

NIGERIA AT THE CROSS-ROAD

A Policy Direction

An Executive Summary

We write to speak up as concerned Nigerians, democrats, and veterans who are worried, embarrassed, and traumatized by the depths into which Nigeria has sunk in recent times. The past 25 years of democratic governance, while meant to usher in an era of progress and prosperity, have instead been marked by a tragic irony. The political class, entrusted with the responsibility of leading the nation towards a brighter future, has seemingly benefited immensely, while the people who voted them into power continue to grapple with the harsh realities of economic hardship, insecurity, and pervasive corruption. The dwindling quality of leadership, the diminishing capacity to deliver on development, and the recklessness and lack of empathy displayed by those in power are deeply troubling. The future of our teeming youth hangs precariously in the balance, jeopardized by the very individuals who should be safeguarding it. The stark contrast between the opulence enjoyed by the political elite and the suffering endured by the masses is a testament to the profound disconnect between the government and the governed.

The consequences of this political failure are painfully evident in all facets of Nigerian life. Insecurity has continuously worsened to levels where the country can be said to be at war with itself. Corruption has not only escalated to levels unprecedented but has also become pervasive and endemic, subverting every effort at development and destroying every institution of government. Infrastructural deficit, institutional decay and the dearth of human capital has continued to frustrate development. Agricultural production has been stalled by insecurity and ineptitude, creating hunger in the land and malnutrition in children. In the face of these human sufferings Politicians have continued to show insensitivity and recklessness as they continue to pad the budget, purchase expensive vehicles, allocate themselves horrendous allowances and borrow huge amounts that could not be paid during their lifetimes. In short, politicians in the last 25 years have brought the country to its knees. Today, Nigeria is a depressing story of a country whose future is in total jeopardy.

The tragedy of the last one year is that we now have a regime that has not only doubled our troubles but has shown neither empathy, prudence, nor competence in governance. The World Food Program reported that malnutrition among children has more than doubled in just the last one year. The withdrawal of petrol subsidy, without any plans to cushion the effects, have

sent prices through the roof. The floating of the Naira a la IMF has sent the Naira crushing, causing chaos in the economy and poverty in society. The rise in taxation and electricity bills has led to closure of many businesses and even private schools are finding it difficult to operate. The executive and the legislature (some would include the judiciary) appear to be in cohort to plunder the country to the finish. The purchase of the presidential yacht, the Betta Edu scandal, the budget padding, the minimum wage saga, the contract for the coastal highway, the purchase of the presidential jets are conveying a picture of politicians on the rampage, who are either oblivious of the consequences or just too intoxicated to care.

All these have created a Huge Trust Deficit. This deficit has been feeding a growing cynicism which is driving a lot of despair and hopelessness. As hunger ravages the pauperized population and citizens become increasingly desperate, crimes shoot up, spaces become unsafe and ungoverned and anarchy looms on the horizon. Meanwhile political office holders continue to live in their bubbles, unscathed and undisturbed. We shudder at the thought of the bubble busting.

Policy direction

Nigeria appears to be a dangerous Cross-Road. As concerned citizens we have found it necessary to put out there in the public space a policy direction starting with what appears to us to be the most pressing inextricably connected issues of economy, security and corruption. While we do not claim monopoly of wisdom, we believe kicking and screaming alone would not bring the end to this misery. We therefore decided to give some solutions in the hope that this could provoke a national discussion on the way out of this imbroglio.

State of the Economy –

- Revitalized Social Safety Net Programme to capture and deliver to the most vulnerable
- Targeted Subsidy Programme for Essential Commodities like rice, flour, cooking oil, medications.
- Regulatory Streamlining Initiative to boost the SMEs – reducing the burden of business and creating conducive environment for growth
- Tax System Overhaul and Revenue Optimization – fair distribution of the tax burden
- Strategic Infrastructure Investment for Economic Growth – create National infrastructural fund to focus on critical infrastructure

- Economic Diversification and Industrialization Strategy – growth of non-oil sectors such as agriculture, iron and steel, machine tools factories to promote manufacturing
- National Skills Development and Educational Reform: NBTE to lead the skilling of the nation
- Green Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy – environmental sustainability and energy production and efficiency

Security

- Launch a Rapid Response Humanitarian Aid Initiative: Provide immediate relief and psycho-social support to victims of these violence
- Establish a National Security Coordination Centre (NSCC) to enhance coordination and collaboration
- Strengthen community policing initiatives by building trust and cooperation in society – avail the existing indigenous knowledge and support through the traditional institutions
- Establish a National Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) to broker peace and minimize conflicts
- Implement targeted programs to address poverty, unemployment, and bring down crime rates and stop recruitment into banditry and insurgency
- Undertake comprehensive security sector reform to improve on professionalism and accountability
- Invest in education and skills development programs to provide young people jobs
- Launch a National Social Cohesion and Integration Program: Promote social peace
- Address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) through proper monitoring
- Strengthen regional security cooperation to combat cross-border crime
- Strengthen the justice system to ensure fair, timely, and effective prosecution of criminals

- Build trust between security agencies and communities through dialogue.

Corruption

- **Operation Clean Sweep:** Launch a high-profile anti-corruption campaign targeting prominent cases of corruption involving politically exposed persons (PEPs) and high-ranking government officials. This operation, akin to a surgical strike, would demonstrate the government's unwavering commitment to combating corruption at the highest levels.
- **A specialized task force within - Asset Recovery and Forfeiture Initiative:** To set up a taskforce to reclaim stolen wealth since 1999 this will deter future corruption, asset recovery mechanisms should be strengthened to trace, freeze, and repatriate assets hidden in foreign jurisdictions. This will involve collaborating with international organizations like the United Nation Convention Against Corruption, UNCAC
- **Whistle-blower Protection and Reward Program:** To encourage reporting of corrupt practices and empower citizens to play an active role in the fight against corruption, whistle-blower protection mechanisms should be strengthened
- **Public Procurement Reform** A comprehensive overhaul of public procurement processes should be undertaken to enhance transparency, competition, and accountability.
- **Asset Declaration and Verification System:** A robust asset declaration and verification system should be implemented for all public officials. This system –
- **Specialized Anti-Corruption Courts:** To expedite the prosecution of corruption cases and ensure justice is served, specialized anti-corruption courts should be established at federal and state levels
- **National Anti-Corruption Education Campaign:** A nationwide anti-corruption education campaign should be launched to raise awareness about the negative impacts of corruption, change the mindset and promote a culture of integrity and accountability. –
- **Strengthen the judiciary** by enhancing the independence, capacity, and integrity of judges and judicial staff. This will involve providing

- International Cooperation and Asset Recovery - Nigeria should strengthen international cooperation to combat cross-border corruption and illicit financial flow

Nigeria stands at a pivotal juncture, confronting a series of formidable challenges that threaten to derail its progress and undermine its potential. Nigeria's future hinges on its ability to navigate this critical juncture. The path forward will undoubtedly be fraught with challenges, but with unwavering determination, collaborative effort, and a shared vision for a better future, Nigeria can overcome its current difficulties and emerge as a beacon of hope and prosperity. The time for action is now. The destiny of Nigeria lies not in the hands of fate, but in the hands of its people. Let us rise to the occasion, embrace the challenges, and work together to build a nation that is truly worthy of its vast potential.

To accomplish this, leadership is critical. Nigeria needs leadership with vision, prudence, and tenacity; a leadership that can muster the political will to act, the will to walk the talk, and the will to deliver. Such leadership must also possess the virtue of being accountable and responsive to the yearnings of citizens. The flip side of leadership with vision, prudence, and tenacity without being responsive and accountable is that it can be autocratic. To acquire this kind of leadership, we should be prepared to re-calibrate our leadership recruitment process to recognize and prioritize competence, character, and courage of conviction.

Signed:

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