

The Sokoto Caliphate and its Concept of Resource Management: Historical Reminiscences on Caliph Muhammad Bello

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Abstract

One of the motives that led to the execution of the jihad led by Shaykh Uthman Bn Fodiyo on the 18th century was the question of justice and the way and manner Hausa land was governed. The issue of honesty, justice and transparency were not in the dictionary of the leadership, particularly in their relation to one another. It was either Gobir or Kebbi fighting Gobir or Zamfara, cohesion was minimal even though there was one alliance or another among them, but the ordinary bore the brunt of the problems. It is against this background, the Sokoto scholars, preached, wrote, taught as well as fought the jihad. Muhammad Bello on ascension indicated the relevance of honesty and transparency, in his writings he also practically showed exemplary leadership in the management of human and material resources, throughout his twenty years of leadership. He is not only honest and transparent in leadership, but innovative in many ways. This paper will look into his human and material management of resources particularly as it pertains to education, agriculture, health together with sedentization of communities both nomadic and agriculturalists.

Introduction

Islamic revolution took place in Hausaland and beyond. The jihad was a continuous process. It was a legacy cherished by earlier scholars, centuries before the emergence of the Sokoto scholars. A revolutionary like Shaykh Uthman bin fodiyo and his lieutenants were inspired by an ideal. The *Tajdid* tradition went beyond religious transformation, but total transformation of the whole gamut of human life. Religion inspired the desire to seek for the ideal. However the leaders also desired to look at ways and means of realizing it, even if it is outside the province of religion¹. Thus they sought to do, because their religious grounding made it possible to look at other out lets, but with the aim of domesticating them to conform to the tenants of islam². The platform in which the jihad was waged, one of the architects of the jihad was caliph Muhammad Bello, in his writings and the conduct of his administration, which spurned over twenty years, he sought to create an idea Islamic polity, near to what obtained during the tenure of the righty

¹ Usman Bugaje. *The past as future: Some preliminary thoughts on the Sokoto caliphate*, p. 9

² Caliph Muhammad Bello in particular was innovative and abreast of what transpired beyond his domain, he wanted to match with time, his encounter with Clerpperton and the conversation that followed was a pointed to this

guided caliphs³, a reminiscences of caliph Muhammad Bello is what the paper intends to achieve, especially the concept of resource management, both human and material.

Other scholars like Mamman Tukur, Aliyu Jedo and many others trode the same path, they shared such noble conception of a society. Mamman Tukur in particular was so interested in improving the human and material condition of the Jama'a, like Muhammad Bello he wrote on field's that had direct bearing to their human and material developments, a case in point is his writing in the field of health, he sought a healthy society where, the natural instincts of man are satisfied so that his energy for religious and economic per suits can be realised to the full.⁴ Caliph Muhammad Bello left no stone unturned in order to achieve a cohesive society in which the human and material aspect find bance. Proper management of resources both human and material under his leadership proved relevance in improving the conditions of the Jama'a, by the time he died the human and material conditions of his people can in no way be compared with what obtained before the Jihad.⁵

This paper will discuss Caliph Muhammad Bello's concept of resource management in relation to education, sedentarization, both of the nomads and agriculturalist together with active emphasis on formation of Ribats as well as on health. In all of the above his interest can be seen in the number of work, he left in the above fields in order to achieve his desired aim.⁶

Muhammad Bello's Concept of Resource Management on the Field of Education

Muhammad Bello was a scholar per excellent, he was conscious of his calling Jihad was waged, so as to improve the quality of lives of the ordinary. He realised education was the greatest tool in which society can be transformed, this informed his writings on various aspects of human endeavors not only to educate and inform but to inspire his people to a higher goal, far better than what obtained before the jihad.⁷ It was through education, by explaining the desired roadmap that effective change can be achieved, in the above areas Muhammad Bello not only wrote to facilitate quicker achievement of what he sought, a clear roadmap was also given for actual realization of the goals. He was conscious of history and what its intervention entails, this he recounted in his important work on history In faq al Maysur.⁸ His attention was centred on education as a way of transforming his society. The caliph realized the consequences of a society enmeshed in ignorance and the difficulty of pulling it out of such quagmire. The caliph extolled the virtues of scholars, particularly the mystics, who wrote on what they transmitted pertaining to their *Awreds* and what relates to it, this was born out of knowledge to stress its eminence, he also gave a biography of some prominent scholars in west Africa, in his work. This perhaps maybe the reason for his emphasis on education, he emphasized that in each village, town or community as well as on a Ribat formation there should be mosques and teachers who would teach people

³ Johnston. *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto*, pp. 114-118

⁴ Isah Talata Mafara. *Rayuwa da ayyukan waliyyi mamman Tukur* pp. 45-50

⁵ The war and economic injustices obtained under the Hausa kings before the jihad, left the ordinary depressed and in quandary

⁶ See Nustin kafin *wali-amradshafi* (cure to social maladies) by Calph Muhammad Bello, see also *Usul-al-Siyasah*

⁷ Salahudeen Yusuf. *A history of Islam, scholarship and revivalism in western sudan*, being an annotated translation with introduction of Infaq-alMaysur fi Tarikh Bilad al Tukrur of sultan Muhammad Bello, pp. 64-104

⁸ See Salahudeen Ibid, where he ought to inspire people to greatness by providing a short history of scholars in west Africa

the right religion and guide them on the right path as well as preventing them from following the wrong way.

He saw the linkage between mosques and schools. Proper religious conduct cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of ignorance particularly what has to do with prayer, where knowledge and practical demonstration became necessary.⁹ Muhammad Bello further instructed that the teachers and Imams that supervised the mosque should be taken care of by the treasury – *bait-al-amal*¹⁰. In this way they pay will proper attention to their callings. He encouraged them to emphasized what will unite them and avoid what divide them, in this respect he enjoined that congregational prayer should be given attention. It is only through education that a cohesive society can be obtained, likewise the core of the “management staff” of the caliphate he emphasis on the necessity of their being learned. These vital institutions includes the Qadis, supervisors of the market, the Muftis as well as Zakat collectors and other state officials, Without education that relates to their respective fields, meaningful achievements and transformation in the above fields can hardly be realised. To strengthen his policy on human resource management, he emphasized on justice without which the spirit of society can only dampened and ossify, systematic retrogression would naturally follows. He sermonized on the necessity of justice without which the whole edifice of the caliphate can easily crumble. In justice, tyranny and oppression are a manifestation of a society not enlightened otherwise it will not refuse to uplift itself and move beyond Hobbesian level.¹¹ Muhammad Bello emphasized right education will eliminate all manifestations of backwardness and injustice, hence he empahsised on establishment of scholars and appointment of right personnel to teach.¹²

No one better understand the relevance of education more than Muhammad Bello, this is attested by the works he was said to have read, particularly in a period bedeviled by many constraints, his emphasis on education is therefore the most effective way of ensuring human resource management and aviable way of material resource management as well. A modern writer has captured the essence of books and education.

“Books are a tribute to the human spirit, to our capacity not only to remember, but also to reflect on that remembrance and thereby remold our lives, in books dream and they give birth to dreams; books are dreams, with books in their hands, people become restless, because their imagination is enriched. Inevitably they begin to think of a better world than the one they live in.¹³

Muhammad Bello on Agriculture

⁹ Salahudeen *ibid.* pp. 155-164. Here Caliph Muhammad Bello made references to what Shaykh Uthman bn Fodioyo teaches concerning jurisprudence. He stressed what his mentor emphasized on the rudiments of religion

¹⁰ This was in line with what obtained during the four rightly guided caliphs. For detail see Khuda Bakhsh *politics in Islam* (the first two caliphs), pp. 13-35

¹¹ Shehu Yamusa (edited and translted) A Mirul Muminin Muhammd Bello *usul-al-siyasah* ppo. X-xi

¹² Muhammad Bello Nusfin – Kifin (Cure to Social Maladies) pp. 1-8

¹³ Femi Osofisan. *Literature and the pressure of freedom*, p. 6.

River Rima valley comprised a large chunk of Zamfara, Gobir and Kebbi area. The above places Muhammad Bello was well aware of its topography, both before, during and after the Jihad. The River Rima valley is a suitable place for habitation both by agriculturalists and pastoralists. Majority of the Jama'a that participated in the Jihad belonged to this area. The coming together of agriculturalist and pastoralist have advantages, there is mutual dependency and services. There is also the tendency to promote understanding and general cooperation between the two groups of people. Hitherto they were living in different enclaves. For maximum development both human and material, Muhammad Bello enshrined a policy in which they would settle along the Rima Valley, for effective agriculture and pastoralism. He wanted the settled communities to have the benefit of settlements, in other words they would be educated on the rudiments of Islam, particularly the pastoralists, whose nature of profession does not give them the opportunity of getting educated, hence the difference between the Fulani gida the likes of Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo and the wandering pastoralist. Their settlements along this fertile area would also boost their pastoral activities, there was more than enough grazing land, formation of *burtali* was ensured so as to minimize conflict between the agricultural settlements and the pastoralist co-existing in an area.¹⁴

Sedentization according to Muhammad Bello's conception, was away in which towns and villages can grow and prosper, by engaging in different kinds of trade to achieve maximum human and material developments and effective utilization of resources the encouraged people to go into activities pertaining to local crafts in this way black smiths, carvers and dyers were encouraged, local industries sprung up, the economy improved and idle hands were minimized, so also the consequences of idleness. A sound human and material resources manager, caliph Muhammad Bello not only enjoined active participation in trade and crafts, but practicalised this independent mindedness on the field of economy, he engaged in handiwork for a living. He also had a garden in his back yard. Villages and towns were established on this basis. The agricultural settlement supplied food needs of the pastoralist, while the pastoralists provided dairy, meat as well as the local manure which was essential in boosting agriculture, to the farmers.

It was the proper nurturing and development of human and natural resources by the caliph that made it possible for his lieutenants to refer to him when ever they were saddled with one problem or the other.¹⁵ Yakubu the Amir of Bauchi for instance was saddled with the problem of his Jama'a, whereby they were in the midsts of non Muslims, yet they wanted the land for effective agriculture but their minority status would greatly affect their religious standing, Muhammad Bello in this way gave two options to the Amir.¹⁶

Tied to his policies on sedentization of nomads and Tuaregs, was the question of security. Peace and security in the whole of the caliphate for proper human and material development of his *Jama'a* together with effective management of the resources, in this way Ribats policy was initiated.

¹⁴ Kabiru S. Chafe. "The Transformation of socio-political policies of the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate: A preliminary study of the impact of the socio-economic programmes and policies of political integration", pp. 39-42

¹⁵ The Amir of Katsina and that of Bauchi sought his advice on various issues, the caliph wrote works (books) as a guide to them in their daily administration of their emirates, for detail see *Usul-al siyasa* and *Ghais-al wabal fi sirat* Imam al-Adal

¹⁶ See *Usul al-Isiyas*. Opcit, pp. ix-x

It was aimed at security in porous areas. The Ribats led to the growth of Ribat towns, Muhammad Bello entrusted his close confidants to manned such places. He manifested his readiness to be the leader of the “*Murabitun*” (those that formed Ribats) he choosed wurno and instructed that when he died, his burial place should be there.¹⁷ The caliph was so concerned with security in the whole of the caliphate, he gave maximum attention to it, he considered it number one priority over and above Hajj at that material time.¹⁸

In a nutshell, one can say Muhammad Bello’s policy on agriculture was also tied to sedentrization of the Tuaregs and normads as well as the Ribat policy. The above three not only led to rapid growth of towns and villages, but ensured security, peace and economic growth, through agriculture and pastrolism, the settled communities also were oppotuned to have the rudiments of religion, in this way their potentialities were harnesssed and their resources were managed effectively.¹⁹

Muhammad Bello on Health Issues

Caliph Muhammad Bello was a leader who sought to liberate his people from many shackles bedeviling them, on health matters he was unwavering in his determination for his people to be healthy morally, spiritually and physically. He started by giving attention to moral maladies, which according to him were more devastating than physical health. In this perspective he trod the path of his mentors, Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo and Shaykh Abdullahi bn Fodiyo. The above scholars had written on spiritual maladies that need to be eradicated for a sound mind and body particuarlly on religious application otherwise ones moral ground could be impaired²⁰. Muhammad Bello relied to a large degree on *Aurad* and *Ahdhabs* of the sufis as an armory against the bessitudes of time, in this way he wrote many and encouraged people to read and apply what they contained in their daily conduct.²¹

On physical health, Muhammad Bello paid attention to common ailments that devastated his people. This was the more so he gave attention to ailments like dysentery and its types, diseases related to optics and what relates to them. He also sought means of their cure through the natural herbs but through complex issue of surgery at that material time. Caliph Bello’s proving into health issues was what made him to sought the help of Muhammad Tukur in this enterprise. He was in the class of Muhammad Bello hence, the collaborative effort of the two. Bello urged Tukur to write works on Medicine, he did so. His works was not only on physical aspect of it but also on the moral and spiritual aspects,²² on this way a balance is stroked.

Bello’s revolutionary and pioneering efforts in this field, had it been colonial conquest did not arrested the growth and development of the caliphates effort, our situation would have been

¹⁷ Murray last. The Sokoto Caliphate, pp. 74-80

¹⁸ See Caliph Muhammad Bello’s work *Tanbi Raqid*, translated and edited by A. A. gwandu

¹⁹ Shaykh uthman bn Fodio had earlier written *Ajiwabat Muharrar an Asilat Shisummas* reply to shisummas on the sedentrization of the Tuaregs and othr issues, Muhammad Bello policy on sedentrization got impetus from the Skaykh’s initiative

²⁰ Muhammad Bello *Nusfin Kafin waliam radshafin* (cure to social maladies) (Translated and Commented by Umar Bello), p. 5-8

²¹ Caliph Muhammad Bello wrote more than ten different types of *Aurad*; most of which are way and means of battling daily problems through moral and spiritual means.

²² Mukhtar Umar Bunza “Muhammad Bello Ibn Shehu Usman Dan Fodio” 1817-1837, pp. 77-80

different today. Abandonment of Muhammad Bello's quest and endeavor is certainly what led to our present situation, a pitiable situation whereby anything pertaining to health, beginning to end starts with the white man's efforts with little input our part. Muhammad Bello's enormous efforts have advanced the cause of medicine generally in this area and it was one of the ways and means in which human and material resources of the area were effectively managed and utilized.

Conclusion

Taciturn nature of Caliph Muhammad Bello helped a lot in the way and manner he sought to run the caliphate. There was no standing army, the caliphate was vast, there was also rebellion from one quarter or the other, yet the caliph was able to steered the ship of the caliphate for twenty solid years. Resources at the hand of the caliph were scanty but he judiciously sought ways of improving the human and material conditions of his people with it. He vigorously pursued, toward this end, clear policies. He initiated policies on agriculture, urbanization and Ribats bats, so that the *Jama'a* can live in an area where agriculture was pursued together with learning nomads also were settled and 'educated', he also initiated policy on health that was revolutionary, had it been the tempo of the caliph was sustained in the field of health our present predicament would have been quite different from the sorry state we are witnessing. Every issue religious obligations inclusive were put in the scale of its possibility and the way in which one particular obligation would not retard another nor can an obligation lead to abandonment of others, in this way he opted to remain on the saddle instead of going on pilgrimage in a period of insecurity and uncertainty. The concept of human and material management could not have found better expression than this.

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