

## **Nigeria At A Cross-Road**

### **A Policy Direction**

#### **Preamble**

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. Agricultural production, once the pride of our nation, has been crippled by insecurity and ineptitude. Today, even basic staples like tomatoes are beyond the reach of the average citizen, let alone the impoverished masses. Our political leaders, meanwhile, have displayed a callous disregard for the plight of the people they are meant to serve. They continue to pad budgets, purchase luxury vehicles, allocate to themselves exorbitant allowances, and accumulate debts that future generations will be burdened with. In short, the political class has brought our nation to its knees.

The tragedy of the past year is that the current regime has not only exacerbated our existing problems but has also demonstrated a lack of empathy and competence in addressing them. The removal of fuel subsidies, without any accompanying measures to mitigate the impact, has sent prices skyrocketing. The floating of the Naira, in accordance with IMF dictates, has led to a devastating devaluation of our currency, causing chaos in the economy. The rise in taxation and electricity tariffs has forced many businesses to close, and even private schools are struggling to stay afloat.

The executive and legislative branches, and some would argue the judiciary as well, appear to be colluding in a grand scheme to plunder the nation's resources. The purchase of a presidential yacht, the Betta Edu scandal, the ongoing budget padding, the minimum wage saga, the controversial coastal highway contract, the acquisition of presidential jets – all these paints a picture of a political class on a rampage, either oblivious to the consequences of their actions or simply too intoxicated by power to care.

These actions, or lack thereof, have created a vast trust deficit between the government and the governed. This deficit has fuelled a growing cynicism, which in turn breeds despair and hopelessness. As hunger ravages the impoverished population and citizens become increasingly desperate, crime rates soar, spaces become unsafe and ungoverned, and the spectre of anarchy looms large. Meanwhile, our political office holders remain insulated in their privileged bubbles, untouched by the suffering they have inflicted upon the nation.

We dare not contemplate the consequences of this bubble bursting. It is imperative that we as a nation confront this crisis head-on, before it is too late. We must demand accountability from our leaders, and we must work together to forge a new path forward, one that is built on trust, transparency, and a genuine commitment to the welfare of all Nigerians.

### **Policy Direction**

Nigeria stands at a perilous crossroads, a nation teetering on the precipice of uncertainty. As concerned citizens, we believe it is imperative to engage in a public discourse on the pressing issues that threaten to unravel the fabric of our society. We propose a policy direction that addresses the inextricably linked issues of economy, security, and corruption, three interconnected challenges that have cast a long and ominous shadow over our nation's prospects.

While we do not claim to possess a monopoly on wisdom, we are convinced that mere lamentations and expressions of outrage will not suffice in extricating Nigeria from its current predicament. We therefore offer our solutions in the hope of sparking a national conversation on the path forward, a dialogue that transcends partisan divides and embraces the collective wisdom of all Nigerians.

Our policy direction begins with the recognition that the economy is the lifeblood of any nation. A robust and diversified economy is essential for creating jobs, reducing poverty, and improving the quality of life for all citizens. We propose a series of measures aimed at revitalizing the economy, including investments in infrastructure, agriculture, and manufacturing. We advocate for policies that

promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. We believe that by unleashing the creative energies of our people, we can build a more prosperous and equitable society.

Security is another paramount concern. The escalating violence, fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions, banditry, and terrorism, has created a climate of fear and insecurity. We propose a multi-pronged approach to addressing this crisis, including strengthening law enforcement agencies, improving intelligence gathering and analysis, and addressing the root causes of conflict. We also advocate for greater community engagement and the promotion of dialogue and reconciliation. Corruption, the cancer that has eaten deep into the heart of our nation, must be eradicated. We propose a zero-tolerance approach to corruption, with strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws and regulations. We advocate for greater transparency and accountability in government, as well as the strengthening of institutions responsible for combating corruption. We believe that by creating a culture of integrity and accountability, we can restore public trust in government and create a level playing field for all.

### **State of the Economy – A Diagnosis**

In assessing the current state of the Nigerian economy, one cannot escape the grim reality of an unprecedented surge in inflation, reaching levels not seen since mid-1996. This alarming trend is a confluence of both domestic and international factors, creating a perfect storm that is rapidly eroding the purchasing power of Nigerians and casting a long and ominous shadow over the nation's economic stability.

High inflation rates, escalating from 22.79% in June 2023 to a staggering 34.19% as of June 2024, have severely impacted the average Nigerian's ability to maintain their standard of living. This alarming figure is fuelled by a trifecta of factors: the removal of fuel subsidies, which has led to a more than 200% increase in petrol prices since May 2023; the unification of exchange rates, resulting in a devaluation of over 100% against the US dollar since its implementation; and global supply chain disruptions, exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have combined to create a cost-of-living crisis of unprecedented proportions, with devastating consequences for individuals, businesses, and the nation as a whole.

The consequences of this high inflation are manifold and far-reaching. The escalating prices are rapidly eroding the purchasing power of Nigerians, making it increasingly difficult for ordinary citizens to afford basic necessities like food,

housing, and healthcare. This erosion of purchasing power is not only a threat to individual wellbeing but also a significant drag on economic growth, as consumer spending, a key driver of the economy, is severely curtailed.

The sharp rise in food prices is particularly alarming, with food inflation, which has consistently outpaced headline inflation, reaching a staggering 40.9% as of June 2024, compared to 25.25% in June 2023. This is pushing millions of Nigerians into food insecurity and malnutrition, as the cost of basic food items like rice, bread, and cooking oil becomes increasingly out of reach. The situation is exacerbated by Nigeria's reliance on imported food, making it particularly vulnerable to global price shocks.

The escalating cost of living is causing widespread economic hardship, forcing families to make difficult choices and cut back on essential expenses. Many Nigerians are struggling to pay for rent, healthcare, and education, leading to a decline in their overall well-being. This economic hardship is not only a humanitarian crisis but also a threat to social stability, as evidenced by the increasing frequency of protests and demonstrations by citizens expressing their frustration with the deteriorating economic situation.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has attempted to curb inflation by raising interest rates multiple times, reaching 26.75% as of July 2024, compared to 18.75% in July 2023. However, these measures have had limited success so far, and economists warn that further inflationary pressures may arise due to ongoing global challenges and the need for continued fiscal discipline.

## **Prognosis**

The current economic trajectory paints a bleak picture for Nigeria's future. If the current trends persist, the nation will face a multi-faceted crisis with severe and enduring consequences. The escalating cost of living will exacerbate poverty levels, pushing millions deeper into economic hardship, and potentially leading to widespread social unrest and political instability. The devaluation of the Naira will have a profound impact on businesses and consumers alike, further fueling inflation and squeezing household budgets. The rising cost of living will not only have immediate economic consequences but also long-term negative impacts on human development, as families are forced to cut back on essential expenses like healthcare and education.

The road ahead is fraught with challenges, but it is not without hope. Bold and decisive action is needed to address the root causes of this crisis and set Nigeria on a path towards sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

## **Short-Term Policy Recommendations for Immediate Economic Relief**

In response to the urgent economic challenges facing the nation, we propose a series of short-term policy recommendations aimed at providing immediate relief to Nigerians and stabilizing the economy. These recommendations are rooted in a deep understanding of the current crisis and a commitment to the well-being of all citizens.

### **Revitalized Social Safety Net Program:**

To alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable, we advocate for a significant expansion of the existing National Social Investment Program (NSIP). This expanded program would encompass a wider range of beneficiaries, including unemployed youth, elderly individuals, and those with disabilities. To ensure that the assistance provided is commensurate with the rising cost of living, we propose a substantial increase in the monthly stipend for beneficiaries. Additionally, a new component focused on providing essential food items and basic healthcare services to the most vulnerable households should be introduced. This comprehensive approach would not only provide immediate relief but also contribute to the long-term well-being of those most affected by the economic crisis.

### **Targeted Subsidy Program for Essential Commodities:**

To address the escalating cost of basic necessities, we recommend the implementation of a targeted subsidy program for essential commodities such as rice, flour, cooking oil, and medications. This program would ensure that these essential items remain affordable for low-income households, protecting them from the ravages of inflation. To achieve this, the government should partner with local farmers and manufacturers to procure these commodities at fair prices. These goods would then be distributed through a network of government-approved retailers, utilizing technology such as mobile money platforms to efficiently disburse subsidies directly to eligible beneficiaries.

### **Regulatory Streamlining Initiative:**

Recognizing the critical role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Nigerian economy, we propose a regulatory streamlining initiative aimed at reducing the burden on businesses and fostering a more conducive environment for growth. A dedicated task force should be established to review and streamline regulatory processes, identifying and eliminating redundant or outdated regulations. Licensing and permit procedures should be simplified, and

administrative fees should be reduced. Additionally, a user-friendly online portal should be created to provide businesses with easy access to information and facilitate the completion of regulatory requirements.

These short-term policy recommendations, implemented with urgency and determination, can provide immediate relief to Nigerians struggling with the rising cost of living and economic hardship. It is our hope that by strengthening social safety nets, ensuring access to affordable essential commodities, and reducing the regulatory burden on businesses, the government can mitigate the negative impacts of the current economic crisis and lay the groundwork for a more resilient and equitable economy.

## **Medium-Term Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Economic Growth**

### **Tax System Overhaul and Revenue Optimization:**

A comprehensive overhaul of the tax system is essential to enhance revenue generation and ensure a fairer distribution of the tax burden. We advocate for a simplified tax code that is transparent and easy to understand, reducing exemptions and loopholes that often benefit the wealthy at the expense of the majority. Progressive tax measures should be introduced to ensure that those with higher incomes contribute a greater share to the nation's development.

To oversee the design and implementation of these reforms, the dedicated Tax Reform Implementation Committee already established by the government should be expanded to include tax experts, economists, and representatives from relevant government agencies, organised private sector, and civil society organisations. This committee should conduct a thorough review of existing tax laws and regulations, identifying areas for improvement and simplification. To streamline tax administration and reduce compliance costs for businesses, a digital tax filing and payment system should be introduced. Additionally, tax enforcement mechanisms should be strengthened to deter tax evasion and avoidance, ensuring that everyone pays their fair share.

### **Strategic Infrastructure Investment for Economic Growth:**

Investment in critical infrastructure is a prerequisite for sustainable economic growth. We propose the development and implementation of a National Infrastructure Development Plan that prioritizes investments in power generation and transmission, transportation networks (roads, railways, ports), and digital infrastructure (broadband connectivity). These investments would

reduce production costs, improve logistics, and enhance Nigeria's overall competitiveness in the global market.

To mobilize resources for these projects, a National Infrastructure Fund should be established, drawing from both public and private sources. Projects with high economic and social impact, such as the expansion of electricity generation capacity, the construction of modern highways and railways, and the development of digital infrastructure in underserved areas, should be prioritized. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) should be encouraged to leverage private sector expertise and financing for infrastructure projects, ensuring their efficient and timely completion.

### **Economic Diversification and Industrialization Strategy:**

To reduce Nigeria's dependence on oil revenue and create a more resilient economy, a comprehensive Economic Diversification Strategy should be formulated and implemented. This strategy would focus on promoting the growth of non-oil sectors such as agriculture, iron and steel, machine tools factories to promote the manufacturing of goods and services. Targeted incentives and support should be provided to these sectors, including financial incentives, tax breaks, and technical assistance. Value chains should be developed to enhance productivity and competitiveness, and exports of value-added products should be promoted.

A dedicated Economic Diversification Agency should be established to coordinate and implement this strategy. The agency would identify priority sectors with high growth potential and comparative advantage, providing them with the necessary support to thrive. Investments in research and development should be made to foster innovation and improve productivity. To promote export diversification, new markets should be identified, and trade barriers should be removed.

These medium-term policy recommendations, if implemented with diligence and commitment, can lay the foundation for sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. They represent a bold vision for a future where the economy is diversified, resilient, and inclusive, providing opportunities for all Nigerians to prosper.

### **Long-Term Policy Recommendations**

#### **Institutional Strengthening and Good Governance Initiative:**

Recognizing that strong institutions are the bedrock of a thriving economy, we advocate for a comprehensive program to bolster key institutions such as the

judiciary, civil service, and law enforcement agencies. This initiative would focus on enhancing their capacity, ensuring their independence, and promoting transparency and accountability in their operations. It is our belief that we can create a stable and predictable environment that is conducive to investment and economic growth by fostering a culture of integrity and efficiency within these institutions.

To further promote good governance, mechanisms should be established to encourage public participation in decision-making, strengthen anti-corruption measures, and uphold the rule of law. This would include the creation of independent oversight bodies to monitor the performance of institutions and hold them accountable, as well as reforms to streamline bureaucratic processes, reduce red tape, and enhance service delivery.

### **National Skills Development and Education Reform:**

Investing in human capital is essential for long-term economic growth. We propose a comprehensive education reform program that focuses on improving the quality of education at all levels, from primary to tertiary. This would involve revising curricula to align with industry needs, enhancing teacher training, and improving infrastructure and learning resources. In doing so, we can create a workforce that is adaptable, innovative, and globally competitive, while equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the 21st-century economy.

In parallel, the National Board for Technical Education should be strengthened to coordinate and implement skills training programs that address the specific needs of the labour market. This agency should partner with industry and vocational training institutions to develop demand-driven programs that equip workers with the skills needed for a modern and diversified economy. Scholarships and financial aid should be offered to students pursuing technical and vocational education, and a national apprenticeship program should be established to provide on-the-job training and facilitate the transition from school to work.

### **Green Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy:**

To ensure that economic growth is sustainable and environmentally responsible, we propose the development and implementation of a comprehensive Green Growth Strategy. This strategy would integrate environmental sustainability into all aspects of economic development, promoting renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, adopting climate-smart agricultural practices, and

investing in green infrastructure. It is our hope that this would safeguard our natural resources, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and create a healthier and more sustainable future for all Nigerians.

To implement this strategy, a Green Growth Council should be established to coordinate and oversee its implementation. Incentives should be provided for businesses and individuals to adopt green technologies and practices, and investments should be made in research and development to promote innovation in clean energy and sustainable agriculture. Policies should be implemented to promote sustainable land use, water management, and waste management, and public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate citizens about the importance of environmental sustainability and encourage behavioural change.

### **A Diagnosis of the Current State of Security**

In examining the current state of insecurity in Nigeria, we are confronted with a multifaceted crisis that has escalated in recent years, casting a long and ominous shadow over the nation's stability and progress. This crisis, characterized by diverse yet interconnected challenges, threatens to undermine the very fabric of our society and jeopardize the well-being of our citizens.

Widespread insecurity has become a pervasive reality in Nigeria, manifesting in various forms across different regions. The Boko Haram insurgency, now in its 15th year, continues to wreak havoc in the north-eastern states, resulting in the displacement of millions, the loss of countless lives, and the destruction of livelihoods. Rural banditry, initially stemming from farmer-herder conflicts, has evolved into a full-fledged security threat, particularly in the Northwest, where states like Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, and Niger have witnessed a surge in kidnappings for ransom, highway attacks, and raids on villages. The North Central zone remains plagued by ethno-religious conflicts, with recent escalations in states like Benue and Plateau resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and displacement. Kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery have become pervasive threats across the country, affecting both rural and urban areas and instilling fear and uncertainty in the hearts of Nigerians.

The consequences of this widespread insecurity are profound and far-reaching. The ongoing conflicts have resulted in the internal displacement of over 2 million Nigerians, many of whom are living in overcrowded and under-resourced camps. The death toll from these conflicts is staggering, with estimates ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of lives lost. The economic impact is equally devastating, with the insecurity severely disrupting economic activities,

particularly in the agricultural sector, leading to food shortages, price hikes, and exacerbating food insecurity. The violence has also deterred investment, both domestic and foreign, hindering economic growth and development.

## **Prognosis**

The prognosis, should the security situation continue to deteriorate, is dire. The humanitarian crisis will worsen, with more people displaced and facing food insecurity, stretching humanitarian resources to their limits and exacerbating the already dire living conditions in IDP camps. The economy will suffer further, with the agricultural sector devastated, investment deterred, and government spending on security increasing at the expense of essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

The erosion of state authority due to the government's inability to provide security will further undermine public trust and confidence, potentially creating a power vacuum that could be exploited by extremist groups and criminal networks. The violence and insecurity will exacerbate existing social tensions and grievances, potentially leading to further conflict and fragmentation along ethnic, religious, and regional lines. The deteriorating security situation could also create fertile ground for the recruitment and radicalization of individuals by extremist groups, further fuelling the cycle of violence and instability.

The situation is indeed critical, but it is not beyond redemption. Urgent and decisive action is required to address the root causes of insecurity, strengthen security forces, promote peacebuilding and reconciliation, and provide humanitarian assistance to those affected. Failure to do so will not only jeopardize the lives and livelihoods of millions of Nigerians but also threaten the very fabric of our nation.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of insecurity in Nigeria, we propose a comprehensive set of policy recommendations that address both the immediate challenges and the underlying root causes. These recommendations are designed to foster a more secure and stable environment for all Nigerians, encompassing short-term measures for immediate relief, medium-term strategies for sustainable improvement, and long-term initiatives for lasting peace.

### **Short-Term Policy Recommendations:**

To address the immediate security challenges, we propose the following actionable policies:

1. Launch a Rapid Response Humanitarian Aid Initiative: Provide immediate humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and communities affected by violence. This should include the provision of food, water, shelter, medical care, and psychosocial support. A dedicated Humanitarian Response Task Force should be established in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and local community groups to coordinate the delivery of aid and services, prioritizing the protection of vulnerable groups.
2. Establish a National Security Coordination Centre (NSCC) to enhance collaboration and information sharing among security agencies at the federal and state levels. The NSCC should serve as a central hub for intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination, enabling a more coordinated and effective response to security threats.
3. Increase the number of security personnel (“boots on the ground”) in conflict-affected areas through targeted recruitment, comprehensive training, and adequate equipping.
4. Strengthen community policing initiatives by building trust and cooperation between security agencies and local communities. This should involve training and deploying community police officers who are familiar with the local context and can effectively engage with residents to gather intelligence, prevent crime, and resolve conflicts.
5. The government should partner with indigenous groups, local hunters, and trade associations familiar with the terrain and community dynamics to strengthen local security arrangements in conflict zones. This would ensure the integration of local knowledge and expertise into security strategies to enhance effectiveness and cultural sensitivity.
6. Establish a National Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation between conflicting groups. The NPRC would mediate disputes, promote understanding, and build trust between communities, working in collaboration with traditional and religious leaders.

### **Medium-Term Policy Recommendations:**

To address the root causes of insecurity and promote sustainable security, we recommend the following:

1. Implement targeted programs to address poverty, unemployment, and marginalization, which are often underlying drivers of insecurity. This would include initiatives to create jobs, provide vocational training, and support small businesses, thus empowering individuals, and communities to build a better future.
2. Undertake comprehensive security sector reform to improve the effectiveness, accountability, and professionalism of security agencies. This should involve reviewing recruitment and training procedures, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and promoting respect for human rights.
3. Invest in education and skills development programs to provide young people with alternatives to crime and violence. This would include expanding access to quality education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support, thus empowering next generation to become productive members of society.

### **Long-Term Policy Recommendations:**

To foster lasting peace and social cohesion, we propose the following long-term initiatives:

1. Launch a National Social Cohesion and Integration Program: Promote social cohesion and national unity through education, cultural exchange programs, and interfaith dialogue. This would involve fostering understanding and respect for diversity, promoting shared values, and building bridges between different communities.
2. Address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) through stricter controls on their importation, manufacture, and circulation, including strengthening border security, improving stockpile management, and promoting disarmament and demobilization programs.
3. Strengthen regional security cooperation to combat cross-border crime and terrorism. This would involve sharing intelligence, conducting joint operations, and harmonizing legal frameworks to address transnational security threats.

4. Strengthen the justice system to ensure fair, timely, and effective prosecution of criminals. This would involve improving judicial independence, enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies, and promoting access to justice for all.
5. Build trust between security agencies and communities through dialogue, engagement, and accountability. This would involve addressing grievances, promoting transparency, and ensuring that security forces operate within the bounds of the law.

These policy recommendations, implemented in a phased and comprehensive manner, can address the multifaceted security challenges facing Nigeria and pave the way for a more secure, stable, and prosperous future.

### **Diagnosis of Corruption in Nigeria – a Systemic Challenge.**

Nigeria's struggle with corruption is not a recent phenomenon but a deeply entrenched systemic challenge that has permeated all levels of government, the private sector, and even civil society. This pervasive issue manifests in various forms, each contributing to a culture of impunity and eroding the nation's potential for growth and development.

Bribery, the exchange of money, gifts, or favours to influence the actions of public officials, is a commonplace occurrence in Nigeria. This insidious practice undermines the integrity of public institutions and distorts decision-making processes, favouring those with the means to pay rather than those with merit or genuine need. Embezzlement, the misappropriation and plunder of public funds for personal gain, is another widespread form of corruption that deprives the country of much-needed resources for development and perpetuates poverty and inequality. The abuse of office by public officials, who often exploit their positions of power for personal enrichment, is yet another manifestation of this pervasive problem. Awarding contracts to cronies or demanding kickbacks for services not only undermines the rule of law but also erodes public trust in government institutions. Political patronage and clientelism, where political leaders reward supporters with jobs and contracts regardless of their qualifications, further entrench this culture of corruption and undermine meritocracy.

The economic and social costs of corruption are staggering. The World Bank estimates that corruption costs Nigeria billions of dollars annually, a sum that could be invested in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other essential services, improving the lives of millions of Nigerians. This diversion of resources

perpetuates poverty, exacerbates inequality, and hinders the nation's development. Corruption also undermines public trust in government institutions, erodes the rule of law, and creates a climate of cynicism and apathy. This makes it difficult to mobilize public support for reform efforts and hinders the country's progress. It also exacerbates social inequality by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a corrupt few, while the majority of the population suffers from a lack of basic services and opportunities.

The manifestations of corruption in Nigeria are evident in various indices and reports. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) consistently ranks Nigeria low, indicating a high level of perceived corruption. The country's inclusion on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) "grey list" due to deficiencies in its anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regime further highlights its vulnerability to illicit financial flows and the need for stronger measures to combat corruption. Reports of the Auditor General of the Federation regularly uncover cases of financial mismanagement, misappropriation of funds, and other corrupt practices in government agencies, underscoring the systemic nature of the problem.

The prognosis, if corruption is not tackled decisively, is bleak. The country will remain trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, inequality, and social unrest. Economic development will be stifled, public services will deteriorate, and investor confidence will dwindle. The legitimacy of the government will be further eroded, fuelling cynicism and apathy among the citizenries. Democratic institutions will weaken, and the rule of law will be undermined, creating a breeding ground for further corruption and instability. In the long run, the failure to address corruption could jeopardize Nigeria's future, as the country's vast potential remains untapped, and its citizens continue to suffer the consequences of this pervasive malaise.

Addressing this deeply entrenched issue requires a multi-faceted approach that involves strengthening institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering a culture of integrity. It demands a concerted effort from all segments of society, including the government, civil society, the private sector, and the media. Only through a collective commitment to combating corruption can Nigeria break free from its shackles and realize its full potential.

### **Policy Recommendations**

In response to the deeply entrenched and systemic issue of corruption plaguing Nigeria, we propose a comprehensive set of policy recommendations that address the immediate challenges while laying the groundwork for long-term,

sustainable reforms. These recommendations, spanning short, medium, and long-term horizons, aim to dismantle the complex web of corruption that has hindered the nation's progress and prosperity.

### **Short-Term Policy Recommendations for Immediate Anti-Corruption Measures:**

1. **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 the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should be established, equipped with adequate resources, legal powers, and protection from political interference, to investigate and prosecute these cases. The progress of these cases should be publicized to maintain public awareness and pressure, sending a clear message that corruption will not be tolerated.
2. **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 partners, utilizing legal instruments like the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), and establishing a dedicated asset recovery unit within the government. The initiative will include enacting legislation to facilitate asset recovery and forfeiture, establishing a central database of stolen assets, and collaborating with international law enforcement agencies to track and recover these assets. Recovered assets will be utilized for development projects and social welfare programs, directly benefiting the Nigerian people.
3. **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. A Whistle-blower Protection Act should be enacted, guaranteeing anonymity, protection from retaliation, and fair compensation for whistle-blowers. A dedicated whistle-blower protection unit within an independent agency should be established to receive and investigate reports, ensuring that those who come forward are protected and their information is acted upon.

## **Medium-Term Policy Recommendations:**

1. **Public Procurement Reform:** A comprehensive overhaul of public procurement processes should be undertaken to enhance transparency, competition, and accountability. This will involve adopting open contracting principles, publishing procurement data online, and implementing stricter due diligence procedures for contractors and suppliers. A Public Procurement Amendment Act should be enacted, to mandate digitized open contracting, competitive bidding, and transparent award procedures.
2. **Asset Declaration and Verification System:** A robust asset declaration and verification system should be implemented for all public officials. This system would require officials to declare their assets and liabilities upon assuming office and periodically thereafter. The declared assets will be subject to independent verification to ensure accuracy and detect illicit enrichment. A user-friendly online platform should be developed for asset declaration and verification, and an independent Asset Declaration Verification Agency should be established to conduct thorough verification of declared assets. Strict penalties should be imposed for non-compliance or false declaration.
3. **Specialized Anti-Corruption Courts:** To expedite the prosecution of corruption cases and ensure justice is served, specialized anti-corruption courts should be established at the federal and state levels. These courts will have dedicated judges and prosecutors with expertise in handling complex financial crimes, as well as streamlined procedures to ensure speedy trials and avoid unnecessary delays. This will send a strong message that corruption will not be tolerated and will deter potential offenders.

## **Long-Term Policy Recommendations:**

1. **National Anti-Corruption Education Campaign:** A nationwide anti-corruption education campaign should be launched to raise awareness about the negative impacts of corruption and promote a culture of integrity and accountability. This campaign would target all segments of society, including schools, universities, the media, and civil society organizations. Educational materials and programs should be developed, utilizing various media platforms, including social media, to disseminate anti-corruption messages.

2. The judiciary should be strengthened by enhancing the independence, capacity, and integrity of judges and judicial staff. This will involve providing adequate training, improving working conditions, and ensuring fair compensation. Mechanisms should also be established to monitor judicial conduct and address complaints of corruption or misconduct. This will ensure that corruption cases are handled fairly and impartially, thus upholding the rule of law and deterring future acts of corruption.
3. **International Cooperation and Asset Recovery:** Nigeria should strengthen international cooperation to combat cross-border corruption and illicit financial flows. This will involve collaborating with other countries to share information, track and recover stolen assets, and prosecute corrupt officials who flee abroad. Nigeria should actively participate in international anticorruption initiatives, negotiate bilateral and multilateral agreements, and strengthen cooperation with international law enforcement agencies and financial intelligence units.

These comprehensive policy recommendations, if implemented with determination and sustained commitment, can create a new paradigm of transparency, accountability, and integrity in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria stands at a pivotal juncture, confronting a series of formidable challenges that threaten to derail its progress and undermine its potential. The nation is grappling with a debilitating economic crisis, characterized by soaring inflation, a weakened currency, and a cost-of-living crisis that has left millions of its citizens struggling to meet their basic needs. The spectre of insecurity looms large, fuelled by insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts, resulting in widespread displacement, loss of life, and economic disruption. The scourge of corruption, deeply entrenched in the fabric of society, continues to erode public trust, hinder development, and exacerbate inequality.

However, while the challenges facing Nigeria are undeniably immense, they are not insurmountable. The policy prescriptions outlined in this document offer a comprehensive roadmap for addressing these interconnected issues and charting a course towards a brighter future. In the short term, immediate relief measures such as fiscal consolidation, targeted social safety nets, and streamlined regulations can provide much-needed respite to struggling citizens and businesses. Medium-term strategies, including tax reforms, infrastructure investment, and economic diversification, can lay the foundation for sustainable growth and development. In the long term, a focus on institutional

strengthening, education reform, and a commitment to green growth can create a more resilient and equitable society, ensuring that the benefits of economic progress are shared by all.

The successful implementation of these policies, however, will require more than just sound economic and political strategies. It demands a fundamental shift in mindset, a renewed commitment to the values of transparency, accountability, and good governance at all levels of society. It necessitates a focus on human capital development, empowering the youth with the skills and knowledge they need to drive innovation and economic growth. It calls for a united front against corruption, ensuring that resources are utilized for the benefit of all Nigerians, not just a privileged few.

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:

1. Alkasum Abba
2. Fatima Akilu
3. Usman Bugaje
4. Jibrin Ibrahim
5. Abubakar Siddique Mohammed

6. Clement Nwankwo
7. Ene Obi
8. John Odah
9. Uche Onyeagocha
10. Muhammad Kabir Salihu
11. Kole Shettima
12. Y.Z. Yau