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THE PRICE OF LEADERSHIP FAILINGS IN GHANA: PART I

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Summary

In Part I of what is intended to be a series, this article examines some areas of leadership failings in tackling our problems and the price Ghanaians are paying for these failings. It also offers some tips on how these failings can be addressed. It has to be said at the outset that the article is not about failings of any particular political leadership. It is about failings of all leadership—be they past or present.

Undoubtedly, Ghanaians are facing a multitude of severe economic and social problems. It is like all imaginable problems have come together simultaneously — *power interruptions, water shortages, poor sanitation, poor health care, violent crime, traffic congestion, poor public services, high cost of living and corruption*—to mention a few. It has to be said that these problems are not all of recent origin. Some may be, but others have accumulated over years and decades. Without doubt, however, they are begging for solutions.

There is a great burden on our leaders to address these problems. That is what we elect them every four years to do based on promises in their manifestos. It appears, however, that once our leaders get into office, they refuse or fail to deliver. This failure is attributable to lack of appreciation of the problems or incompetence or lack of political will. When we demand solutions to the problems, our leaders unleash on us a barrage of “all-knowing” communicators to play down the gravity of the problems and offer a range of excuses. This is not acceptable.

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In this first article, I want to focus on four of these problems: *sanitation, utilities, traffic congestion and corruption*. *Follow-up articles will look at other problems.*

My pet problem is *Sanitation*—particularly the filth in Accra. This not because I have any expertise on the subject, but it is just because I can't stand it! In this modern world, how can anybody justify the filth in the Central Business District (CBD) of Accra—with open and choked drains and refuse dumped all over the place? Is this not a gargantuan eyesore? Don't we see that it poses a major health hazard? Don't we have a sense of shame about what foreigners who visit these places may think of us? The legitimate question to ask is: where is leadership in all this? In particular, where is the AMA leadership? What will it take to clean the CBD? We are often told the reason is lack of money. But should we buy this? Why can't AMA be more innovative in mobilizing resources to tackle the problem? How about levying the people doing business in those vicinities? How about floating municipal bonds—with possible initial Government guarantee? They cannot just sit down and expect manna to come from Government or donors. We have able-bodied young men and women roaming the streets doing little to nothing. Why can't we gainfully employ them to clean the city and pay them for it? They will earn an income as a result and the city will be clean. So everybody gains. And to prevent littering in the first instance, why can't we provide litter bins at vantage points in the city so that people can dump their refuse in them? Taking hawkers off the streets will also minimise littering. All of this calls for leadership. If the people in charge of cleaning Accra cannot do it, then they do not deserve to be in office—pure and simple! And the higher authorities must take charge and

make sure that capable people are appointed in their place to discharge that responsibility

Let me go on next to *Utilities*. Erratic power and water supply have become part of our daily lives. It inconveniences domestic consumers and damages personal property. It disrupts industrial activity and erodes our domestic output. We are told that the problem has to do primarily with inadequate installed production capacity. But this problem has been with us since time immemorial. Even in his day, Kwame Nkrumah anticipated that power capacity will have to increase to meet the demand of a growing population. Therefore, he planned beyond Akosombo, including by starting the Kwabenya nuclear facility. The problem is that successive governments failed to invest in production capacity, which has now fallen far behind demand. We need to invest more in production capacity. But we cannot do this by relying on foreign loans alone. We need to look inward also to generate needed resources. And the first point of call should be the budget. We need to cut Government's recurrent expenditure drastically to free resources for capital expenditure. We cannot do this effectively until we trim the size of the public sector—including government itself and possibly Parliament, if it is not too late to do so. We also need to expand the tax base, reduce the spate of exemptions, and tackle tax fraud and corruption. Further, we need to think outside the box and exploit other innovative means of raising more development resources. Possible vehicles to this end include: issuing domestic development bonds, promoting remittances and tapping other diasporan capital.

Another excuse offered for erratic utility supply is inadequate tariffs. While, we understand that utility companies need to recover their costs to be able to provide uninterrupted service, we are also aware of the gross inefficiencies in the sector. These relate to: unacceptably high distribution losses, delinquent bills, thievery and corruption. Until the utility companies deal adequately with these inefficiencies, it will be difficult for them to justify their costs, which they want to recover through tariffs. The PURC has a responsibility to ensure that the utility companies reduce their inefficiencies to the acceptable minimum so that their justified costs can be reflected in higher tariffs. Consumers cannot accept to pay higher tariffs for inefficiencies clothed in the form of costs.

Next is *Traffic Congestion*. In the first place, many of Accra streets do not benefit its purported status as a “Millennium City.” Given the nature of the streets and the growing number of vehicles, traffic congestion is bound to increase if nothing is done about it. But there is a lot that can be done - little steps that can make a big difference. The first is to clear hawkers off the pavements. AMA has undertaken this exercise in the past only to relax—ostensibly out of political expediency—and to allow them to return. Why can't this exercise be sustained? AMA has enough underemployed staff to police and enforce the exercise. Another major obstruction on the streets is truck pushers. They have no right being on the streets and somebody should act to take them off. If you go to more civilized jurisdictions, you do not see people pushing trucks on the streets and obstructing traffic. All loads should be carried by approved vehicles. Another obstruction and nuisance that one encounters on the roads from time to time is broken-down vehicles. Why don't we make it mandatory for people to tow away their broken-

down vehicles within the shortest possible time. In default, the police should quickly tow broken-down vehicles to designated locations and surcharge the owners. Then you have the ubiquitous 'tro-tro' drivers who cause so much congestion and nuisance on the roads. Why not relocate 'tro-tro' stations off the streets where necessary? And, also, why not provide designated stops so that 'tro-tros' cannot just stop anywhere to drop off or pick up passengers. Then there is the problem of frequent traffic light breakdowns that also cause traffic jams. Here you have the power outages to deal with as well as quality and maintenance, all of which are begging for leadership. When we spend hours in traffic before reaching our various destinations, the nation loses millions of Cedis in productivity and output. Indeed, if we are able to reduce traffic congestion to the minimum, we would be adding at least 1 percentage point to our annual GDP (which is about US\$400 billion). This works out to about US\$400 million annually. I cannot imagine how many hospitals or schools this amount can build.

And last but not the least is the mother of all problems (or is it evils?)—Corruption. Corruption is endemic in the country. We do not need Anas Aremeyaw Anas to tell us this. We see and encounter it all around us — in DVLA, the police service, passport office, customs, immigration, the judiciary, lands registry, other ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) —indeed in almost the entire public service. Corruption enriches a few and impoverishes majority of the people. If we allow one or two people to pocket millions of state money in the name of judgement debt — or whatever — we impoverish millions of people who go to bed hungry on a daily basis, or cannot afford to pay for basic medication, or pay school fees, or afford decent accommodation. When our

leaders put up mansions in a short span of time, when we know that their official incomes cannot allow them to do that, they deprive Ghanaians millions of money that would otherwise have benefitted them. They lose public trust and confidence. And we need leadership to deal with it. The leadership must indicate its strong commitment to fight corruption. It must lay down the ground rules — the red line that must not be crossed. It must instruct the security, governance agencies and the judiciary to deal swiftly and drastically with corruption wherever it rears its head. We must see concrete actions in this regard. There is a need for several layers of corruption overseers and enforcers. A preventive mechanism would be to install an

independent corruption auditor in every public institution from central government to local governments—like the US Inspector-General system. EOCO and CHRAJ should be made independent and sufficiently resourced to investigate and prosecute corruption—at all levels without fear or favour. Ghanaian citizens should be encouraged to report corruption anonymously to these agencies without any fear of victimization and be rewarded as necessary.

The problems facing Ghanaians are crying for urgent solutions. We have every right to demand performance and accountability from our leaders. *“Boyz abre.”* I will be back.

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