

**Transformative Leadership, Key to Sustaining  
Political Power in The Gambia.**

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**Preamble:**

This article attempts to capture the Gambia's political leaderships since independence. It unveils a brief summary of the failures of each of republics from Sir Dawda's time. Above all, it defines the major leadership failures and identifies a number of recommendations with significant moral lessons to learn from, for the incoming Leadership after the 2021 election. The document clearly postulates that going forward, no leadership will survive political power if it fails to deliver for the masses. I encourage everyone especially stakeholders to fine time to go through it with an open mind. I am very much convinced that you will find it interesting and useful.

**Vol. 1 Gambia**

**Dated: 11/2021**

Only a few people will doubt the reality that the people of the Gambia have been truly patient for over half a century since its independence in 1965. Gambians have witnessed the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, Yahya Jammeh and the last five years of Adama Barrow era of political leadership without much to be desired, really. Without being ungrateful to anyone of them, each one has undoubtedly done some little things that helped to push the Gambia's economic development agenda forward, but at an inconsistent pace with both Global and continental trends. It was narrated that Sir Dawda's era was branded with stability and democracy, but with inadequate development outcomes that would have changed the lives of ordinary Gambians. We have witnessed Yahya Jammeh's epoch, profoundly characterized by brutality, repression and inconceivable violation of human rights. *A friend of mine once told me in a conversation, that anything evil that Yahya Jammeh did not do, he must have forgotten to do it.* To the extent that I despised his leadership style, I willfully refused to attend my MBA graduation ceremony hosted by the UTG in 2013, primarily to circumvent shaking hands with him. He has unfaithfully and selfishly been meddling with the foreign exchange market at all levels, aided by a clique of egoistic business tycoons, throughout his tenure as president. This often resulted to unprecedented exchange rate volatility with severe consequences on both the banking system and the domestic currency visa vie the major traded currencies, such as EURO, USD and the GBP. I believe I can tell this story better, because I was a Head Treasurer of my bank and having direct relationship with the regulator at the time. All of these human and financial crimes committed by Yahya Jammeh, did not only dent his political leadership but also dwarfed his development efforts.

Current President Adama Barrow, was voted into power with great hopes, after 22 long years of painful dictatorship. So far, it has been most disappointing in the minds of most Gambians both at home and abroad. The reason is that, when Gambian broke away from Yahya Jammeh's repressive political era, everyone thought the ideal time has arrived for the country to move forward with the Coalition 2016 now in power. Little did Gambians know, the danger of putting a man in political power with limited knowledge, and understanding of global issues. For me, it's like everyone underestimated this reality, or were perhaps unconscious of the implications at the time of making the political choice. Make no mistake about it, knowledge is truly the superpower of time and space. It is the power that cannot be stolen or disposed-off; and notably, no one can disregard it without consequences. For society to progress, it must be led by people who know, and I am not the one saying this but because it's a known fact. That is why today, we are all paying the price of that poor decision taken in 2016. I say this with no disrespect to the honorable men and women, who were architects of the coalition five years ago. For avoidance of doubt, I somberly celebrate all of them and thank them for their action which helped to throw the dictator out of power at the very least. Though it helped to remove a dictator and restore democracy, Adama Barrow's regime can better be characterized by a proliferating corruption and insensitivity to the agenda of the change, to the displeasure of every Gambian, sure to speak. Over the last five years, he visibly became more preoccupied with self-glorification and means of keeping himself in power beyond the three or five years, than the priorities needs set in the agenda of the change. Thus, his

focus began to shift which greatly constrained his leadership's efforts for effective life changing economic growth for the country. Under his leadership from 2016, the unity that Gambians yearn for diminished. In fact, our society became even more polarized than ever before, condensed on tribal and regional lines, regrettably.

### **The resources and what the incoming leadership must do with it?**

It is now apparent that the Gambia has suffered from disgraceful leadership failures over the past several decades since independence. But what are we prepared to do about it now? What must the next leadership do differently to set the country on an economic life changing trajectory for the citizenry? What leadership values must we embrace to achieve what we want as a country, going forward?

These are not easy questions to answer. But what we know is that, the Gambia has one of the smallest economies in the world with great potentials. We may not have precious metals like Gold and Silver for now, but we are blessed with abundant sunlight, the river Gambia, the Atlantic Ocean with beautiful beaches, large area of fertile arable flat land for cultivation and animal husbandry. Alongside all these material resources, the country is also blessed with tens of thousands of university graduates, capable of providing the human resource required for stirring the country forward on a high speed lane. A significant number of these graduates have their Masters and PhDs in diverse fields of study from various universities, the world over. The youth population of the country is said to be over 60%. We have both technical and vocational institutions delivering qualified youthful personnel ready to transform the country for better. Given all the above material and human resources, the Gambia has no real justification whatsoever, for its lack of swift economic transformation. It only requires a good political leadership to organize these resources for take-off. Having realized this fact, let me rush in to the discourse of what the issues are and the fitting remedies, as I see it, for the country's effective transformation for a better Gambia.

### **The Leadership issues that must be dealt with**

Our daunting challenge has ever remain as the lack of a good political leadership. It is my personal believe that, we are where and who we are, because of our leaders. This is because we have empowered them for the sole purpose of taking decisions on our behalf. The question we must ask our leaders when in position of leadership is; *"Is leadership really a position of service or a position of privilege?"* The question has a simple answer and that is, service, obviously. However, our leaders' response to such a question has often been greeted with visible signs of hesitancy. Why? Because they are insincere to the electorate who put them into power. Our leadership and by extension African leaders, more often than not, assume power with an unspoken agenda. An agenda behind the seen, that ends up becoming the overriding and destructive element for their set priorities and the hope of the electorates. To succeed in doing this, they engage in burning bridges between the people, instead of building them, using the powers of selfish business

tycoons in the country, the very weak and dishonest intellectuals among us. It does not matter sometimes how much education one may have received. Most people in society simply accept their lives, they don't lead it regardless of their degrees. They only follow the flow because they have no real goals for themselves in live. These are people that merely leave their lives to make others happy. Our political leaders have always organized these short of men and women in our midst and easily use them to consciously exploit state resources and misguide the masses. The gap created by the economic shortage we all witness, is not entirely a result of the lack of sufficiency, it is merely the result of waste and the horrific greed of our political leaders and their manipulative business tycoons. The new unspoken agenda becomes the perfect source of the financial indiscipline and all other forms of economic crimes we all witness. They deliberately fail to serve the social contract signed with the people. What makes it appalling for me is that, it does not even challenge their conscience in anyway.

The question now is, can we continue to go on like forever? How long can we accept to go on in this way? How long? For the Gambia to move forward, it needs a political leadership that cares and sympathize with the ordinary man in the streets. Just like we tell our children at home and away from home every day, the success of any leader is firmly predicated on self-discipline. Proven motivational theories have shown that self-discipline is indeed the master key to real success. Financial indiscipline is a result of the lack of self-discipline and has always inconceivable wastage and leadership failures in all nations the world over. But one might want to ask, what I meant by self-discipline. Remember, in school back in the days, when our Head Masters or a Class Teacher uses the word discipline, what comes to mind is basic. That is, to behave oneself well, have respect for school rules and obey instructions both in school and at home. This is perfectly sufficient for children at that level of development and even beyond.

However, we have to be more expansive in our definition of self-discipline when it comes to leadership roles as we see it, particularly political leadership. Political leadership is critical to nation building and world order. It defines the leaders' ability to start tasks base of plans, and ensuring that the set tasks are completed. In order words, it is about living up to all the campaign promises. It is about concentration and commitment to duty with utmost sincerity to the electorates. Hardly do we realize that, when a leader starts a task and fails to complete it, he/she has failed to demonstrate self-discipline. The lack of self-discipline is a product of the lack of political will to adhere to their electoral promises. Additionally, this also leads to the leader's glaring lack of self-control. When our leaders lack self-discipline and self-control, they cannot follow laid down national plans that were carefully set for the benefit of the people due to some destructive temporary urges and impulses which ends up changing their priorities. In such a situation, they cannot follow through their own plans and strategies to win for the citizenry. At this stage, let me remind the readers about Yahya Jammeh's Vision 2020, Vision 2025, and Barrow's National Development Plan (NDP) among others, all of which ended up becoming mere blue prints. Once again, this explains the how and why our political leaders have often failed in the past. The only option then becomes nothing less than surrendering our economic

sovereignty to others, especially the more developed world who are more in control of their own minds. Our political leaders must have self-discipline first, to enable them enforce it among those they enrolled into the government for creating a winning team. If a leader fails to institute self-discipline and enforce it well, it limits his probabilities for success. It takes precedence over all others good things the leader may intend to do for the country. The beginning will always be very tough. However, it gets better and easier as the leader intentionally progresses with time.

We will continue to test our leader's love for the people by the degree of their political will to fight and eliminate poverty, social and economic injustices such as corruption, which handicapped millions of Gambians. Democracy means nothing for us if the people have nothing to put into their stomach. A declaration of war on poverty will be a sure way of fulfilling electoral promises and earning the peoples' trust and confidence. The Gambian society is so horrifically polarized due to the divisive politics which should worry any incoming leadership after this crucial 2021 election. The people will look on to the leadership to reunite them back on. I am personally not convinced that any politician will succeed if he fails to give prominence to the matter of reuniting our vastly polarized society. The leader must realize that in every tribe and in region that exist in this country, there are good men and women. The only way a leader can earn their real trust and confidence is by attempting to create an environment for those men and women to demonstrate their talents and needed skills for the Gambia to move forward. That's all we need.

### Role and effect of Social Media

The Social media has made the task of leadership anywhere ever more challenging. The incoming leadership whoever it may be, must be aware of this reality and must work with it. Social media has dramatically changed the way we communicate and there is no doubt about that. Just like any other country today, The Gambia is branded with the proliferation of news media from individual level, structured and unstructured, local and international media. Our customary forms of communication has ever been where in a conversations, you talk and I listen or the vice versa. But social media is not about talking and listening. It is about exposing and judging the other, in almost all its forms. It has the capacity to make you lose focus if you are not strong and careful. It will continue to intensify the bickering and bigotry, but you must allow your conscience to lead you at all times. To succeed as a leader, one must learn to leave with the challenges pose by the social media. You must never as a leader, allow those challenges define you at the end of the day. At times the challenges will test you to your very core. *But Nietzsche once said, whatever does not kill you, makes you stronger.* Remember, these are the moments when the leader must be composed. Your preemptive skills, your innermost strength and love for the people must be brought to bear. The bottom line is that, there is no alternative to doing the right thing. The leader must just do the right thing to survive the heat.

## Conclusion

Gone are the days when any political leader will have it easy with the electorates unless the results are visibly telling. It will no longer be business as usual. But I have tried to provide what I believe to be fitting political solution for any incoming leader. I am convinced if they are used, they will help minimize the greed and tendencies of self-aggrandizement due to some temporary urges that underpins leadership failures in most instances. Sometimes, it will be prudent for the leader to suspend his right to be right, listen to others with compassion and respect everyone. In order to ensure a life changing economic transformation for its people the next leadership must have commitment and concentration on the course and keep moving forward without looking back. It is widely said that what makes you different is what ends up making you stand out and special, and eventually successful. If our political leadership bears these in mind and at all times, I can guarantee you of not only the possibility of a life changing economic transformation, but a very swift socioeconomic change where every Gambia becomes a winner.