

Divide and Rule: The Bane of Effective Governance in Africa

A.N. Maduegbuna

Department of Banking and Finance, Tansian University, Umuaya, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract: Divide and Rule is keeping control over people by making them disagree with and fight each other, therefore not giving them the chance to unite and oppose you together. This paper discussed how divide and rule has killed good governance in Africa.

Key words: Divide • Rule • Karmic • Governance and Africa

INTRODUCTION

This treatise on: “Divide and Rule” as the causality of the failure of African leadership may help us to understand the frequent crises bedeviling true governance in Africa. To make the phrase clearer for the understanding of the people, the Advanced learners Dictionary, international student’s edition, defines “Divide and Rule” as keeping control over people by making them disagree with and fight each other, therefore not giving them the chance to unite and oppose you together. This concept refers to a strategy which a leader employs to break existing power structures and renders small power groups less effective to challenge his authority. This tendency has robbed many governments in Africa of the finest officers and technocrats that would have served the governments in various capacities in obvious transformation of their economies. Within each unit of administration in any African country the story is the same, giving room to multiple of crises in African economies [1].

The success story of Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model with its advantages in providing reservoirs of experts existing in private sector for services and development cannot have any effect in a system where divide and rule game is encouraged. The African leaders think they cannot sustain themselves in office without adoption of “Divide and Rule” factor which is definite weapon for perpetuating themselves in power. Each leader savours the moment of this situation with obvious relish. The worst case scenario is that if this evil of “Divide and Rule” is allowed to deepen in African continent, many countries within the continent may become failed states. Since the interest of African leaders is apparently to perpetuate themselves in office through this factor, rather than providing good leadership, they will continue to run out of ideas in practicing real democracy. When a leader engages himself in this ruinous system of administration, he should be certainly disorganized and all his actions in governance become a comedy of errors in the process of making important official decisions. Sorry, this paper does not intend to cause African leaders any offence or headache but to point out why they are not getting it right in terms of governance and leadership [2].

In the 1960s when most African countries had their independence, the leaders in Government at their youthful age worked very hard to bring the continent to the next level in terms of development of infrastructure, agriculture, industries and what have you. They also sustained the aesthetic power of Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) as special places where divisional officers sit to make important decisions about the running of government. Barely twenty years of independence of some of African countries, Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) which were ornamental and places of importance, were sold out to people who converted some of them to Hotels and other business ventures. In Nigeria, the

Corresponding Author: A.N. Maduegbuna, Department of Banking and Finance,
Tansian University, Umuaya, Anambra State, Nigeria.

actual sale of the Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) was the beginning of government collapse and bastardized version of government assets and property. What we are saying, if given a desired thought, is true but some leaders in government not only in Nigeria but in African countries may regard people saying this as those wearing the reverse side of a shirt. The interest of this writer is to highlight one of the reasons why democracy in Africa will be difficult to practice. Openness in governance has correlation with democracy [3].

In spite of the fact that African societies, according to their culture, value gerontocracy as a prerequisite to assuming important positions but it will generally be wrong to mix respect which is accorded to elders with ability of individual to perform in certain positions. The issue of divide and rule gains ground where elderly statesmen are still in government. This factor might help them to sustain themselves in positions of authority and cover their weaknesses as a result of age and other inadequacies. Divide and rule thrive where gerontocracy is accorded undue respect when people think age could be panacea to solving problems of management of economies in African countries.

In the past, average age of African leadership was (50), during which actual development was witnessed in African soil. The leaders were relatively young and they employed their youthfulness to develop infrastructural activities such as roads, railways, agriculture, industries and others. With the passage of time, the situation was reversed and started changing with attendant deterioration in governance with elderly people of the average of (80) gaining ascendancy in rulership in tandem with the earlier period when duties, responsibilities and functions were allocated to them not because of their fitness and ability to perform their job but in line with culture. With this state of affairs, it became obvious that during youthful age of African leaders, they performed better than their counterparts in governments at their old age, looking at development indices. In African culture, the custom of treating elders with respect and reverence is good but using age to determine allocation of duties, responsibilities and functions may not lead to any development. As a matter of fact, age exploits virtues of divide and rule, if any, to sustain leaders in office. This paper is not quarreling with quality assurances of good governance produced by elderly people in leadership but quarrels with a situation this factor is ubiquitous where elderly people are ruling in governments. Younger people with ideas are likely to ignore the practice of divide and rule in their administration and move forward with creative minds to render required services to the people. In the recent times, it is no longer the elders only that use the divide and rule factor in governance but also younger leaders in politics with nothing to offer exploit this factor in order to retain themselves in power. In Nigeria for instance, leaders in governments at every level succeed in returning themselves to offices due to this factor which helps them to destroy their rivalries and gain ascendancy in the position of control. In so far as this state of affairs exists in political positions in Africa with attendant corruption, development in African continent is anybody's guess [4].

Karmic Nature of Divide and Rule: Divide and Rule could be likened to “transitional government” which gives way on arrival of popular government. A government that is an offshoot of this factor sounds like building a house on sand which could fall on arrival of strong wind. Based on this law, it shows that whatever bad or good that happens to the government, comes at the invitation of the government. If a leader comes on stream via this factor, the leader will never succeed because his government which is formed with mediocrity of individuals and falsehood will eventually witness a comedy of errors in governmental decisions and activities. According to wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, (2013), the factor of divide and rule is found in Politics and Sociology: the phrase that was used by leaders of old in order to gain and maintain power. This concept according to wikipedia, refers to a strategy that breaks up existing power structures and prevent smaller power groups from linking up. In the context of African leadership, this factor is being sought and unconstitutionally approved as a sure weapon that guarantees success in competitive post in government without regard to its evil effect of slowing progress in government business. Apart from the fact that divide and rule was the practice by Emperors and Monarchs in the olden days to gain control over their subjects, some schools of thought believed that this act of leadership was imported during colonial period which made their administration of African countries easier. For instance, the socio economic divide between Igbo and Hausa was traceable to colonial masters during the reclassification of regions for administrative purposes [5].

However, this reclassification brought conflict between the two groups which helped the colonial masters to consolidate power in the region. In the final analysis, this technique that helped colonial masters to administer some areas in Africa sowed a seed of discord which generated crises in the African continent, leading to various internal wars in the Region. Infact, the case of Southern and Northern Sudan was a case in point, because the access between the two regions was restricted by colonial masters from the word go, leading to accusation and counter –accusation from each other culminating into hatred between them even today.

The choice of this word Karmic law, is derived from Hindu and Buddhist religions, expressing the belief that what happens to one whether good or bad results from one's attitude in life (Dictionary of contemporary English, 2009) [6]. Given this law, any government that is in love with this technique of governance is bound to reap the ugly effect of it. It is, therefore, advisable that African leadership should ignore that technique of governance which brings about division and hatred in the act of governance.

As a matter of fact, the developed economies during the colonial rule, applied the factor of divide and rule in one way or the other. For instance, the success of administration of colonial masters in Nigeria, was largely due to indirect rule factor which made use of local Emirs, Obas and Chiefs. In all the policies as the instrument of government, by the colonial masters, the educated elite were consistently excluded from the machinery of government; a situation that had actually aggravated the discontent of politically ambitious intellectual people, leading to development of nationalism. Even when the educated elite were excluded from the main stream of government, various parts of colony were administered on separate lines. In confirmation of this, the British colonial government applied different policies in the development of the North and South of Nigeria. Before the arrival of colonial masters in Nigeria, there were people who were regarded as traditional authorities and the society had painstakingly introduced law and order as well as safeguards that enthroned checks and balances for the governance of people, but at the installation of the new administration by colonial masters, in line with their perceived system of divide and rule, they broke the old laid down system and injected new order that granted Chiefs, Obas and Emirs excess powers which they did not possess under traditional system, leading to autocracy on their part in exchange for their cooperation. In line with the theory of government as advocated by colonial masters, these local authorities started to rule along regional lines in fulfillment of their masters' directive. Divide and rule as the name implies, may connote introduction of dichotomy in administration for the purpose of achieving interest of people in governance. In the colonial period either under British Government's indirect rule method or French government assimilationist policy, divide and rule factor was in operation. For instance, under French assimilation principle, preferential treatment was usually given to educated Africans who were regarded as French Africans while uneducated elite were relegated to an inferior status. On either side whether the French government granted full French citizenship to educated elite or the British Government carefully tried to dodge the participation of the elite in government, both system, in the main, amounted to divide and rule in order to achieve their purpose of colonization.

In fact, having gone through the literature, we should have observed that divide and rule system of administration could not be said to be of recent origin, rather it was an imported system of administration during colonial period. As a matter of fact, divide and rule could be said to have slowed down development in many African countries. The leaders to whom offices were handed over, by colonial masters, embellished the tenets of divide and rule, having seen it as a sure way of perpetuating themselves in office. It has crept into formation of governments in Africa; a situation where "winner takes all" is encouraged without looking for qualified hands in managing government business. In the early stages of governments in Africa, the enlightened Africans saw the need for educated people to have say in government. In deed it was the roles of enlightened Africans that facilitated the granting of independence by British government to British West African colonies. In the words of Francis Adigwe:

Educated Africans like Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Awolowo, Chief H.O Davis, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and Casely Hayford did much to lead to the nationalist struggle. The British government would not have been willing to grant independence to its colonies in Africa if it had not been convinced that there were enlightened and responsible leaders to control the governments of these countries.

The point this paper is trying to emphasize is that the educated elite dominated the struggle and by extension, if the educated elite in the case of British colonies were integrated into the main stream governments in the colonies, African countries would have developed over a number of years and generally the countries under the British government in the colonial period, would have developed beyond the level we are, even in this modern government.

During the early period of African struggle for independence, the educated people knew that when the war would finally be won, filling in people in governments would consider knowledge, essentially qualifications to be able to understand the meaning of government and what governance demanded in the true sense of it. In line with this anticipation, when Nigeria got her independence, the people in the main stream of government were highly educated. Even though the divide and rule method was not erased completely in governance but it was not given a front-burner. From 1960s to early 1980s, most of the leaders in government in Africa were virtually young and educated and they embraced governance, applying their knowledge, intelligence and qualifications without resorting to divide and rule method. In Nigeria, during the period in question, development of infrastructure, industries and agriculture was by leaps and bounds, making the country self-sufficient in food. The country enjoyed railroads, good roads, water transportation, dams, developed seaports, uninterrupted electricity and water supply and what have you. However, at the end of military rule in the country, so many sectors had been destroyed; leading to bastardization of government assets and property. Government Reserved Areas, (GRAs) for instance, were sold as if government was coming to an end. After this scenario in successive governments in Nigeria, divide and rule was sustained and this time in more sophisticated manner in such a way that uneducated people can find themselves in juicy positions provided they are part and parcel of government in power. In Nigeria, political parties toe the line of fielding candidates in positions of trust, equivalent to American "spoils system" in the past, where consideration is no longer given to qualifications, integrity and fitness to occupation of positions in government [7].

Impact of Divide and Rule on the Society: Faced with the evidence of colonialism in Africa, a "balance sheet" of colonialism could be drawn where "credits and debits" could be placed for a balanced statement over the activities of colonial masters in Africa. Even though colonial masters saw African continent as "Goldmines" considering the resources in Africa soil, the benefits derivable from their rule, according to some school of thought, overwhelmed bad aspects of their administration while some others saw it directly as exploitation. Our assumption is that introduction of divide and rule by colonial governments might not be to ruin the economies of Africa, given premium placed on education, through missionaries; it could apparently be a diplomacy to exclude those they thought might be obstacle to their administration. The argument suggests that, on the one hand, there was exploitation but on the other, colonial governments did much for the benefits of Africans and they developed Africa. They built railroads, schools, hospitals and the like. To some people, however, the sum total of these services was amazingly small, Walter Rodney (2009) [8].

This paper tries to draw distinction between divide and rule introduced by colonial governments from French people on the one hand and the nature of divide and rule in the running of administration in African countries, by British government on the other, after independence. The former was adoption of the principle of assimilation which drew people closer and the latter might be indirect rule which had connotation of divide and rule in Africa. In India for instance, the largest democracy on earth, the country's forefathers divided the country for ease of administration. Places like Singapore and Pakistan were in India but due to difficulties arising from overpopulation, the country was partitioned. In some cases, division could come if people so desire for ease of administration and so this division could not be likened to a situation where divide and rule could be enthroned for the purpose of grabbing position or consolidation of power.

In Nigeria, for instance, application of divide and rule has permeated into different institutions ranging from grassroots governments to Federal Government including other government agencies. In Nigeria, different levels of government both in States and Federal could not boast of having enough technocrats and other experts in government due to either that you do not belong to the party in power or you did not contribute to the upkeep of the party and should therefore refrain from nearing the corridors of power, no matter your credentials. The machinery of government keeps on collapsing both in States and Federal levels due to application of the technique.

In Nigerian higher institutions of learning, positions of vice-chancellors are fast becoming political, paving the way for divide and rule bad karma. Your future growth in the university is subject to your stand in the institution. If VC happens to be a politician, merit is thrown overboard and whoever supports him is guaranteed bright future whether eligible or not. The effect is that this negative strategy of governance is deleterious to the growth of education in the country. Instances of this method of governance have affected successive governments in the country where associations or professional Unions with good labour bargains have been either proscribed or gagged in order to break their synergy or ability to challenge government. Divide and rule could easily manifest itself by government dismantling the associations and foisting upon an unpopular candidate in place. There is, infact, no limit to which this technique could destroy governance both at institutional or governmental level.

While people cry obviously in the country over the low level of educational standards, the heads of various institutions from Primary to University level should watch this situation and see that they do not lend hands in pushing quality education into a precipice by adoption of divide and rule game which ushers in mediocrity into the system. Divide and rule which is the product of corruption has affected African people and their governments. No government in Africa is stable due to the factor of divide and conquer which is already a jinx affecting governmental activities. African leaders have seen the system of administration as a sure way of perpetuating themselves in office. There are some African leaders who have carried endless reforms, tampering with their constitutions, organizing killings of opponents, with a view to remaining in office. This action invariably denies credible and qualified staff from serving and making their inputs into the running of government of their fatherland. This state of affairs has destroyed the machinery of government and injected mediocrity into management of governmental affairs. It is high time African countries started looking inwards to examine why most of the governments in Africa are sliding into failed states. Apart from massive demonstrations from the Northern Africa, in recent times, some people suggest violent revolution as a means of addressing the problems, while some other fearful leaders advocate for taming revolution; a situation where persuasion could be applied, to avoid the shed of blood.

The Colonial Policy of Divide and Rule: This issue now is not whether the policy of divide and rule was a predetermined system by colonial governments or the system that was adopted by circumstances, but the essence is simply to examine whether the people profited by it. In the words of Nnoli: (1978) [4], “the British colonial administration encouraged communal sentiments among Nigerians. It seized every available opportunity to spread the myth and propaganda that they were separated from one another by great distance, by differences of history and traditions and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers”. By this statement, it boiled down to the effect that most of the problems being faced by governments of modern day in Africa, were apparently planted by colonial masters. In Nigeria the colonial masters were accused of using this technique of administration to widen the social distance among the communal groups in the country. The colonial masters told the Northerners that the system being introduced by them had upheld the system which their forebears evolved from generations to generations.

In summary, whatever benefits, if any, that were accruable from this system of government, were, so to say, cancelled by the division which it engendered through the socio-economic divide between the Southern and Northern Nigeria.

Recommendations / Conclusions: In the true statement of facts, governance in Africa has had a lot of hiccups affecting growth, due to divide and rule factor which has robbed African countries true leadership. In Nigeria, during the death of Chief Awolowo, it was Dim Odumegwu Ojukwu, who dubbed the elder statesman as “the best president Nigerian never had”. Due to one thing or the other that is connected with politics, good leaders are always not allowed to rule. Some times, it may be a divide and rule experience or failure to belong to the party in power. African countries should endeavour to reverse this system in order to maximize enormous resources in African soil. In Nigeria, National conference was convoked to discuss various problems in the country, so divide and rule which is an unconstitutional implicit method of governance, must feature in the discussion, in order to remove it completely as an implied element of governance. Any country in Africa that will be first to remove divide and rule in its polity will be first to see peace and growth.

African continent has potential for growth if the right form of government that suits its environment is in place. The leaders in Africa should respect the constitution and abide by the rule of law. The nations slide into failed states if leaders see themselves as being above the law. Discipline is necessary to help the leaders respect the tenets of democracy.

REFERENCES

1. Adigwe, Francis, 1985. Essentials of Government for West Africa, Ibadan, University Press Limited, pp: 380.
2. Mba, C.C., 2006. Political Theory and Methodology, Nimo, Rex Charles and Patrick Ltd.
3. Morel, E.D., 1969. The black man's Burden, London, Modern Reader Paperbacks.
4. Nnoli Okwudiba, 1978. Ethnic Politics in Nigeria, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, pp: 112.
5. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2013. www.wikipedia.org, divide and rule, accessed in 2013.
6. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, International Student's Edition, 2010. U.K Oxford University Press, pp: 427.
7. Okoli, E.F. and C.F. Okoli, 1990. Foundations of Government and Politics, Onitsha, Africana First Publisher Limited.
8. Walter Rodney, 2009. How Europe underdeveloped Africa, introducing by Vincent Harding, Abuja, Panaf Publishing, pp: 246.