

## **IMPEDIMENTS TO THE GROWTH OF ISLAM IN EKITILAND, KWARA STATE: AN OVERVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impediments to the growth of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara State. Although Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions globally, its development in Ekitiland compared to other parts of the state has been significantly constrained by several challenges. The study identified key obstacles such as disunity within the Muslim community, inadequate Islamic knowledge, low levels of Western education among Ekiti-Kwara Muslims, religious practices, and limited political representation. Using historical, analytical, and descriptive research methods, the study revealed that despite Islam's presence in the region for over a century, its practice and institutional structures remain rudimentary compared to other parts of Kwara State. The findings further showed that these challenges have collectively weakened the influence of Islam and hindered its expansion. The study concluded by recommending strategies such as promoting unity, strengthening Islamic and Western education, revitalizing Da'wah activities, and increasing political participation to foster the sustainable growth of Islam in Ekitiland.

**KEYWORDS:** *Ekiti-Kwara*, Islam, *Da'wah*, Disunity, and Non-Muslims.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ekitiland comprises two local government areas, namely Ekiti and Oke-Ero, with the headquarters at Araromi-Opin and Iloffa, respectively. Both are among the sixteen local government areas in Kwara state. The people of the area are called Ekiti-Kwara people, and they are a sub-tribe of the Yoruba nation (Samuel, 1960). It is believed that the people of Ekiti-Kwara migrated from Ile-Ife in the same way other *Ekitis* migrated from Ile-Ife. The land covers an area of 918 square kilometres with a population above 100,000 inhabitants. Ekiti local government extends from latitude 7° 45' North in its Northern part to latitude 7° 45' North in its Southern tip and longitude 30° South and 5° East in the eastern reach. While Oke-Ero lies

between latitude 8° 5' 36" in the North and longitude 5° 8' 32" in the East (Mindat, 2023). Both local government areas share common boundaries with Ifelodun, Irepodun, and Edu Local Government Areas to the North and Ekiti and Osun States to the West, as well as Kogi State to the East. Also, to the South, the land shares common boundaries with Ondo State.

Ekiti-Kwara people are of the same origin as the people of Ekiti State. Many traditions have been ascribed to the origin of the Ekiti people. Some scholars believe that Ekiti ancestors migrated from “the Middle East to Ile-Ife, the (fabled) cradle of the Yoruba race from where they spread all over the place to form one of the largest ethnic groups in Yorubaland. While some sources believe that some of the present sub-groups of Ekiti were the aborigines of Ekiti, various traditions of origin also claim that many subgroups or towns migrated to the present location from other Yoruba areas at different times. This seems to receive popular acceptance among some scholars; more so if it is known that the “Ekiti dialect differs, in varying degrees, from one kingdom (town) to another (Femi, 2004). Ekiti-Kwara is a completely homogenous society, made up of different family units within households that were also within districts. All the districts within each town are headed by an *Oba* or king, whose chiefs are usually heads of these districts.

Kwara State is a Muslim dominated state. The growth of Islam manifests in all sixteen (16) local government areas except the Ekiti and Oke-Ero local government areas. Islam is backward in the land under review in many facts; religiously, socially, politically, etc. The paper, therefore, seeks to beam the searchlight on the reasons Islam is not thriving as it is the case in other parts of the state. The paper adopts historical, analytical, and descriptive methods.

## **FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST THE GROWTH OF ISLAM IN EKITILAND, KWARA STATE**

The growth and spread of Islam are apparent since its advent. The introduction of Islam to Nigeria is dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century through North Africa via the trans-Saharan trade route to the Kanem-Borno Empire (Balogun, 1969). Despite the long-standing presence of Islam in Kwara state, several challenges are facing the growth of Islam in Ekitiland. This paper aimed to examine the factors militating against the growth of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara, and to suggest practical solutions for the sustainable development of Islam in the area.

## **Disunity**

Islam canvases for unity among the Muslims. But this is not always the case in any given Muslim community. Ultimately, promoting unity among Muslims requires a commitment to dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect that transcends narrow sectarian interests or ideologies. Islam is a religion of peace and harmony. It is a religion of tranquility and brotherhood among people. Islam teaches unity, which is the most important ingredient for the survival of people on this earth. Islam has placed great emphasis on the development of brotherhood, love, respect, and prosperity among Muslims. Allah (SWT) says:

The believers are nothing but brothers, so make a settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah (SWT) that you may receive mercy. *Sūratu'l-Hujrāt* 49:10.

Unity gives power, strength, and courage in any community or group, and it becomes very difficult for external forces to crush, break, or harm any individual from the united community. People feel strong and secure in those societies and communities where there are fewer conflicts and more understanding.

The Messenger of Allah (SWT), Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.) said:

The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever [Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari 5665, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2586].

The above hadith shows the strong relationship among the Muslim brothers. Prophet Mohammad (S. A. W.) has drawn an analogy of brotherhood with the parts of the body, how Muslims need to take care of their brothers, and they must worry if one of them is in pain.

The Muslims in Ekitiland face intra-societal discrimination. For example, some of the Imams see themselves as rivals rather than as integral partners. Struggling for societal supremacy, the ensuing power struggles over who becomes the Chairman of the League of Imam (Quasim Abdulfattah, personal communication, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023) and elsewhere are defeating the ideal of a unified purpose. Rather than working together as a common force against their common “enemies,” they engage in clandestine fights while posing as friendly people.

In Oke-Ero Local Government Area, unlike Ekiti Local Government Area, where the chairman of Imams is rotational, one of the Imams decided not to relinquish the chairmanship position when his tenure expired. He claimed that the headquarters of the Local Government Area is situated in his town, so he should be the permanent chairman. He supported his claim with that of the Ekiti Local

Government Area, where the chairmanship is not rotated. There are 10 Imams in Oke-Ero Local Government Area representing all the towns in the Local Government Area. The appointment of the chairman is according to the longest serving Imam after the death of the immediate past Chairman of the League. This event led the 9 Imams to be against the Imam who refused to vacate the chairmanship position. The crises exposed the lapses among the Muslim community in Oke-Ero Local Government Area to the extent that a non-Muslim Oba had to interfere in the affairs of the Muslim community by supporting the Imam from his town who refused to relinquish the position (Quasim Abdulfattah, personal communication, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023).

The issue became more escalated and created division among the Imam, and it became one against nine. When the conflict among these Imams could not be resolved locally, it was reported to *Jama'atu-l-Nāsiri-l-Islam*, Kwara State chapter, to settle the dispute (Quasim Abdulfattah, personal communication, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023). The issue had not yet been resolved at the time of this research. The dispute among the Imams has also extended to their followers from various towns in the Local Government Area. The Muslims now support their Imam irrespective of who is right or wrong. In the past, the Muslims were united against the external forces of the non-Muslims socially, politically, and economically. But now, Muslims from each town are left to fight and defend themselves from the persecution of the non-Muslims individually.

The case is different in Ekiti Local Government Area. There were conflicts between the Imam of a town in the Local Government Area and his followers. The root of the dispute was that the *Imam* was accused by some local *mallams* of being a tyrant and lacking the etiquette of delivering a sermon on the pulpit every Friday. Whenever there was a conflict between the *Imam* and any of his followers, the incident became the topic of his sermon on the pulpit on Friday, to the extent of raining curses on the person with whom he had the dispute. This continued until one day when the mosque was filled to capacity, and the prayer was about to commence, the congregation deserted the mosque for his family to perform the Friday prayer. Although this issue was later resolved partially, many among the congregation refused to attend Friday prayer. In retaliation, the Imam ordered that the Ekiti Muslims Assembly should not be allowed into the town for Islamic propagation (Musa Aminullahi, personal communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023).

Although Islam strongly emphasizes unity, brotherhood, and cooperation as reflected in Qur'ān 49:10 and the Prophetic tradition likening believers to a single

body, the situation among Muslims in Ekitiland, Kwara State, demonstrates how internal leadership crises can undermine these ideals. Rivalry among Imams, competition for influence, and the struggle for positions have generated factions and hostility within the Muslim community. This dispute escalated to the extent that a non-Muslim traditional ruler intervened, revealing the depth of internal weakness and exposing the Muslim community to external manipulation. Similarly, in Ekiti Local Government Area, conflicts between an Imam and his congregation, coupled with the misuse of the Friday pulpit to address personal grievances, fractured the worshipping community and led many congregants to abandon *Jumu'ah* prayer. These tensions have weakened collective solidarity, diminished trust among Muslims, and shifted focus from addressing common external challenges to internal power struggles. Consequently, the once unified Muslim community now experiences fragmentation, reduced cooperation, and declining religious harmony, all of which contribute to the weakening of the bond of brotherhood and solidarity among the Muslims in Ekitiland.

### **Low Level of Islamic Education**

Muslims in Ekitiland do not have adequate knowledge of Islam. Thus, this is really affecting the practice of Islam among the faithfuls. It is so disheartening that the few Muslims in the area have inappropriate Islamic education. Islam places more emphasis on the search for knowledge. Islamic Education implies a thinking system, directly or indirectly, originating from the Islamic values. Islamic education is defined as the nurturing and formation of an ideal Muslim individual whose life is brought to bear on the Islamic ideal intellectually and mentally. The content and methods of the education of an ideal Muslim were closely bound by the ideology of Islam. Abu Salih precisely presented Islamic Education as the nurturing and preparation of the Muslim for his earthly and immortal life (Muhibbuddin, Abu Salih, Migdad, Yalgin, and Abdu'r-Rahman An'Nahlawi, 1982).

The growth of Islam in Ekitiland has been significantly constrained by inadequate Islamic education and the persistence of syncretic practices rooted in traditional Yoruba culture. Although Islam arrived in the area as early as 1882, formal Islamic learning did not take shape until 1989 with the establishment of Anwar-ul-Islam Arabic and Islamic College, leaving over a century during which Muslims had limited access to structured religious instruction. With only a few formal Islamic institutions available, many Muslims lack sufficient knowledge of essential Islamic doctrines and practices, resulting in widespread ignorance and

nonchalant attitudes toward religious knowledge. This weak educational foundation has facilitated the blending of Islamic beliefs with elements of African Traditional Religion, such as participation in traditional festivals, use of charms and amulets, and consultation of fortune tellers, all of which contradict the principles of *Tawhīd* (Muhammad, 2000). The continued influence of cultural practices that conflict with Islamic teachings not only dilutes the religious identity of Muslims in the region but also projects a distorted image of Islam to non-Muslims, undermining effective *Da'wah* and limiting the religion's expansion. Consequently, the combination of weak Islamic education, syncretism, and the dominance of traditional customs poses a major obstacle to the sustained growth and internal consolidation of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara State.

Traditional festivals are one of the legacies of African Traditional Religion; they are celebrated purposely among others to commemorate historical, cultural, and religious events that are of great significance to the community. These various traditional festivals aim at thanking the divinities and ancestors and soliciting their continued blessing and protection. The festivals are usually accompanied by elaborate rituals, sacrifices, and appeasements, which are referred to as *Irubo*, *Etutu*, and *Ipese*. The *Egungun* festival, for instance, symbolises the traditional belief in life after death. The superstitious belief associated with this festival is that those that died live elsewhere, and this is meant to appease the dead. Some Yoruba Muslims and non-Muslims worship through this festival in the area; this is syncretism (Dioka, 2001). Many of them have the same characteristics and rationale for their celebration. Participation by some Yoruba Muslims in some of these festivals, which have their root in *shirk* (associating partners with Allah (SWT) in worship), is an indication of syncretism. Syncretism is nothing but *Kufr* (Muhammad, 2000). Its presence affects the growth of Islam in that many Muslims may remain nominal who might not be truly faithful in the sight of Allah. More so, it also renders some Muslims to be hypocrites. This is so because they would have their allegiance divided between Islam and ATR (African Traditional Religion). This is bound to have negative implications for Islam in terms of population and strict adherence to its teachings and principles.

There was a significant decline in pupils' enrolment in Arabic and Qur'anic schools, as Western education now attracts most Muslim parents. The proportion of Muslim children attending Islamic schools has dropped sharply compared to those enrolled in conventional schools, with many parents increasingly preferring Christian

missionary schools over the few available institutions that combine Western and Islamic education because there are more competent teachers in Christian schools.

### **Low Level of Western Education**

The educational imbalance between Muslims and non-Muslims in Ekiti-Kwara has significantly hindered the growth and influence of Islam in the region. Historically, the reluctance of Muslim parents to enrol their children in Christian missionary schools created a long-term gap in access to Western education among the Muslim minority. Since formal education became the primary pathway to socio-economic mobility and access to white-collar employment, Muslims who avoided these schools were largely excluded from influential positions in government institutions and professional sectors. This underrepresentation weakened their voice, limited their capacity to advocate for Islamic interests, and reduced their participation in decision-making processes affecting their community. Additionally, the concentration of Muslims in low-income occupations, such as petty trading, hawking, and messenger positions, reinforced negative stereotypes and diminished the social prestige associated with Islamic identity. The limited exposure of Muslim children to modern literacy and administrative skills further constrained the development of strong Islamic institutions capable of responding to contemporary societal challenges. Consequently, the historical mistrust of Western education has contributed to the slow intellectual, socio-economic, and institutional growth of Islam in Ekiti-Kwara, leaving the Muslim minority less empowered to sustain and promote their religious identity in a pluralistic environment. Some Muslims believe that prosperity is attached to religion, which makes them attend crusades organized by the churches.

### **Political Weakness**

The growth and consolidation of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara State, have been significantly constrained by both educational and political factors. Historically, the reluctance of Muslim parents to enrol their children in Christian missionary schools resulted in limited access to Western education among Muslims. As formal education became the primary pathway to socio-economic advancement and white-collar employment, Muslims who avoided these schools were largely excluded from influential positions in government institutions and professional sectors. This underrepresentation weakened their socio-economic status, reduced their political voice, and limited their capacity to advocate for Islamic interests. Additionally,

Muslims were concentrated in low-income occupations such as petty trading, hawking, and messenger roles, reinforcing negative stereotypes and diminishing the social prestige of Islamic identity. The limited exposure of Muslim children to modern literacy, administrative skills, and institutional knowledge further constrained the development of strong Islamic institutions capable of addressing contemporary societal challenges.

The political marginalization of Muslims in Ekitiland was narrated by a former Muslim councillor who served between 2007 and 2010. He said that during that period, only two Muslim councillors were elected, and that was the first time in the political history of Ekiti local government area that the Muslims would have the highest number of representatives out of ten councillors (Hon. Ishaq Amodu, personal communication, 17th September, 2024). He further said that the attitude of the Muslims in the area towards politics is very poor. Many of them do not participate in politics. Sometimes a Muslim politician will be used to fight another Muslim politician who is a civil servant. He gave an instance of a political leader who decided to seize the salary of a Muslim in an opposition party because the latter did not belong to his political party. Thus, this will allow the non-Muslims to persecute the Muslims politically (Hon. Ishaq Amodu, personal communication, 17th September 2024).

Political marginalization has compounded these educational disadvantages, further hindering the growth of Islam in the region. Despite having historically held various political positions, Muslims remain underrepresented due to their low numerical strength, limited participation, and internal divisions within the community. This underrepresentation restricts access to public resources, such as sponsorships for religious pilgrimages, and limits their ability to protect constitutional rights or advocate for community interests (Alhaji Salih Abdulsalam, personal communication, 1st April 2024). External political interference, including decisions by party stakeholders from Ilorin (Abdulrahman Abdulrasheed, personal communication, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024), and the collaboration of some Muslims with non-Muslims against their fellow community members, have weakened collective Muslim influence. Consequently, Muslims in Ekitiland are politically marginalized, restricting their ability to exhibit God's consciousness in governance, promote community development, and strengthen the spread and institutional presence of Islam. Collectively, these educational and political challenges continue to impede the intellectual and religious growth of the Muslim minority in Ekitiland, Kwara State

(Alhaji Salih Abdulsalam, a member of Ekiti Muslim Assembly interviewed on 1st April, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined the major factors that continue to hinder the growth and practices of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara State, despite more than a century of presence in the region. The findings reveal that the practice and institutional development of Islam in Ekitiland remain comparatively weak when measured against other parts of Kwara State. The key challenges identified include internal leadership crises, which have significantly weakened collective efforts. Likewise, limited access to formal Islamic learning and the prevalence of syncretic practices undermine doctrinal purity and proper religious understanding. Furthermore, historically low participation in Western education has restricted Muslims from attaining socio-economic and political positions that could advance the interests of their community. These factors collectively contribute to the slow and fragile state of Islamic growth in Ekitiland. It is recommended that Muslim leaders and stakeholders should focus on unity through reconciliation and dialogue to resolve internal conflicts and promote development. Scholars and organizations are urged to strengthen Qur'anic and Arabic education for all ages to improve Islamic literacy and reduce misconceptions. Parents should be enlightened on the value of Western education, supported by scholarships and integrated Islamic-Western schools. Muslims in Ekitiland should engage in politics for fair representation, supported by leadership training. Finally, *Da'wah* efforts must be enhanced through peaceful dialogue, community service, and outreach to correct misconceptions and attract others to Islam.

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**EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: JUXTAPOSING BIBLICAL  
MOSES AND OSOFISAN'S MOREMI IN *MOROUNTODUN***

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**ABSTRACT**

The argument presented in this paper centres on exemplary leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria, examining the various factors that contribute to the nation's growth and development. The paper draws lessons from two distinct and divergent disciplines: the first is the Biblical Moses and his exemplary leadership style, and the second is the artistic and imaginative creation of a character by Femi Osofisan, one of Nigeria's leading voices in the literary domain. The character Moremi is said to have played a vital role in the history of the Yoruba people in western Nigeria. These two characters and their exemplary characteristics are the concern of this paper. Being two divergent characters, given that one is Biblical and the latter is artistic, their selfless leadership qualities, and how they contributed to the advancement and emancipation of their respective subjects in their struggles, are a huge lesson for Nigeria's sustainable development. Biblical Moses, for instance, was highly patient in his dealings with his people (the Israelites), who were disobedient and highly immoral. Despite their shortcomings and constant provocation, Moses could endure and return to God in prayer to plead for the forgiveness and the fulfilment of God's promise to them. Moremi, on the other hand, is said to be from the upper class of the society; as a queen, she selflessly renounced her affluence and good quality lifestyle to embark on a journey into the camp of the enemy to unravel her strength, magic and relate same to her people to liberate them from their oppressors the Igbos who were constantly molesting and killing her people, the Ifes. These two great characters and their contributions towards advancing the well-being of their people, amidst condemnations and trials, remained exemplary in their commitment to liberating their people. The paper concluded that exemplary leaders

like Moremi and Moses have the potential to enhance sustainable development if replicated in the Nigerian society.

**KEYWORDS:** Exemplary Leadership, Sustainable Development, Biblical Moses, and Osofisan's *Moremi*.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is seeking exemplary leadership that will foster peaceful coexistence and promote sustainable development in all spheres of human interaction. No nation in the world can ever make progress or develop without credible leaders who are willing to make remarkable sacrifices for the common good of the general populace. This exemplary leadership quality has been missing over the years in this part of the world and beyond. In every sane society of the world, and for development to occur, such a society needs credible leadership that showcases exemplary, all-inclusive leadership. The interplay here is the fact that the all-inclusiveness of all the sectors of society in the entire process of leadership and followership has the potency to deploy all governmental apparatuses and the sound manipulation of policies and programmes, which include proper management and allocation of resources to attain the desired level of growth and development of the nation.

Exemplary leadership provides the platform where issues concerning the growth and development of nations are properly addressed to fulfill the yearnings and aspirations of the people. This helps promote nation-building, peaceful coexistence, and the attainment of sustainable development. This is achievable where leadership is just and not adjudged based on tribe, religion, or region. Rather, credible and exemplary leadership creates room and opportunities for all citizens, beyond tribal, regional, and religious affiliations, to promote the indices that are responsible for aggregating sustainable development in all the nations of the world.

According to Obiozor:

Nigeria is a nation born in optimism in 1960 at independence, but has spent its 55 years living in a state of doubt and uncertainty. Within these years of Nigeria's independence, all kinds of analyses and conclusions have been inferred on critical issues responsible for what has become a Nigerian dilemma over nation-building and national development. This is because all countries compared to Nigeria since 1960 have made astronomical progress, developed relatively stable political and economic systems (1).

The description of the kind of development that has taken place in Nigeria since its independence and its sixty-five (65) years as an independent nation is at a low pace compared to other developing countries. This is largely based on failed leadership in the country, which has ignored areas that will benefit the nation.

In Nigeria today, there is unrest in virtually all regions of the country, such as kidnapping, farmers/herders' conflicts, rural banditry, armed conflicts, small-scale insurgencies, and terrorism, and so on. The fortunate or unfortunate thing is that Nigeria is immensely blessed with both human and natural resources, which could have launched the country as one of the world-class' developed countries like America, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, and a few others. Rather, the situation in Nigeria is worrisome as things have fallen apart and everything seems to be in reverse gear rather than progressing. This prompted Achebe's position about the state of things in Nigeria when he described the situation in his book titled *The Trouble with Nigeria*, stating that: "There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian air or water, the only thing wrong with Nigeria is the inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility" (1). Achebe's position and those of many others are the motivation for this paper. This paper centres on two personalities, the Biblical Moses and Moremi, Osofisan's creation in *Morountodun*. The reason for juxtaposing and analysing these two personalities is to note that both Moses in the Bible and Moremi in *Morountodun* were exemplary leaders who exhibited exceptional qualities that helped to better the cause of their people, as history records.

## **DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP**

Leadership within the Nigerian context has various definitions and explanations as to what it constitutes. Many scholars, diplomats, and artisans alike have viewed leadership from different perspectives depending on their understanding of what it means to them. Leadership, which revolves around the ability to organise individuals for the achievement of a common goal, is often marred by the leader's inability to provide the people with the needed representation for the effective actualisation of set goals and the attainment of sustainable development. Leadership roles and dispositions vary in given situations across all sectors of the country.

Leadership refers to the collective effort to govern or direct the affairs of a people. This concept highlights the importance of Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert's perspective, which views leadership as "the process of planning, organising, leading and controlling the work of organisational members using all available

organisational resources to attain stated organisational goals” (7). This definition supports the argument that strong leadership, often represented by a single individual, is essential for effectively guiding an organisation toward its goals and fostering sustainable development.

Similarly, Winston and Patterson, cited in Onolememen, provide us with another definition of leadership that:

A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more followers who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the followers to the organization’s mission and objectives causing the followers to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives (67).

This definition of leadership has given us a perceptible insight into the hallmark of the argument in this paper. Leadership is a broad term, and connotes the ability to lead people and ensure that they are truly represented. In doing so, leaders are expected to create the right atmosphere that enables followers to function very well.

Again, Teles takes the argument further when he conceptualised that:

Leadership is a paradoxical phenomenon; it is admired yet controversial, respected and often ridiculed, explainable but uncertain, relevant, yet blamed by so many. This seems to be particularly true when it is about political leadership. It encompasses those activities and interactions between individuals, which take place due to a particular setting of power, legitimacy or influence gap between them (126).

It is convincing that leadership is a broad entity with multiple layers, and this multidimensional nature can never be separated from the controversies that surround it in the truest sense of the word. Leadership is an integral part of humanity and existence in general.

Iyanya conceives leadership to mean “One’s ability to motivate and guide any group of people towards the attainment of a set goal or objective. The desired goal in some cases is determined by the group members, in other cases, the leader may be the one to identify such goals and then convince group members to follow” (104). Biden adds that “leadership refers to the commitment to a cause and determination to convince others that a cause is important” (cited in Teles 3). From the two perceptible views adumbrated above, it becomes imperative to note that leadership provides the leader with the opportunity to lead, guide, and motivate the

group into taking actions that will improve the well-being of the group. Allan Bass takes the conversation further and notes very emphatically that:

Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviour as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions (11).

Haiman says, "In the broadest sense, leadership refers to the process whereby an individual directs, guides, influences, or controls the thoughts, feelings, or behaviours of other human beings" (4). Ogali takes it further when he notes that leadership is "a process of a person in a position of authority inspiring an organised group of people to set and accomplish great and lofty goals in a dynamic social milieu to resolve continually merging challenges confronting the group of community" (154). The views of these three scholars are convincing enough to suggest that only exemplary leadership has the potential to control and check the activities of group members towards sustainable development.

## **CONCEPTUALISING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Conceptualising sustainable development within the context of this paper provides us with an understanding that no nation in the world can attain meaningful development if the apparatus or indices meant for growth are not properly harnessed. This is one of the reasons this paper seeks to examine exemplary leadership and link it as one of such indices that has the wherewithal to bring about not just development but a sustainable one. Sustainable development is the process of meeting human developmental needs by preserving and sustaining the resources for development. The concept of sustainable development gained popularity in the 1980s, driven by the desire to preserve the Earth and its inhabitants. At this point in the world's history, humanity was desirous to keep nature. This is why Amacker noted that sustainable development was a term first coined in 1980, which means to conserve the earth's natural resources (Amacker, "Sustainable Development"). The entire rationale for sustainable development is to ensure that human activities on the planet are protected.

Gess and Pidlisnyuk state that sustainable development depends on transparent, participatory, and accountable systems of government. Exemplary

leadership across society builds sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond. This is possible only if the principles of social living are followed. Leaders at all levels must provide responsible and fair representation.

In trying to understand what sustainable development means, a report by the United Nations, on the World Commission on Environment and Development, comes this striking definition of sustainable development to mean “The development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs” (86). Again, this paper becomes imperative owing to the subject matter it tries to address. This definition by the World Commission on Environment and Development strengthens the argument by noting that it is only when leaders are prudent and sincere in all the decisions they make and how those decisions affect citizens that the world we live in will begin to enjoy a better life.

Given that development is a positive change, which is propelled by the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of human existence for an improved lifestyle in every sane society, sustainable development becomes the pattern by which development in its entirety can be achieved. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable development, certain parameters must be arrived at. This is why Obiegbu makes bold to unravel some of those parameters with the submission that “making the necessary decisions now to realise the vision of stimulating economic growth and tackling the deficits, maximising the well-being of the citizens and protecting our environment, without affecting the ability of the future generations to do the same” (83). The reality is that for sustainable development to occur in any form or country, the government (leaders) needs to be exemplary and take proactive and productive measures that can promote the quality of life and the well-being of the people.

In putting the thesis on sustainable development together, this definition from Goteng and Randawa comes in handy, where these scholars were emphatic in their essay when they submitted that, “Sustainable development implies continual improvement of the living conditions of human beings in a particular community (society) from one generation to another” (199). This connotes that whatever beseeches a people affects their developmental processes. It is in the light of the foregoing that exemplary leadership is needed for the sustenance of all developmental apparatuses of a nation. In the context of Nigeria and its leadership peculiarities, it is incumbent on leaders to display exemplary leadership that will continue to improve the living conditions of citizens and, at the same time, promote sustainable development for both present and future generations.

## **EXAMINING MOREMI'S EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* is a thought-provoking piece that presents the ancient story of Moremi, the Ife Queen, who infiltrated the enemy's camp to study their secrets and transmit them to her people. In the dramatic representation, the playwright captures and presents lucidly the crisis that ensues in two folds. On the one hand, the masses are aggrieved with the upper class about the ill treatment they are being subjected to, and on the other hand, the war between the Ife people and the Igbos. From the playwright's creation, there is no reason for the Ife people to always be defeated by their enemy, the Igbo people. It has become common knowledge, and the Ife people fear for their lives. This continuous fight and humiliation that the Ife people suffer in the hands of the Igbos in Osofisan's creation breed the strong desire by Moremi, the queen mother, who is determined to infiltrate the enemy camp and save her people from further destruction and even extinction. This singular act brings out her exceptional and exemplary leadership character.

In the first instance, Moremi is determined to abandon her comfort zone as the Queen mother, who is highly respected by her husband, the king, friends, and the entire people of the kingdom. Moremi wants to embark on a journey to the enemy's camp to understudy their tactics and relate them to her people. This will bring victory to her people and improve their living conditions. She (Moremi) undergoes the purification rites as it is customary with the tradition of the people, and is ready to proceed on the journey.

Niniola asks if she is not afraid of the journey and her intended mission, but Moremi responds thus:

**Moremi:** Well...up till this moment, I never thought of it. Fear was... a faraway land. When I went to Esinmirin to make my pledge, my heart was as stout as the iroko tree. Right up till this last moment of my departure, when I held my son Oluorogbo to my breast and bade him farewell. The priest led me darkly into the grove for the appropriate ceremonies, and then, slowly, we danced past the shrine of my husband's grandfather, Oduduwa. You know, going from god to god, looking into their impressive eyes, then walking through the streets, past the throngs of silent forms, the people watching, immobile, I felt like one drunk on wine. I felt strong and light, the noon breeze was in my veins...but then, we arrived here, in the market, and the priest left. And I was alone, alone with these empty spaces.... (31-32).

The lines from Moremi are expository; they open the conversation on her doggedness to ensure that her people are liberated. The speech shows how exemplary she is; she even went as far as to hold her son Oluorogbo to her breast and bade him farewell. This is amazing, and it is only those with true leadership qualities who can sacrifice their happiness and that of their loved ones to bring positive change to their society and sustainable development. Moremi says that “perhaps, if we dance together again, like before, for a little while, perhaps Moremi will recover her courage” (32). This further justifies her willingness to ensure that the glory and victory of her people are absolutely resolved. And to achieve this, she pays the dreaded price of entering the camp of the enemy to learn their powerful prowess and relate to her people for counterespionage.

Niniola’s attempts at persuading Moremi to desist from her insistence to journey to the enemy’s camp proved abortive as Moremi tells her that:

**Moremi:** You talk of beauty and success and glamour! But what is all that to me when, one fine day, in the midst of the most splendid rejoicing, with the choicest meat in my teeth, without warning at all, the Igbos can arrive suddenly, locusts in the air, and eat everything up? That is the life our gods have provided for us after all our rituals and sacrifices. No, no! Nini, it is time for us to rise, to stand and square up our shoulders by our own courage, and stop leaning on the gods (33).

These lines portray Moremi as an exemplary leader who is never distracted by the good things of life. Moremi is viewed as a person who sees beyond the enjoyment; she would rather wish for a future where she can sit back and watch her people enjoy their lives without further problems. This conviction from an exemplary leader is the reason for Moremi’s actions to find ways to redeem her people from an impending doom.

To further justify her reasons for embarking on the journey to save her people from the constant attacks and humiliations from the Igbos, Moremi is propelled to question her friend Niniola:

**Moremi...**How many times already, we watched our festivals change into periods of mourning? When the Igbos set on us. Yet we have made sacrifice upon sacrifice till the earth is glutted with blood. Our priests have scraped their throats hoarse on incantations, and their latest ploy is to try and make us accept defeat as fate. Tell me, my friend, what more shall we do to learn that the gods will not help us? I have decided. Moremi shall be the clay which the race requires to remould itself (34).

These are reassuring words from a true leader who has the interest of her subjects at heart. Here, Moremi presents us with another dimension of what society faces in the name of overdependence on others. In her speech, one could discern how the people's dependence on their gods has not yielded any results for their survival.

Reassuring herself of the journey she is embarking upon, and having taken solace in her conversation with Niniola, her friend. Moremi utters these words confidently, "Come, Nini. Embrace me. I am glad you came and talked to me. Now, Moremi is no longer afraid. Let the women come, and we shall dance together, like the procession on a bridal night. Your doubt and your fear have strengthened me. I shall go, and I shall return" (34). True representation is that which removes personal self and fear but is motivated by the realities of the whole. In the same vein, Oronmiyon, Moremi's husband, tries to talk her into forgetting her quest to redeem the people. He tries to persuade her from embarking on the journey as he sneaks into her departure point to lure her back home by saying, "This is no time to worry about that. Come quickly.... I say, do not worry. I, Oronmiyon, I am the public opinion. Subjects only echo the ruler's caprices" (36-37). In response to his plea, Moremi questions him, "So, what about the mothers who will crowd to your palace tomorrow, as before, their hands empty again, those hands which only this morning held laughing children to their breasts? Ah, the thought that Oluorogbo, a prince born, can be stolen like that, stripped of his inheritance, and turned into a slave before nightfall..." (37). This tells the distinction between credible leadership and an unguided leader. Oronmiyon represents leaders who care less about the subjects that they represent.

In the development that follows, Moremi's husband, the king, sees reasons with her and describes her special qualities and her willingness to accept the reality of ending the mish-mash, which threatens the lives of his people, in the conversation below:

**Oronmiyon:** I know you are a woman of tremendous courage. Right from the day of your arrival, you became the real favourite of the royal chambers. Your beauty and your special grace, Moremi, wear the principal ornaments of the palace....

**Moremi:** (Teasing) And yet, my lord, only two moons ago, you took another wife?

**Oronmiyon:** Of course, you understand. Kings are like a mother bee. They must clothe themselves in people. The palace must fill its hives with nectar of female voices. That is how our fathers made it. But your place of eminence

was never in dispute, for your courage is strong, like our ancient rafter. Your name alone holds up with esteem the tottering roof of our besieged kingdom....I said to myself, echoing your words, that Moremi is the one person in this land who can succeed, if we are ever to find a counter to this mysterious power of theirs which turns my bravest warriors into omolangigi each time the marauders come upon us (36).

This further justifies our point in this paper: the masses should always identify and support leaders. This will help build further the zeal in the leaders to provide credible leadership for the people that they represent, and this will, in turn, bring about sustainable development. When leaders and their subjects are united, there is a likelihood of sustainable development, especially when leadership is exemplary.

Moremi is not happy with this development, and she laments as she reiterates her commitment to embark on a trip to end the rift. This is her lamentation and recommitment:

**Moremi:** Do you hear them, my Lord? The Igbos are drawing near, combing the streets and alleys, scaling our walls with ease. And you know what is happening as our story repeats itself. Already our men tremble by their household shrines, their prayers stuck in their teeth. Our warriors are beginning to babble like Obatala's misfits. The women are pissing shamelessly in front of their screaming children. Your priests are again going to pieces in helpless rage, their vaunted charms now impotent like Osanyin left in the rain... They are near, they approach, Kabiyesi, you can do nothing other than gnash your teeth. Once again, we are encircled, and the mysterious paralysis is beginning to spread in our veins like the stupor of majele. Nothing in Ife has been discovered to counter it: no leaf or bark, no grass, no ritual amulet, we are lost, lost... And yet Moremi is prepared to stake her life, to take the risk of captivity to be able at last to penetrate the enemy camp and learn their magic... (37).

All leaders, just like Moremi, must understand that what affects the people they govern affects them as leaders. To this end, Moremi's determination to go into the enemy's camp and understudy their magic. To reveal the same to her people for a renewed cause of action and survival of her people, presents us with the selfless and exemplary leadership of Moremi as a character in Osofisan's creation of *Moruntodun* as a dramatic text. Her exemplary quality in the play is a mirror and great lesson for leaders in our country to emulate to bring about sustainable development.

In her concluding remarks and regarding her decision to embark on the journey, Moremi says, "...Nobody sacrifices Moremi. Nobody! I have chosen, all by myself. Neither by the gods' cajoling, nor by your designing. Moremi chose and carries the burden upon herself..." (38). At the core of the play, the audience is made to understand that the Ife people found new ways to contend with the Igbos. The exemplary leadership of Moremi is what interests this paper, and it calls on leaders in our society to follow the path of leaders like Moremi to achieve sustainable development through quality and rational handling of events that concern the welfare of the people.

### **EXAMINING BIBLICAL PORTRAITS OF MOSES AS A LEADER ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

According to Moses' story as provided towards the end of the book of Genesis, how, on the invitation of Pharaoh and Joseph, his chief minister, to escape the severe famine in Canaan, Jacob and his sons went down into Egypt (Gen. 47:1-28). While factual details about this period are very flimsy. The immigration in Joseph's time may have been three or four centuries before the birth of Moses. Recent biblical scholarship is reluctant to claim factual precision for any of the narratives of the early monarchy. No record of the Hebrew exodus has been discovered in the Egyptian sources. However, the following historical reconstruction is still held by many based on the biblical text. Many centuries before Jacob's time, Egypt had been conquered by a pastoral Semitic race from Anatolia, the Hyksos, who brought the native Egyptians into cruel subjection.

Thus favoured, the Israelites "multiplied exceedingly" (Gen. 47:27) and extended to the west and south. At some time in the 13th century BC., the supremacy of the Hyksos in Northern Egypt came to an end and "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (Exod. 1:4). Under the new regime, the Egyptians began to despise them, and the period of their "affliction" (Gen. 15:13) began. They continued, however, to increase in numbers, and "the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). The native Egyptians regarded them with suspicion, and made their lives bitter with hard bondage, and "all their service was with rigor" (Ex. 1:13, 14).

Pharaoh's desire to weaken and root out the Hebrews is thwarted by the midwives, who secretly spare the male children. He instructs his people to drown all Hebrew male children in the Nile (Ex. 1:22). Moses is born amid this crisis, son of Amram and Jochebed, who already have two children, Miriam and Aaron. His mother conceals him for three months and then contrives to have her child adopted

by Pharaoh's daughter by placing him in a basket of bulrushes, and setting it afloat at the spot where the princess came down to bathe. The princess sends Miriam, who was standing nearby, to fetch a nurse. She brings her mother, to whom the princess says, "Take this child and nurse it for me", and so the name of "Moses" is explained ("Saved from the Water" Ex. 2:10).

On the other hand, according to von Rad, "There is a noticeable difference in the picture of Moses given by the Elohist." (1). The idea of Moses' office has changed, "Elohist has pushed Moses much more into the foreground as the instrument of God in effecting the deliverance." (2). Moreover, "Moses is now the miracle-worker, in fact almost to the point of being a magician." (3). Moses' importance is enhanced "by setting Aaron over against him.... Moses is God for Aaron, and Aaron the mouth for Moses, Moses is the creative initiator and Aaron only the executive speaker (Ex. iv. 16);" and (4) Moses is a prophet in Egypt, but "of a special type he is much more the prophet of action, taking an active hand in the events" (*ROTT* 1: 292–93). He now concerns himself with the condition of his Hebrew countrymen, and "looked upon their burdens" (Ex. 2:11). He makes common cause with them to break the yoke of bondage. One day, his indignation roused against an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand. But soon he finds that the deed was known and that Pharaoh "sought to slay Moses" (Ex. 2:15). So, Moses flees from Egypt to the land of Midian, the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula, and finds a home there with the family of Reuel, where he remained for forty years (Acts 7:30).

After an eventful journey in the wilderness, we see them at length encamped in the plains of Moab, ready to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. There, Moses addresses the assembled elders (Deut. 1:1-4; 5:1-26:19; 27:11-30:20), and gives the people his last counsels, which fill the entire book of Deuteronomy. Then comes his song of thanksgiving (Deut. 32), and its review of the marvelous history of what God has done through him. After blessing the tribes (33), he ascends to the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah opposite Jericho (Deut. 34:1), from where he surveys the land much farther than the eye can see. "God showed him all the land of Gilead, to Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, to the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, to Zoar" (Deut. 34:2-3), the magnificent inheritance of the tribes of whom he had been so long the leader; yet he him-self was destined never to enter the Promised Land. Nevertheless, Moses was distinguished for his meekness and patience and firmness, and "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." "There

arose not a prophet since in Israel like to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12). The entire representation in the above statements shows the life and leadership qualities of Moses in the Bible.

We understand that even though Moses was instrumental in leading the Israelites out of the land of Egypt to the promised land, he could not enter the land promised by God himself. Yet Moses gave thanks to God the Father as he watched his brethren enter the promised land with joy and thanksgiving to God, the maker of heaven and the earth.

## **CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD**

The challenges of exemplary leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria are enormous and daunting, with both local and global dynamics. The argument advanced in this paper is that sustainable development is possible even here in Nigeria, through strategic and exemplary leadership. The argument, therefore, has shown that if the country has credible leaders such as Moses in the Bible, whose concern was for the people God entrusted into his care, it is evident that countries can only witness sustainable development with such leaders as Moses and Moremi. Just like Moremi in Osofisan's *Morountodun*, who sacrificed herself to avert the impending calamity that was to befall her people (the Ife people) from their enemy, shows how exemplary leadership can save a people and bring sustainable development. In this paper, we have established that sustainable development is possible for any nation. But it can only be attained if leaders at all levels display exemplary qualities that advance fairness, equity, and equality for all citizens. This leads us to conclude that there is a need for a total change in attitude by leaders at all levels. Leaders should pay more attention to the yearnings and aspirations of the people to build trust and, at the same time, rebuild the lost confidence in leadership that has neglected the citizens over the years. This is the only way the country can achieve sustainable development.

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