INSECURITY AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN IMO STATE

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Abstract

This paper on insecurity and community leadership in Imo state is born out of the enormous security challenges in Imo State and the need to reorient and deepen knowledge and skills of community leaders for better performance in dynamic environment. The paper espoused insecurity in Imo state including killings by unknown gun men, kidnapping for ransom, arson, banditry, poverty, unemployment among others, all of which reflect deteriorating socioeconomic, political and livelihood crises in the state. Noticeable too was the ineffectiveness of community leaders in stemming the menace. Arising from review of relevant literature and theories, is the recognition of situational variables and leadership competencies as essential ingredients in leading in a dynamic environment. The paper observed that community leaders have not being sufficiently equipped with the necessary competencies to play the leadership role expected of them during crises. It therefore recommends capacity building for leadership competencies needed to mingle situational variables with followers need for leadership. It also recommends regular leadership training for community leaders and in and out-of-school training for both young and old whether in leadership position or not to build a reservoir of competent leaders in our communities.

Key words: Security, leadership, competencies, community development

Introduction

No time in the history of community development in Imo state requires pragmatic leadership than now that there is so much insecurity and poverty in the state. The insecurity in the state in recent time is a source of concern to all well-meaning Nigerians. There is increase in poverty, hunger, unemployment, killings, kidnapping, arson and armed robbery. The incessant attacks on security personnel have reduced

the visibility of police personnel in rural communities. The reduction has emboldened miscreants whose activities have reached alarming level. The nation's news media outlets are inundated with the reports of insecurity that the issue needs no further stressing (Ugwu, 2023, Okeoma, 2022, Okeoma, 2023, Sahara Reporters 2023, and Oluwafemi, 2023). Similarly, Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma, Iheancho, Ezeji, Okafor and Wokoma (2022), Onuoha, Anaele and Okwara (n.d), Udeoba, and Eze (2021) and Gbeneme (2022) have all shade light on insecurity in Imo state. It is no longer news that Communities have become less protected. Traditional institutions of leadership find it difficult to cope because they have not been prepared for the huge challenges facing community leaders in the current situation in the state.

Community engagement for internal security can only work through leaders of communities. It is the leader that activates the dormant potentials of the group as leading is all about influencing and motivating people, communicating and encouraging people, and building interpersonal and group relationship among followers. The above narratives underscore the need to draw the attention of relevant authorities to the need for reorientation of community leaders and the deepening of their leadership skills to face present day dynamic environment. This requires building capacity of community leaders for better performance. Community leaders are strategic partners in the development of rural communities. They live in their respective communities and so they are aware of the peculiarities and needs of members of their communities. Community leaders, who by their mode of operation fall within the informal sector operators, have the obligation to fight insecurity within their domain. This paper reviews some underlining theories relating to insecurity and leadership and suggest improving leadership competencies of community leaders.

Nature and scope of insecurity in Imo State

Human security is the desire of every living being. Security is the absence of incidence of threats and fear of harm to the life of individuals; material and nonmaterial deprivation; and loss of property and services pertinent to individuals in community and national wellbeing (Mba, 2018). The contrary is insecurity, which logically is the presence of incidence of threats and fear of harm to lives and property of people, including material and nonmaterial deprivation. In Imo State, leaders of communities, be it opinion leaders, traditional leaders, political / administrative

leaders, group or age-set leaders are troubled by insecurity. Traditional leaders are being kidnapped, opinion leaders cannot speak out for fear of attack, other people in leadership positions are scared by threat to their lives and that of members of their family. Illustrious sons and daughters in the diaspora and those in the cities and other states of the federation are scared of coming home. Incessant attacks on security personnel have reduced the presence of security agents in rural communities. This has in-turn emboldened miscreants who take advantage of the vacuum created by limited presence of security personnel in rural areas.

Insecurity is a product of dysfunctional society. The theoretical frame of reference explaining causes of insecurity are usually the Queer ladder and Aggression – frustration theories. The one explains organized crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing (Okchi and Agada, 2014). The other explains violent behavior as a function of frustration, a situation that emerges when circumstances interfere with goal-attainment which very often leads to aggression (Berkowitz and Aubrey, 1962). Thus, insecurity is instigated by deteriorating socio-economic problems and frustration from livelihood challenges in our society. The theory has it that frustration causes antagonism, which if not curbed, the bellicosity gets displaced onto innocent targets. Going by these theories one is enabled to situate insecurity as a by-product of frustration encountered when socio-economic and political environment is plagued by poverty, unemployment, greed, inequality and hopelessness. This is exactly the situation youths in Imo state found themselves. Reversing the situation calls for leaders that understand the mechanics of contemporary society, where unemployment exists and slim opportunities for engagement, survival and progression.

Community development and insecurity

There cannot be any meaningful development without peace and security. Community development will flourish only when there is peace and security. It is not surprising therefore that Ukah, Akor and Oluoha (2020) opined that the presence of rural development is not strongly felt in most rural communities in Imo state. Earlier, Iheriohanma, Wokoma and Nwokorie (2016) reported that communities are grossly underdeveloped and poverty has remained pervasive in rural communities leading to youths abandoning rural areas, migrating to cities in search of greener

pasture. Failing to get gainful and stable employment, youths become willing tool ready to be recruited and used for separatist agitation, crime, arson, killing, kidnapping, thuggery and all manner of criminality and destabilization of society.

Insecurity distracts the attention of community leaders from community development to solving security challenge. Rather than focus attention on implementing community development plans and mobilization of resources to carry out the plans, community leaders spend time, energy and resources on fighting insecurity. Indeed, it is difficult to mobilize human and material resources for development when people's minds are not at peace. Those in diaspora, whose financial contributions are enormous will be hard to motivate to contribute to developmental efforts when they are aware that there is no peace at home.

Ozor and Nwankwo (2006) argue that development has eluded most communities due to lack of "the mastery of the practical wisdom (leadersip) … to mobilise community members for our overall benefit". Indeed, the lack of purposeful and knowledgeable leadership, the catalyst to integrate and drive the wheel of development is the bane of community development in Imo state (Iheriohanma, Wokma and Nwokorie, 2016). There is no doubt that leadership vacuum exists in communities in the state. The happenings in the state attest to absence of leaders with the requisite competencies to cope with the security challenges in the state. In one breathe, leadership is taunted as a solution to many, if not most, problems of social and organizational life, and in another, the same leadership is often accused of being formative cause of societal problems (Ruben, 2019). This being the case, it is not out of place to blame failure of leadership for the insecurity and low level of community development in Imo state.

There is every need therefore to ensure that leaders of the various communities in the state are imbued with the capacity to ensure peace, stability and development. Pollyn (2016) posits that capacity building for Nigeria's sustainable development must include enhancement of the capacities of the informal sector operators for better performance. Community leaders and leaders of Community-based organizations represent strategic development partners or agents in the informal sector. When the leader is properly equipped with the relevant leadership competencies, insecurity will be reduced and community development will flourish.

Leadership that works

There are several theories of leadership, however the theoretical frame of reference considered appropriate for this discussion are the situational cum contingency theories of leadership. Thompson and Glaso (2015) state that a key premise underlying situational leadership theory is the recognition of situational variables, their effect on specific personalities and the leader's style in response to followers need for leadership. Furthermore, Fiedler and Chemers Contingency theory 1974 harp on the need to recognize individual orientation and using it to predict the situation in which the individual will be an effective leader. Both theories provide a basis for leadership choices in our communities. The fluidity of the socio-political and security situation in Imo state demand that community leaders be imbued with leadership skills and competencies that would enable them mingle together environmental variable with followers' desire for leadership.

The topic leadership has been characterized by a variety of definitions, frameworks and meaning without a single generally accepted definition. Interest in leadership as well as the search for conditions for successful leadership has continued to grow (Samul, 2019). Leadership is an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes (Rosari, 2019). The core role of leadership is to motivate the pursuit of the common purpose of a group or organization (Knippenberg, 2020). Leadership is an intervening variable in modern governable society as it increases or decreases the rate of crises depending on policy choices, decisions and implementation (Samuel, 2006). Performance in leadership is an interplay of the personality characteristics of the leader, the socio-political contestation in the leadership environment and the attitude, needs and other characteristics of the follower. Vidal, Campdersuner, Rodriguez and Vivar (2017) asserted that leadership styles are always evolving according to the context leaders face, with newer elements complementing, perfecting and accompanying more traditional styles. Performance in leadership position is all about the ability to mingle all the variables together to proffer solution.

Circumstances determine a leader's course of action (Agbagwa, 2015). A good leader responds to the environment the same way followers works with leadership (Folarin, 2013). According to the author, there is a quintessential interface between leadership

and followership and social space or environment. The fact remains that different situations produce different outcomes in leadership. Community leaders need to understand this in their pursuit of peace and security within their domain of authority. It is essential that a leader possesses the requisite competencies namely: analytical, personal, organizational, positional and communication competencies. Each of the five clusters parades an inventory of learnable abilities that are capable of being acquired through life experiences, formal education and non-formal education.

Leadership is dynamic, there is no set of rules that is cast in stone for all situations, rather, an admix of a number of variables depending on the context. According to Vidal, Compdesuner, Rodriguez and Vivar (2017) the contingency theory of leadership expresses the need for the leader to adjust his behavior based on a rational understanding of the situation and assume a leadership style that is appropriate for the occasion. Individual leaders need to understand how their skills and experiences match in variety of situations (Waters, 2013). It is by so doing that they will be able to surmount the security and development challenges confronting the state.

Improving leadership of Communities for security

Community leaders play significant role in maintenance of social order, peace and stability in various communities. They play this role through community-based organizations such as development associations, age grade associations and other community-based organizations. Leaders of Community development association help in the maintenance of peace and security through formation of Vigilante groups in communities (Muse & Narsiah, 2015). Development programmes are intended to change undesirable situations (Udensi, Daasi, Emah & Zukbee, 2013). That being the case community leaders must not only possess the necessary leadership competencies, but must also exhibit the competencies to mobilize and encourage participation of community members. They should have the ability to generate new ideas and initiate innovative community development programmes that could encourage youth development (Utba & Onyesom, 2020). In line with contingency theory of leadership, community leaders need to examine how their abilities, skills, experiences and orientation match with the socio-political environment to be able to improve on the security situation in their communities.

Conclusion

Drawing from the review and theories, it can be deduced that insecurity is a function of deteriorating socio-economic, political and livelihood crises. Community engagement for security demands that leaders of communities acquire relevant competencies needed to stem insecurity. This can be achieved through human capacity building that produces leaders that are equipped with relevant leadership competencies needed to grow the economy, develop communities, and build confidence. Leadership being an intervening variable in modern governable society (Folarin, 2013), equipping community leaders with analytical, organizational, communication, personal and positional competencies will dispose tham to better performance in positions of leadership.

Recommendations

In view of the above discourse, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The state government should make adequate plans for regular leadership training for community members, both young and old whether in leadership position or not.

2. Authorities at all levels should identify and recognize role models as reference points for youths to emulate.

3. State and local governments should make adequate budgetary provision for leadership training programmes at the community and local government levels.

4. Leadership training packages should lay emphasis on leadership competencies comprising analytical, organizational, communication, positional and personal competencies.

5. State government should quickly identify leadership-competency gaps of present community leaders and organize short training programmes for remediation and improvement,

6. State government should diversify the economy to create jobs for youths, reduce unemployment and minimize taking to crime as a means of survival.

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