

VEC Projects and Tomorrow Ugwuozor Samuel Ifeanyi

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ABSTRACT

Participatory governance could be another name for VEC Project. It focuses on deepening democratic engagements through the participation of citizens in the process of governance in the State. It requires citizens to play a more direct role in decision-making, especially in matters that border on their welfare. If there is a general acknowledgement that VEC is successful, judging by its outcomes in establishing the key developmental needs of all the 472 communities in Enugu State and in their order of priorities in establishing the number of on-going, completed and abandoned projects and in the status of their implementation; identifying the economic resources in all the communities, including tourist sites, mineral deposits, farm produce; identifying all micro, small and medium enterprises in all communities; sensitizing, mobilizing and educating people on programmes on the 4-Point Agenda of the State Government, Vision 2020, MDGs, CEEDS and on their civic responsibilities and in equipping the present and future governments with all the relevant DATA with which to develop all the communities, wards, Local Government Areas, constituencies and zones among other benefits, then the concern of any development person would be on the continuity and longevity of VEC. This concern stems from the fact that in most States in Africa, government's policies and programmes are never contiguous, and this has often raised the issue of policy somersaults, a situation where well articulated and conceptualized ideas of Government are undermined by a constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration, and are sometimes outrightly ignored, bastardized or abandoned.

Keywords; Participatory governance, democratic, VEC, 4-Point, Agenda

The Role of Leadership

It is obvious that leadership is very central here. Chinua Achebe was unequivocal in locating the problem of Nigeria on leadership [1,2,3]. The legendary philosopher, Plato, also in his work declared emphatically that leadership is not an all comers affair. According to him:

There will be no end to the troubles of States ...till, philosophers become kings in the world or till those whom we now call Kings and Rulers really and truly become philosophers. Whether we are conscious of or acknowledge it or not, the fact remains stubborn and indestructible that poverty, disease, social unrest and instability and all kinds of international conflicts have their origins in the minds of men ... It is only when the minds of men have been properly and rigorously cultivated and garnished, that they can be safely entrusted with public affairs with a certainty and assuredness that they will make the best of their unique opportunity and assignment.

Awolowo maintained that there is need to produce a breed of Plato's Philosopher Kings whom he called leaders spanning from politicians, judges, chairmen and members of Boards, senior officers in all public offices, including the armed forces [4, 5, 6, 7]. The leaders, according to him, must possess "comprehension", "mental magnitude" and "spiritual depth." By comprehension, Awolowo meant the ability of a man (leader) to appreciate and grasp the salient details, as well as most of the practical and temporal complications of a given problem or situation" This work is not about the person of the Governor of the State, His Excellency, Sullivan Chime [8]. It is about a programme of government - more specifically the VEC Project which has impacted and would have greater impact on the lives of our people more in the future. We have talked about leadership as a supreme factor, in the conceptualization and effective

Democratic laws generally tend to promote the welfare of the greatest possible number ... The advantage of democracy does not consist ... in favouring the prosperity of all, but simply in contributing to the wellbeing of the greater number

If, therefore, leadership is a factor in governance, Governor Chime is a living and identifiable example of what leadership is all about [11]. He may not be remembered for sloganeering or for bulldozing his way through; rather he would be remembered by his concrete and physical achievements, by his personal example, by participating and encouraging participation and in the process getting extraordinary things done, in making visions and values tangible, in demonstrating that development or success is not just a function of abundance of resources but more of disciplined leadership and management and by bringing to bear in the governance process such noble qualities like hard work, sense of

implementation of any government policy and specifically in the continuity of VEC Project. The Governor is a self effacing person, who would rather prefer his achievements to speak for him but we cannot fail or refuse to acknowledge his leadership qualities. After all, VEC and his other monumental achievements are concrete externalizations of his inner self [9]. He has in the characterization of Awolowo "comprehension", "mental magnitude and "spiritual depth". He is not only a democrat, he is a utilitarian leader. For him, the proper course of action is the one that maximizes utility or maximizes total benefits and reduces sufferings or the negatives [10]. His actions and policies are based on what would produce "benefits, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness" and conversely prevent "mischief, pain, evil and unhappiness. In the words of Alexis Tocqueville:

common good, transparency, fidelity to law and trust and uncommon courage [12]. Chime is in the mould of leaders with uncommon courage. To be a courageous leader is uncommon. John F. Kennedy, a former President of the United States, in his "Profiles in Courage" gave graphic narration of some courageous American politicians of various political and regional persuasions "whose one overriding loyalty was to the United States and to the right as God gave them to see it." According to Kennedy, the basic motivation for the actions of these men was national interest, rather than private or political gain [13]. Their behaviour, he said, was not because they:

“loved the public better than themselves”... On the contrary it was precisely because they did love themselves -because each one's need to maintain his own respect for himself was more important to him than his popularity with others stronger than his desire to maintain his office - because his consume, his personal standard of ethics, his integrity or morality, call it what you will - was stronger. ... because his desire to win or maintain a reputation for integrity and courage was than the pressures of public disapproval - because his faith that his course was the best one, and would ultimately be vindicated, outweighed his fear of public reprisal.

Demonstration of courage in the face of threat to life, rejection, losing popularity, attracting public disapproval is undoubtedly an uncommon phenomenon as politicians are always sensitive about matters that would affect their political fortune [4]. So, more often, they resort to mere populism in the place of public good [7]. Their considerations may never be

With exceptions so rare they are regarded as miracles of nature, successful democratic politicians are insecure and intimidated. They advance politically only as they placate, oppose, bribe, seduce, bamboozle, or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding threatening elements in their constituencies. The decisive consideration is not whether the position is good, but whether it is popular - not whether it will work well and prove itself, but whether the active -talking constituents like it immediately.

In other words, some politicians for private considerations would choose to abuse their conscience and compromise patriotic principles and “go along” with the un-informed wishes of the electorate. In this circumstance, it becomes a case of the tail wagging the dog and not the other way round. Compromise and flexibility, are however necessary parts of politics and politicking, but history is replete with stories of politicians or leaders who withstood the pressures of public opinion on issues of public concern and

whether the issue at stake is good, reasonable, realizable, viable or sustainable, but whether it would place them on the good side of their constituents [8]. This attitude among American politicians attracted in the past a harsh judgment from Walter Lippmann, a political scientist, writer and social critic. According to him:

awaited the vindication of their positions in the long-run judgments of the people [9]. In any case, it needed the courage of a leader to embark on finding lasting solution to what I may call “Akwata debacle.” The dualization of Zik Avenue with a brand new bridge, the dualization of New Airport road, the sanitization of Enugu roads with the banning of commercial motorcycle operations within Enugu metropolis, the demolition of all illegal structures, the demolition of secretariat buildings and their subsequent replacement with

complex, gigantic and monumental edifices, the erection of a New Lion Building, (Office of the Governor), the conduct of four local government elections in his tenure where several States are yet to conduct one in eight years, the institutionalization of community governance of royalty and democracy, tradition and modernism represented in the Igwe and his Council and the Presidents of town unions and the enormous investment in the maintenance of peace and order which

has made Enugu State, according to the former Inspector General of Police, M. D. Abubakar, the State with the least crime rate in Nigeria, can only come from a government of a courageous leader, a statesman who thinks beyond the immediacy of his environment into the future. What could be said of Governor Chime and about the courage of his convictions is what Henry Gonzalez, the first MexicanAmerican, ever elected to the U.S. Congress, said of himself in 1994 [9]. He said:

Once I got into politics, I learned this very early, people will respond to you if they can believe what you say. People will trust you if you keep your word. People will respect you if you respect yourself, if you lay out the problem accurately and if you propose a reasonable solution, people will give you a chance, not withstanding your heritage or race.

The leadership question, therefore, cannot be discountenanced. Coming to our point, the continuity of VEC would be a function of leadership and leadership styles.

The Role of Citizens

Leaders and followers are at the opposite sides of a coin. It is often said that a country gets the leadership it deserves. What makes a citizen, Aristotle says, is that "he shares in the administration of justice and in offices,

it is he who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any State." For John F Kennedy, a citizen, also holds office [7]. According to him:

In a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics, "holds office"; every one of us is in a position of responsibility; and, in the final analysis, the kind of government we get depends upon how we fulfill those responsibilities. We, the people, are the boss, and we will get the kind of political leadership, be it good or bad, that we demand and deserve

The unquantifiable benefits derived and derivable from VEC project promote and confirm this Aristotelian assertion that citizenship is exercised through participation in the governance of the country. Responsible exercise of citizenship would assist in shaping the colour of leadership [2]. The citizen, however, can

only do this if he is educated, sensitized and informed [3]. There is a whole lot of difference between the educated and the uneducated. The educated, for Aristotle, differ from the uneducated as the living from the dead. On seeing an uneducated man sitting on a stone, Zeno said, "Behold a stone on top of a Stone." Although overcoming hunger and

malnutrition is a critical factor, improved health, nutrition and education are ends in themselves but healthy and educated human beings are the principal means of achieving meaningful and sustainable development. One significant way of fighting poverty is through the process of empowerment which a scholar defined as “a multidimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, social, physiological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. Education is a transformational tool and as NEEDS NIGERIA document asserted,

“... the goals of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value reorientation can be effectively pursued, attained and sustained only through an efficient, relevant and functional education system ... It gives the people the skills necessary for their effective participation and hence for their ability to fight for a better standard of living and social services. We totally agree with an assertion that if you build democracy on illiteracy, you are building on a weak foundation. But give education to the people, they know their right and will fight for their rights [8].

The Role of Rural Industries

Rural development is a cardinal factor of the 4-Point Agenda and one major thrust of the Agenda is Rural Industry. The industries would be expected to provide employment, generate income, excite local initiatives, improve the condition of the rural poor and discourage rural/urban migration [7]. The vital question is; what type of industries does VEC envisage for the rural area? Let us look at the “preferences” which were derived from India experiences as something that might be appropriate in establishing industries in the rural areas, and they are preferences for capital saving and employment generating rather than capital intensive and labour saving technologies; for cottage -medium scale and small scale, rather than large-scale technologies; for technologies of goods and services appropriate for mass consumption, rather for individual luxuries; for technologies using local materials, rather than materials which have to be imported from abroad; for energy-saving, rather than energy intensive technologies; for locally available sources of energy such as the sun, wind, biogas etc. The adoption of

these preferences which the proponents tagged “inward looking policies” will, according to them, lead to “appropriate technology”, which, according to the proponents, is the technology that “produces for the satisfaction of basic material needs for all, preserving essential ecological balance and it has built into it structures that also are compatible with the satisfaction of basic non-material needs for all” In such technologies, production technique is subordinated to social needs. The development of indigenous technology is promoted and self-reliance is encouraged. In this regard, the Bank of Industry could be useful, because as Ajadike observed “poverty makes capital accumulation impossible in the rural areas and conventional banks are not meant for the poor with their very stringent collateral requirements” He suggested that credit institutions be developed exclusively for rural development as was done by the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, a specialized banking institution for the poor established in 1983 [9].

The Role of Institutions

It is important to recognize that the often “charitable dispositions” of some Nigerians towards the problems of the rural poor and the masses in Nigeria are not sustainable [8]. The institutional basis of poverty as a product of deliberate economic or institutional arrangement must be acknowledged. Uwalaka's concept of “distributive imperative” must not be ignored by leaders of this country. This is a concept that suggests an economic and social inclusiveness that de-emphasizes the “unlimited accumulation of wealth” in society. According to Uwalaka; A

society where a few are wallowing in superficialities and the majority lacking necessities can never know security, peace, cohesion and cooperation, no matter how stringent the laws are and how iron-handed the rulers are [5]. In this case, it is not about VEC, it is about an imperative that every government in Nigeria should pursue as envisaged in Chapter II of the Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended. The paper contains political, economic, social and educational objectives that if attained would pull Nigeria from the cesspool of poverty and quagmires.

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