, accountability and good governance to ensure that there are consequences for actions or inactions. Above all, the citizens should compel the leadership at the states and Local Government Areas, as sub-national tiers of governance, to deliver on their developmental targets, since they constitutionally control over 47% of public resources. The economic development of the nation should and must be a collective responsibility of the citizens and all tiers of governance.

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## ENDNOTES

[i] SDGs: *elimination of poverty; Zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; enabling environment of peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships.*

[ii] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions.

[iii] UN Chronicle (2015) *Implementing the 2030 Agenda: The Challenge of Conflict*. April. No. 4. Vol LII

[iv] Amitav Banerji (2015). *Global and National Leadership in Good Governance*. *UN Chronicle*, April 2015, No. 4 Vol. LII.

[v] *Next Eleven Countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Turkey and Vietnam.*

[vi] BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

[vii] UNDP Human Development Report 2002. P. 14.