



SHEKARAU'S DAY UNDER THE LONDON SUN

By
Sule Y Sule
Director of Press and Public Relations
Government House, Kano State
sulevsule@yahoo.com

Deepening the democratic culture in Nigeria took the centre stage again last June where a distinguished coven of credible icons in the struggle for good governance converged in London to review progress made so far and chart a way forward. The event, an International Conference on **Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects** was organized under the auspices of **Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria (FGGN)**, a non-governmental organization of Nigerian professionals based in the United Kingdom. The Foundation is committed to a peaceful and prosperous and supports programmes that help improved governance and law economic reform and development.

The conference organizers invited only people whose credentials are unblemished, men of integrity and democratic fidelity, harbingers of hope in a desert of despair, personalities whose principled antecedents set them apart from the madding crowd of illegitimate usurpers and jobbers squeezing the political space in Nigeria for selfish reason. The distinguished Alex Ekweme, Second Republic's Vice President and former Chairman of the PDP Board of Trustees chaired the occasion.

Coming at a time the Nigerian Dream is being heckled and knocked from all sides the conference held out promise of a one-stop inquest shop for what ails the Nigerian Democratic Project. Granted that it is boom time for global promoters of the liberal democracy ideal, what does it portend for transiting societies like Nigeria. Would democracy translate to improved living conditions, eradication of preventable poverty, peaceful resolution of internal conflicts and promotion of the good life? If the West has thrived under a democratic ethos, does it automatically imply that similar result can be replicated by constitutional fiat under African, nay Nigerian conditions? What role did democracy actually play in transforming the Asian economies into the world-beaters they are today? Indeed, is democracy the secret formula Nigeria desperately needs for the quantum leap it must take? If yes, what is the experience and judgment of those involved in governance and political aggregation in Nigeria?

The paper presented by His Excellency, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, Executive Governor of Kano State lucidly examined the democracy project in a holistic manner and emerged the most debated and applauded. Malam began his presentation by questioning the local content of the form and substance of the variant of democracy adopted by the Nigerian elite and exposed its incongruence with domestic normative truisms which he held responsible for the numerous contradictions those entrusted with political authority have had to resolve, often unsuccessfully.

Warning that the foreign backed efforts in developing countries at setting up constitutional conferences with follow-up Presidential and Legislative elections hold no prospects of guaranteeing a sustainable democratic polity because democracy is a

product of a particular cultural milieu, conceived and nurtured within the Western cultural setting over several centuries. In the words of Malam "Democracies as introduced to the developing nations are too expensive to run, too prone to corruption and too cumbersome to implement. Democracy has its own soul and spirit as well as its outward form and manifestation. We must go for the spirit and then adapt its outward form to suit our cultural peculiarities".

The nugget of Malam's paper centred on leadership and the role the leader in a transiting democracy is expected to play in shaping the affairs of state and influencing the followers. He identified the lack of sacrifice; insatiable greed to accumulate wealth, intolerance and corruption, traceable to irresponsible leadership, as why Nigeria has failed to make substantial progress?

Pointing the way out, Malam drew the attention of the conferees to the Kano model of exemplary and visionary leadership, which he leads and how the leader's personal paradigm has enhanced the two pivotal agenda of his administration - Societal Re-orientation and human development. "Our task is to lead the people and prevail over them to re-embrace the Islamic-Christian embedded values of discipline, hard-work, tolerance, cooperation, accommodation, decency, cleanliness, moral uprightness, respect for law and order, respect for elders, proper upbringing of children, respect for the rights of women and above all, the fear of God; and encourage them to eschew unethical behaviors that are manifested in dishonesty in business dealings, dereliction of duty by public servants, hawking by the girl-child, begging by boys, reckless driving on the roads, drug addition, willful idleness, thuggery, mismanaging the marriage institution, prostitution, examination malpractice and general discipline.

The Kano Chief Executive whose presentation drew the longest applause in the packed hall adduced three indispensable conditions for the emergence of sustainable democratic culture in Nigeria, drawing heavily from the Kano experience, which has received nationwide respect because it is people-oriented and transparently clean.

The first is sincerity of purpose. Malam's position is that all policies proposed in the course of governance must be for the good of the greater people, as deliberate policies to retard the development of some parts of the country or accelerate the development of the other part will not create an atmosphere that would guarantee fairness and a level-playing field.

The second is respect for the rule of law. He warned that no one should be above the law while immunity clauses that shield certain public officers from criminal investigation are a 'misnomer'.

The third indispensable condition for sustainable democracy is good governance. In Kano's case, he stated, it became immediately imperative to win over the confidence of the people through quick settlement of a backlog of pension arrears of over 20 years amounting to over N2billion as well as the prompt payment of all salaries and entitlements. And where other states keep a fearful distance from the searchlights of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC,) the Kano State Government invited them in to investigate corruption charges in the government and the administration always emerged clean of any inappropriate act.

In conclusion, Malam charged those in positions of leadership in Nigeria to appreciate leadership as a trust that must be delivered. "Once our leaders deliver their trust, then we are on the path for a sustainable democratic culture" and warned that there will be a Day of Reckoning.

Other invited speakers spoke in the same vein, chorusing a dire need for expansion of the democratic space, respect for the rule of law and the inevitability of purposeful leadership.

General Muhammadu Buhari in his remarks titled "Challenges Facing Democracy in Nigeria" lamented that whereas Nigerians had hoped for a system that would guarantee a competent and accountable government with checks and balances, an independent judiciary, flowering of business and foreign investments and a drastic rollback of poverty and corruption, the reality is in fact the opposite. Neither the fight against economic prosperity, poverty or corruption is recording any modicum of success. "Democracy is not being practiced, poverty is not being alleviated and corruption is not being tackled in any meaningful way", he said.

Governor Ahmed Bola Tinubu of Lagos State argued that development could only take place when there is good governance. "If good governance were in place in Nigeria, it would have ensured the security of lives and property of Nigerians", he said. He challenged the Foundation to galvanize the disparate element of NADECO in the U.S. and U.K. as a bulk walk against emerging tyranny bad governance in Nigeria. Alhaji Muhammadu Abubakar Rimi, the modernizing Governor of the old Kano State in the Second Republic dropped a poser aloud in choice metaphor: "Where the cloth is dirty, it can be washed with water, but where the water is more dirty than the cloth, what do we do?"

Chief Mike Ahamba SAN, in his paper warned against politicizing the judiciary as it is the only arm of government in Nigeria whose credibility is still intact. Alhaji Balarabe Musa, Governor of the old Kaduna State in the Second Republic and Chairman of the Conference of Political Parties in Nigeria said corruption was so entrenched in the polity that no President or Governor can survive for a week without having to bribe the legislature, a practice he said began in the Second Republic.

The conference was also attended by Chief Bisi Akande, former Osun State Governor and AD National Chairman, Professor Jalingo, Senator Habu Ibrahim, Dr Junaid Mohammed, Dr Sulieman Kumo, Hon. Dr. Usman Bugaje, Prof. Munzali Jibril, Alhaji Tukur Jikamshi, AVM Mukhtar Mohammed and Malam Kabir Yusif, publisher of Daily Trust Newspapers.

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