



Text of the Address

**THE CHALLENGE OF RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP:
HOW CAN A SUCCESSOR-GENERATION DO BETTER?**

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PROTOCOLS & INTRODUCTION

Let me express profound gratitude for the privilege of being asked to speak at this year's Future Award's Symposium for Young and Emerging Leaders. As an abiding sceptic of flagellating awards, especially awards that were not based on any clearly articulated, independently verifiable scientific grounds – the type that has become so commonplace in Nigeria, I found The Future Awards a rare exception and I have been a long-standing admirer of its celebration of young achievers in various spheres over the years because of its rigour that accompanies its search and recognition of individual talent. Yet while individual talent is a major pre-requisite in the moulding of leaders, I am even more excited that The Future Awards has now decided to deepen its engagement of the next generation of leaders in a number of ways beyond the recognition of the heroic individual .

influencing national leadership outcomes; determining leadership needs for national development and creating a networking platform to drive leadership projects.

The organisers asked me to offer a perspective from the inside on how to stand out from the crowd - particularly in the moulding of a successor-generation. Knowing that you are mostly cynical about those on the 'inside' and my interaction with some of you show that you are extremely disappointed about the turn of events in our country, I guess I am already at a disadvantage trying to convince you about the relationship between power and leadership. So, what I am going to speak to are essentially the reflections of an accidental politician - in the hope that the emergent inter-generational dialogue may produce tangible outcomes, particularly in the making of new leaders and the building of a successor generation. Politics, if you believe the word on the street, is *a dirty game*. And many people always ask politicians the same question: Why, with all the opportunities in this world that could perhaps earn one considerable social, financial and personal security, would anyone want to go into something *like* politics, particularly in a setting as dangerous as Nigeria? Politicians are often seen to be *janus*-faced - on the one hand, charismatic, visionary, fascinating and sophisticated, and on the other, repulsive, cynical, calculating, venal and opportunistic. My own interest is really not to indulge in any deep philosophical or academic arguments about these claims today, many of which you are familiar with but to simply explore - based on my limited experience, the possibilities of harmony in this pseudo-dichotomy - to explain that this pattern of categorizing people is at best a luxury, and at worst irrelevant in our own setting. Indeed, my own experience and my fundamental thesis in this presentation is that where the

younger generation is not political, there can be no public service and the State runs the risk of decay and illegitimacy.

Any casual observer of political developments in our nation come's away with the erroneous impression that succession to leadership in public office is a matter of "divine rights of kings" or what is known in local parlance as "God-fatherism". The quest by older generation politicians to capture and hold on to the reins of power continues to exert a debilitating influence on the political development and democratic progression of our nation. Stemming from the prevailing background of widespread poverty and underdevelopment, the control of political power is frequently seen as a guarantee of access to the national cake, with the gladiators willing to do virtually anything to capture and retain power. This prevailing theatre of the absurd has greatly impaired our nation's journey to national greatness.

It is instructive to note here that where there is no deliberate and carefully planned succession process in political leadership, there can be no hope for sustained development. The Singaporean experience provides us a good example. Singapore's systematic and painstakingly planned political succession sharply contrasts with succession in most new democracies. Singapore's search to find a small group of potential successors from a small "catchment area" had begun in the late 1960s when Lee was still in his forties and picked up a sense of urgency after the sudden death in 1983 of one of his closest cabinet colleagues, Finance Minister, Hon Sui Sen. In 1980, Lee had publicly identified a team of young Peoples' Action Party (PAP) rising stars who were to form the nucleus of second generation successors. These individuals were tried in office, given a bewildering array of tasks and promoted or discarded as deemed appropriate. Gradually and cautiously - so as to reconfirm investors in Singapore's economic miracle - the

second generation was given more responsibility. Recent elections in Europe and America have also proved the importance of a successor generation deliberately taken through the crucible of political training in their 20s and 30s and fully ready to take over the reins of power in their early forties. What has made this possible in countries where a leadership cadre has been consciously groomed is a commitment to education and training – formal and informal and sustained, time-tested mentoring schemes for leaders in politics, private sector and the public service. The subversion and collapse of public institutions in Nigeria, particularly the University system under military rule over the last two decades has resulted in state desertion by those who ought to have been groomed for such leadership positions thus rendering leadership positions the sole arena for the highest bidder no matter how ill-prepared and integrity deficient. I see myself as a product of the tutelage available in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although the challenge of reforming the State has become fundamentally structural and institutional, the issue of leadership – particularly how we conceptualise leadership is central to it. For too long, our political culture has perpetuated the myth that only heroic, strong and charismatic leaders can bring about change single-handedly – rather than convert the formal authority derived from legitimate electoral mandate into a process of democratic renewal. In my own view, the only way to stand out is to ensure that real leadership is values-driven and ought to involve motivating people to solve problems within their own communities, rather than reinforcing the over-lordship of the state on citizens. We need to (re)build as well as strengthen public and private institutions that can mediate between individual and group interests, between human and peoples’ rights and dismantle the physical architecture and psychological infrastructures of oppression in our country.

Sadly, the authoritarian residues of politics over the last decade have however achieved the purpose of turning many away from politics even if they want to be active in their neighbourhood associations and their community projects. The main challenge of the political leadership therefore is to reconnect democratic choices with people's day-to-day experience and to extend democratic principles to everyday situations in citizens' communities and constituencies. Understandably, if you make political discourse more negative as it is often done in Nigeria - you deliberately turn young people particularly off politics; they grow cynical and stop paying any serious attention to politics. This experience is not unique to us in Nigeria; in fact it is the crisis that democracy is experiencing all over the world, with low turn out at the polls and scant regard for political leaders. Yet, if we as citizens choose not to play a part in the process of developing our communities and our country, we will get the politicians we deserve, allow the hijack of the political realm by special interests and ethnic jingoists who are only keen to promote their narrow agendas. As Barack Obama memorably put it, *"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek. And the time is now."* The essential point therefore is that leadership must not only demonstrate a vision of transformation, rather than transaction, show the courage of conviction and promote values that are enduring and replicable over the long-term. Such leadership must not be fickle, opportunistic or ready to compromise at the slightest whiff of intimidation or harassment and demonstrate the capacity to inspire and innovate. Above all, it must be ready to consciously develop a successor generation that can take over the mantle of leadership rather than recycle tired hands whose capacity to mentor or inspire remains suspect and hardly endearing to the young and the restless.

It is for this reason that those of us interested in re-drawing the map of Nigeria's future must return to more solid grounds rather than tie ourselves to the apron strings of power-holders that neither have a track record nor demonstrate a vision that they are better than what we can offer our people. This solid ground must be within a larger movement though, one that accommodates the place of political institutions and not simply the celebration of astute individuals as the ultimate panacea to our crisis of governance. The most practical way to link individual choice to collective responsibility is to participate in the institutions that influence our lives. We must ensure that formal and informal institutions are democratised and given more responsibilities for exercising state power. To do it well, we have to see Nigeria as a permanent social enterprise that has to be fought over and restructured in order to provide cover for all Nigerians – young and old.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, this is why I see the debate about whether young people like many of us in this room should become politicians superfluous. Important as they are, the institutions of direct state power and electoralism are just the tip of the iceberg in the democratisation complex. Indeed, genuine democracy ought to rest on a much richer ecology of associational and organisational life and should be nourished and reproduced through every-day struggles of the citizens. Operating in the practical field of politics, I have come to realise that when we broadly define this everyday struggles as simply the handiwork of 'politicians' or even more narrowly the work of 'civil society activists', we strip them bare of spontaneity and deeper meaning and romanticise politics as though it is a rationally ordered, codified and all-knowing process and overplay our abilities as politicians to counter the inherent inequities of societies. This is why perhaps the issue should not be one of transition from activism to politics, but the extent to which we are able to achieve citizen

participation in our democracy. Yet while politics may have lost its edge - suffering a decline, apathy or disinterest, it is also true to say activism, even though on the rise in the form of single issue campaigns like *the Anti Fuel Subsidy Removal* or *Enough is Enough* campaign, such popular campaigns still suffer from a crisis of exaggerated expectations. The reason for these crises of exaggerated expectation that barricade activism suffer is not far fetched. The truth is that as long as we live in the world of sovereign states, we exaggerate the ability of the individual, even the most astute politician among us to stand up to the power of the nation-state or the mega corporations on his own steam.

This is why I want us to really focus more on the making of leaders and citizens in a good society because without direct citizen participation, the legitimacy of our political institutions will continue to decline. It is for this reason that I strongly believe that political leaders - be they politicians or young activists - should worry because their ability to lead effectively is being seriously undermined by the desertion of average citizens from the public space, deepening the crisis of legitimacy in our State. Yet, this lack of legitimacy cuts both ways. When we the people withdraw our trust in leaders or discountenance politicians, we make our democratic institutions less effective and risk making ourselves ungovernable.

Yet, young activists, social entrepreneurs and progressive politicians must not only reject the false debate between *Activism* versus *Politics*, we must also insist that it is not only narrow human rights that matter and contend that economic and social rights are also human rights and social justice questions matter as much. This is important for many of our youngsters who take an instrumentalist view of democratic struggle and focus more on the existential issues of immediate survival. There is no doubt that a young person in a state of deprivation draws a direct but tenuous correlation between his personal deprivation and state decay.

In situations where the linkage is effectively drawn, the response is often a call to arms for radical change rather than reconstituting the state on the pivot of democratic governance to serve the interests of the broader citizenry – and this is why young people are often quick to agitate for equivalents of ‘Arab springs as a response to bad governance in Nigeria.

For the state to be worthy of preservation and protection therefore, it must be a State which provides with sensitivity to its citizens’ needs with the same level of care that companies must show to their customers if they are to stay afloat; not today’s structures of command and corruption, where the developmental role is clothed as the personal benevolence of the President or the Governor. Citizens must feel and actually *be* empowered to have oversight of their own state agencies and functions, and be given local input and control in a genuine and open, not tokenistic and patronage-based, manner. That’s what informed our citizens’ based budget in Ekiti State this year. It is also what informed our domestication of the Freedom of Information Law as well as our Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law. Giving communities a role in their own development is *the* essential part of dismantling the command mentality which plagues our country today and the most attractive tool for enlisting disinterested citizens in the political arena.

I am therefore not sure that the solution to the current deficit that our democracy is experiencing can be solved with posing the young in binary opposition to adulthood or politics in opposition to activism but to locate the social construction of youth as part of adulthood and recognise the importance of deliberate, organic and planned succession therein. For autonomous institutions to play a different role in mediating citizens’ democratic choices, their organic development must be combined in a more nuanced manner and a more systematic way with the use of public and state power. In my view, our young

people should stop agonising about the problems of the Nigerian State which will not disappear in a hurry and begin to organise in a manner that places citizens as drivers of change in our quest to restore values-driven leadership and a future of hope and possibilities for our people.

This is why I am in politics. It is my belief that a committed leadership must help provide the roadmap that will give our people control over their own destinies and lives. It is the belief that public office is too serious to be entrusted in the hands of charlatans - old or young - and that when serious people turn away from politics, the field is left wide open to those who have nothing to offer in terms of values and character other than crass opportunism and damage to the people's well being. We must - politicians, social entrepreneurs and young activists alike - be determined to ensure that the State empowers rather than dictate, enables rather than control, pushes power down to the people and shares the responsibility of governing with them rather than turn them to supplicants at the table of the masters daily wracked by their own inferiority complex. Unfortunately, today's politics is characterised more by so-called leaders who would rather turn young people into permanent supplicants serving their illicit agenda, not mentors interested in the making of a successor-generation.

The Need for a Collective Rescue Mission.

Having spent the last few years in partisan politics and participating in grassroots organising, my belief in the need to take politics beyond political parties is even more reinforced. The immediate challenge for all of us is to concentrate on how to rescue our people from bad governance. Unless the critical mass of our people cutting across age, gender, zones and party political affiliations adopt the same positions, with a more clearly defined collective agenda, the

current approach to solving our problem will not suffice. There is an urgent need to build coalitions and permanent platform in the public sphere that is beyond party and personalities, but all embracing enough to accommodate those who subscribe to the core values of character, competence, compassion, integrity, honesty and dedication to transformation in Nigeria. We must move away from the cult of building individual stars which devalue communities and undermines the distributed leadership that make things run.

This all-embracing platform could address a variety of issues, but none is more urgent today than the question of restoring faith in the democratic process by making the votes of the people count and developing an accountable and transparent governance process. Almost everyone is fed up with the quality of governance in our country. The impression that those who govern Nigeria – whether at the State, National Assembly or Federal executive level – are mediocre – is widespread and many trace the roots of bad governance to the lack of accountability to the citizens on the part of such elected leaders. But the task of such an all-embracing platform must not be limited to reforming the institutional framework of governance alone. It must also focus on Conduct in Public Life; The Constitution and the Legal Framework of the Federal State; Human Rights, Militarism and Civil Violence; Public Sector Management, Transparency and Accountability, viable human capital development agenda as well as visible economic progress for the ordinary citizens. This is not an exhaustive list, but it certainly provides civil rights activists and progressive politicians with a template for democratic renewal. I see a major role for our young people and the “senior youths” in championing this all important cause.

Ladies and Gentlemen, based on my own trajectory and experience from direct anti-establishment confrontation at the barricades as a young Students union activist and a pro-democracy subaltern through civic engagement with

political actors and public officials to my current partisan political involvement, I am convinced that through a carefully and consciously developed formal and informal leadership development schemes, we can build a pool of young Nigerians who are committed to social transformation and genuinely want to work for change. This is why we must not hesitate to criticise those who have enjoyed the privileges of the Nigerian state as youngsters, even cynically promoting so-called 'new-breed politicians' in the process - only to turn around and deride young people's lack of experience and inability to lead. I am glad that this dismissive statement by a former military ruler has gingered many youngsters out of their self-imposed lethargy to embrace the place of politics in the transformation of Nigeria. Let us now translate this into concrete power given the opportunities that abound among the youth.

Herein lies my hope about the future. This hope is certainly not bleary eyed optimism. It is not even the optimism that the crisis of governance in our land will simply go away because we all know that this country is tottering on the brink. I am talking about the hope of our founding fathers in the struggle for independence and freedom and their unshaken belief in our inalienable right to rule ourselves. It is the hope that led us to resist the military oppression in our land because of our belief that another Nigeria was possible - one that will be accountable to its citizens, legitimate in their eyes, transparent and respected around the world; the hope that allows us to hold our heads high, proud of our accomplishments and contributions to humankind; the hope that the time for change is now.

I believe we can revive the Nigerian State in a qualitative manner and make democracy more meaningful to our people, provide jobs for the jobless, improve healthcare, modernise agriculture and reclaim our young people from a future of violence, decadence and despair by linking social enterprise, youth activism to

politics and not drawing artificial divisions in our promotion of values-driven leadership. Renewing our democracy through the strengthening of institutions and public participation increases our collective capacity to tackle the major problems facing our society – with a corresponding achievement of individual contentment even as we pursue the common good. We need leaders who have a clear vision of the future, who see character as destiny, who advocate values-driven reorientation, who are committed about transformation, who are compassionate about changing the decrepit plight of our people, who act with integrity and ethics, who create an entrepreneurial mindset and capabilities in followers, who see leadership as service and responsibility, who are in a hurry to make a difference and who are not content with mediocrity. That is what I have been doing in the dedicated quest to make poverty history in Ekiti State. Many of the young leaders in this room fit the bill but remember my earlier quote from Barack Obama, *‘Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek. And the time is now’*. It is the only way to consolidate this civilian rule and not suffer dire reversals as we perch on this very dangerous precipice.

Thank you very much for listening.

Dr. Kayode FAYEMI

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