



# **POWER, POLICY & PROGRESS**

**A COMMENTARY ON GHANA'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

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*“The theme of my argument clearly suggests a linkage between the state of Ghana’s socio-economic progress and the pattern of thought that has influenced public policy in Ghana within the last fifty-seven years.”*

While plying the motorway on the Accra-Tema side of traffic one Monday morning, I flipped through radio channels searching for inspiration in order to change the texture of what was clearly threatening to be a morning of blues and stone-cold lethargy. Many things had happened leading to the week ending August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014 that had power to evoke a spectrum of emotions in any attentive observer; emotions that ranged from bewilderment and amusement to confusion and hopelessness. As I continued my scanning spree, fate will have my restless misery rewarded with yet another news item of the Vice President of Ghana, putting boots on the ground to champion a charge against garbage dump sites from Agbobloshie to Kokomlemlé. “Lord Jesus, please give me good news today”, I desperately pleaded, all the while contemplating the nexus between my private stress and public policy. The discussants, bawling through my radio frequency were debating whether Vice President Amissah Arthur’s action were to be interpreted as micromanagement, leadership by example or just another example of leadership failure at all levels; the political executive, local government, the church, traditional leaders and at community level. Being a student of critical thinking, my thoughts raced to inquire of all known theories and models in a bid to contribute intelligently to this important policy debate. In the wake of cholera outbreak, sanitation seemed to be the immediate flash point of this debate, however,



upon deeper inquiry, other development gaps that have erupted throughout our national experience in the area of education, energy sufficiency, and food security amongst many, seem to provide an inkling into a curious phenomenon that I have termed, leadership bankruptcy.

### The Leadership Lacuna

Leadership has become yet another platitude of management literature that is bundled around with little appreciation for its true character as a complex construct and strong catalyst for political change, economic transformation and social progress. One hardly needs to closely examine our civic interactions at any level to draw a conclusion consistent with the refrain that “our attitude as a nation needs to change.” Indeed the Vice President was reported by the Daily Guide’s online news on August 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 as having affirmed that view point, asserting that “as a people, we have to manage ourselves and our sanitation. Attitudinal change is required. We have to make it a sustainable process on the part of the individuals themselves.”

So what really is the problem? Why is leadership capacity and effectiveness such an elusive virtue at levels of our social and political life? How do we begin the process of reform that could be embedded into all relevant aspects of our national experience? I have wrestled with these fundamental questions, given its far reaching implications for public policy, quality of governance and the soundness of our collective psyche as a people searching for true freedom and economic advancement. This article therefore, is an invitation to a place of solemn introspection in order to challenge the state of the Ghanaian mind as reflected in our political leadership, the materialistic church, the dysfunctional university system and a youth demographic that is slipping fast into an abyss of moral decadence and social media addiction. In the wake of deep factionalism in the New Patriotic Party (NPP), policy credibility issues with government, and the proliferation of churches without commensurate social transformation, it is a critical imperative to have this discussion now, in order to provoke a renewal of commitment to growth and collective responsibility. For the purpose of this article, I find it quite useful, the trait-based approach to leadership definition since it provides insight into the attitude and behavioral component of leadership. Within a democratic context, essential leadership qualities needed for good governance may

include, but not limited to - responsibility, strength of character and emotional maturity. Fiscal discipline, timely policy adjustments and human rights protection are all undergirded by these essential competencies.

### Cultural and Cognitive Gaps

Part of conducting any root cause analysis of a problem, is to start from the symptoms and trace back to the roots by following or using the why-why fishbone approach. It is a well-known principle in psychology that our words and actions betrays our belief and assumptions about important aspects of life. In subsequent paragraphs, I have recapped some views of certain highly placed personalities who I deem to have sufficient decision-making authority in their respective fields of endeavor. My goal in rehashing such publicly reported views, is to demonstrate this claim of words and actions expressing belief and assumptions, as a basis for making an argument for change. The theme of my argument clearly suggests a linkage between the state of Ghana's socio-economic progress and the pattern of thought that has influenced public policy in Ghana within the last fifty-seven years.



The subsequent comments are expression of views on a broad range of policy issues:

#### *On Sanitation*

The Daily Guide's online portal reports the following on August 6 2014, under a captioned, Veep Joins Sanitation Exercise in Accra.

“Asked whether the country is in full control in meeting the Millennium Development Goal 5 by 2015 which impress upon all countries to ensure the well-being of its citizens by improving upon its sanitation, the Vice President could not state clearly whether or not the country would meet the challenge but was rather quick to say that “the question is unfair to government.”

### *On Corruption*

Former President John Agyekum Kufour in responding to allegations of corruption is reported to have averred that “corruption started from Adam.

### *On Government Succession*

Former President J.J Rawlings is reported to have made the following comments during the launch of Nsawam Food Cannery that was bought by Carridem Development Company (CDC), a limited liability company, for 2.9 billion cedis in 2000.

“Had the government continued from where we left off in 2000, quite frankly, I don’t think Ghana will be in the condition she is today.”

### *On WASSCE Results for 2014*

CITI FM through their online portal reports..., “A Deputy Minister for Education in-charge of tertiary, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa has described the 28.11 percent pass rate in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination WASSCE as one of the best performances by Ghanaian candidates in the last decade.”

... “meanwhile, the Acting Director of the Ghana Education Service, Charles Aheto Tsegah also told Citi News that it is not automatic that all students who graduate from the Senior High School (SHS) would make it to the university.”

### *On Intra-party Conflict*

The Crusading Guide newspaper reported on August 22, 2014 that Dr. Arthur Kennedy, a leading member of the New Patriotic Party, blamed Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo for the current trend of in-fighting the party was experiencing. According to Dr. Arthur Kennedy, “It is obvious, upon reflection that these hooligans – from [President] Kufuor’s house, through Tamale to the party headquarters are being organized, encouraged, inspired and motivated by or on behalf of the 2012 Presidential Candidate, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo.”

There are many more instances of such views, skewed in my view, from academia, religious circles and regular folks, which essentially point to gaps in thought patterns and character weaknesses which are inconsistent with the pre-requisites of good leadership.

### So what is the Problem, Really?

In all of the aforementioned instances, there may be arguments to support their validity or even the speaker's democratic rights to take those positions, and yet all of these instances, without exception have done very little to provide sustainable solutions as a way of addressing the policy questions that they sought to comment on. That, essentially is a common denominator of leadership purpose; problem solving. A common thread in all of these comments (essentially policy-related) is the woeful lack of personal responsibility being taken for events and situations, be they crises, ill-conditions, losses and the like. Competitive pressure and fear of ceding ground to opposition are few of the destructive influences that is re-defining responsibility as democratic virtue into a strategic nonsense. In order words, there is no virtue in taking responsibility if it devalues one's political power, dents your credibility and compromise your electoral fortunes. I am truly convinced, that every one of these examples presented a unique opportunity to demonstrate remarkable leadership by accepting responsibility and saying "yes, government has not done well in this area, but we have recognized our gaps and limitations and have renewed our commitment to solving this problem by taking these specific steps; a, b and c.

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President Kufuor's administration, notwithstanding the remarkable performance record, missed it on corruption. Former President Rawlings, notwithstanding his record on national security and rural development, I will argue, also missed it on the same count and more. The policy response of current political administration to exchange rate depreciation, fiscal deficit and political governance, to name a few, is suggestive of the proposition that the lessons of Rawlings, Kufuor and the Mills administration has not found its way into the policy cycle. The urgent imperative for a new kind of leadership in our politics cannot be overemphasized.

## Final Thoughts

Contrary to the popular refrain, that too much politics in Ghana is our problem, I am persuaded beyond any shred of doubts, that politics is the solution. My reasoning is simple; politics is a higher order discipline and practice, out of which social order, secular peace and economic opportunities evolve. A rational and growth-centred political philosophy is a major step in creating a free and just society. If our politics is right, all else will fall in place. But our politics cannot be right, if civil society actors refuse to, or are lukewarm about engaging the political establishment to demand reforms and the exercise of Godly values and responsible leadership in the administration of our common wealth.

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