

THE 2015 ELECTIONS AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM IN NIGERIA

By

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Let me start by commending Speakers' Trust Nigeria for creating the platform for this very important debate and for inviting me to speak at this month's event. I want to preface what I say by giving you advance notice that I will make a number of caveats during this presentation. First of all, I want to make it clear that I do not speak for any political party. Instead, I will tell you about how our country, Nigeria, has reformed in the 15 years since we returned to democratic rule, what we are doing now, what we need to do for the future, and why public service reform is a vitally important issue in the way that Nigeria is governed. It is an issue that voters need to have an awareness of in choosing who to vote for in the forthcoming elections.

Public service reform is not often an election issue in many democracies. One of the few major politicians, that I am aware of, that made public service reform an election issue is my old boss, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. He won each of the three elections he contested by a landslide. He famously labelled his final election victory in 2001 as "A mandate for reform...an instruction to deliver." It was after this election victory that he brought me in to help set up the Prime Minister's Office of Public Service Reforms in 10 Downing Street.

Similarly, successive civilian administrations in Nigeria have recognised the importance of focusing on public service reforms. President Olusegun Obasanjo set up the Bureau of Public Service Reforms in 2004. The Bureau started very well and introduced worthwhile innovations like the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS). Unfortunately, around 2007, it was brought into the bureaucracy as part of the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation and was headed by a series of short-term permanent secretaries. This destroyed its independence and vibrancy, and made it part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. Although a lot of reforms happened in Nigeria in those years, the Bureau was essentially a bystander. In 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan decided to reinvent the Bureau and give it back its rightful place in driving all public service reforms at federal level. He changed the reporting lines to ensure that the Bureau reports to him through the Secretary to

the Government of the Federation. As fate will have it, he sought me out and appointed me as Director-General of the Bureau of Public Service Reforms in August 2013, on the strength of my CV alone and without ever having met me before.

My second caveat is that you would have noticed that I have spoken throughout of public service reform, rather than public administration reform, which is the formal topic of this discourse. I have done this slight modification in order to shift the emphasis from 'Administration' to 'Service.' The primary responsibility of public organisations is to deliver services that the private sector may not deliver at all, or to deliver services to those who cannot afford the market price of the service. Therefore, in vibrant democracies, elections are fought over competing promises to deliver "the good life" – better transport, improved healthcare, safer communities, better education, and so on. Environments in which the politician feels accountable to the electorate are more conducive for public service delivery than environments where there is no accountability to the electorate. Ideally, therefore, to deliver on its mandate, the political class will invest in and value the role of the public service; and the public service, in return, will view its role as helping the government of the day to deliver on its mandate and fulfil its electoral promises to the people. This is why we must treasure the opportunity provided to us by the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan to choose the leaders we want in free, fair and credible elections, devoid of violence. We must celebrate the fact that INEC has greatly improved since the Maurice Iwu days and is now providing an electoral service that delivers outcomes that tend not to surprise the electorate or independent election monitors.

Therefore, the real issue is Service. The word 'Administration' tends to focus more on routine internal bureaucratic processes. It lacks the immediacy, accountability and resonance with the needs of the people that the notion of 'Service' evokes.

As our democracy matures, we in Nigeria also need to focus on competing promises to "deliver the good life." It is for this reason that today's discussion by Speakers' Corner is important and timely. I am delighted to be joined at this event by my old friend, Dr. Otiye Igbuzor. A lot of so-called civil society activists aim to draw the loudest applause by constantly running down their own country. They are constantly in search of new expressions to show just how bad things are, and will consciously fail to focus on anything that appears to be working. Unfortunately, you will hardly ever hear a civil society activist celebrating the fact that our trains are running again for the first time in 40 years, or that our victory over the Ebola virus has been hailed as an example to the rest the world, or that our elections have become much freer, fairer, credible and predictable since the current INEC leadership came into place, or that life expectancy in Nigeria has gone up from 47 years to 52 years in the last 3 years.

I had the privilege to read Otiye's paper in advance of today's event and his passion, patriotism and love for country was apparent throughout. He has framed many important questions for those seeking elective office to answer.

There are, of course, many areas where his paper would have been enriched by more information about government's recent actions to tackle many of the issues he has raised. However, we must not blame him for this, as we are not yet doing enough to communicate to the public the ways in which their country is changing for the better all around them, even to the informed elite like Otiye. It is instructive that a recent public perception survey that my Bureau conducted with the National Bureau of Statistics, with the participation of donors, shows that people in the rural areas are actually more aware of the reforms of government over the last 4 years than those in the urban areas. They can see the new roads and the refurbished ones, they can see the trains running again, they can access their hospitals and clinics, they are getting their fertilisers direct without middlemen and touts, and many of them live near the 37 new dams that has been constructed in the last 4 years. The urban elite doesn't even notice the fact that we have refurbished all our 22 airports, which they, rather than people in rural areas, use. Instead they rely on a constant diet of negative comments fed to them daily by a press institution with a clear preference for bad news over good news, and social media commentators who will actually never stand in a line to vote during the elections. Please note that 80% of our citizens live in rural areas.

2.0 TAKING STOCK: PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS 1999 TO 2014

The Bureau of Public Service Reforms has recently completed a review of all the key reform initiatives over the last 15 years, and we hope to publish it in the next few weeks. It assessed 47 of the key reform initiatives against 10 tough questions:

- i. Have the reforms improved the quality and quantity of the public services delivered?
- ii. Do more people now have access to services, including disadvantaged groups such as women, young persons and people living with disability?
- iii. Have the reforms reduced the cost of governance?
- iv. Have the reforms made the service more affordable for citizens?
- v. Have the reforms reduced corruption?
- vi. Have the reforms reduced unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape?
- vii. Is the reform likely to aid our development as a country?
- viii. Are things improving, staying the same or getting worse?
- ix. Where things are improving, will those improvements endure?
- x. Where things are not improving, what should be done?

In order to whet your appetite in advance of the publication of the review, I will give you only the key findings for each reform initiative assessed.

- The payroll reform through the IPPIS has saved government in excess of N160 billion and has removed more than 45,000 ghost workers from the payroll.
- The reform of the Pension system has seen our pension funds grow from a deficit of N43 billion in 2004 to a healthy credit of N4.6 trillion in 2014

- Our Public Procurement reforms has brought savings of N618 billion since 2007
- Our anticorruption efforts has seen Nigeria go from being the second most corrupt country in the world when we returned to democracy in 1999 to now being perceived to be the 39th most corrupt.
- We now have a National Health Insurance Scheme that covers 98% of federal government employees
- We now have more credible elections, with predictable results
- We have totally eradicated Guinea Worm and are on the verge of eradicating Polio. Maternal mortality has halved, infant mortality has drastically reduced, and our HIV prevalence rate has dropped by 37% from 5.4% in 1999 to 3.4% in 2013. We also met Goal 1 of the MDGs two years ahead of the 2015 deadline.
- Our defeat of Ebola has been held up as an example of good practice, and the UK Parliament and the US Congress have each asked their governments to come and learn from Nigeria.
- In Education, we have seen a 20% increase in primary school enrolment and a 24% increase in secondary school enrolment. Our carrying capacity at tertiary level has gone up from 324,000 in 2010 to 500,000 in 2014, largely as a result of the creation of 12 new universities in states that did not previously have federal universities. There has also been a 75% increase in 'O' -Level credit passes in English and Maths in the last 4 years.
- In Sports, the Super Eagles won the 2013 African Cup of Nations after 19 years; the Golden Eaglets finished 2nd at the Under-17 African Championships in 2013; and Nigeria got to the last 16 of the last World Cup in Brazil.
- Our Nollywood is now the 2nd most prolific movie industry in the world, contributing significantly to our GDP and projecting our artistic talents around the world.
- In terms of Public Financial Management, our Treasury Single Account has turned a government overdraft of N102 billion in 2011 into a credit of N86 billion in 2014. Tax collection has improved significantly from N455 billion in 2000 to N4.8 trillion in 2013.
- The reform of our banking system has improved our average capital adequacy ratio from 4% in 2009 to 18% in 2013, which is higher than the global threshold of 10%. Our Non-Performing Loan ratio has also fallen from 25% in 2004 to just 4% in 2013. Our Cashless Policy has seen a growth in the use of bankcards from N38 million in 2012 to N24 billion in 2014.
- Our stock market return of 47% in 2013 was the best in Africa and our market capitalisation has grown from N1.4 trillion in 2003 to N13.2 trillion in 2013.
- Our reform in the Agriculture sector now means that we have virtually eliminated fertiliser fraud. Our innovative E-wallet system has reached 6 million genuine farmers in just 2 years. We have seen \$5 billion new investment in the Agriculture Sector, and our food importation bill has declined from \$7 billion in 2011 to \$4.3 billion in 2014

- The number of Nigerians with mobile phones has grown from 8.5% in 2004 to 93% in 2013 and our telephone subscription has grown by 16,000%.
- In the Transportation Sector, our trains are running again for the first time in decades, moving millions of people and 1 million litres of petrol everyday. Our road network around the country has improved dramatically and we are using our inland waterways again. We now have made in Nigeria cars, including my official car, which was made by Innoson Motors in Nnewi, Anambra State.
- With a GDP of \$508 billion, we are now by far Africa's biggest economy, 40% bigger than that of South Africa that has a GDP of \$350 billion.

There are many more, but I will not overwhelm you with statistics. The message to take away is that our country is reforming for the better. Public Service Delivery is improving all around us. Our country is growing. Anybody with contrary statistics should bring it forward.

Of course there are challenges. The 10 key ones are as follows:

- We need to defeat the psychopathic serial killers known as 'Boko Haram', so that all of our country can develop at the same pace.
- We need to ensure that the reforms in the Power Sector result in available, stable and cost effective electricity for all Nigerians
- We need to further tackle the menace of corruption, and better manage the perception of corruption in and about Nigeria.
- We need to aggressively tackle the issue of unemployment and build on the successes of initiatives like YouWin and the Graduate Internship Scheme
- We need to make it easier for ordinary Nigerians to own their own homes, and build on initiatives such as the 10,000 Mortgages for 10,000 Homes Scheme.
- We need to ensure that Kerosene and diesel are as freely available as Petrol, at the official sale price
- We need to reduce the carnage on our roads and the rate of accidents and fatalities from them.
- We need to ensure that our parastatals and agencies deliver to the people, and to reduce the cost of governance by faithfully implementing the government White Paper on the Reorganisation and Rationalisation of Agencies, Parastatals and Commissions (our response to the Oronsaye Report). In advance of required changes in legislation, BPSR has ensured that agencies slated for scrapping were not provided for in the 2015 budget.
- We need to ensure that our public servants are more accountable to our citizens, and promote greater use of the Freedom of Information Act.
- We need to further diversify our economy, particularly given the dwindling price of crude oil in the international market, and ensure that our economy is growing equitably and inclusively.

Our compendium of key public service reforms from 1999 to 2014 and the independent assessment of what is working and what is not, together with the

Public Perception Survey that we have recently completed with the National Bureau of Statistics represent a robust and credible analysis of where we are now and what we need to do to move forward. For the public perception survey, we interviewed more than 13,000 households in ALL 36 states and the FCT (including Borno, Yobe and Adamawa) and spoke with nearly 700 organisations, public and private. The Compendium of Reforms, the Public Perception Survey and the evaluations of progress against the Transformation Agenda have informed our plans for reforming our public service now and in the future. These, I will now set out.

3.0 A ROADMAP AND STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

The Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Jonathan has focused very heavily on those levers of development that can position our country for greatness. These include Agriculture, Manufacturing, Infrastructure, Power, Creative Industries and Transportation. No country has ever developed without focusing on these real issues, and the Transformation Agenda represents a credible and comprehensive roadmap, the results of which are already visible within a relatively short time frame.

To ensure that the public service is equipped to deliver accelerated development in Nigeria, Mr President has resuscitated the previously moribund National Steering Committee on Public Service Reforms, which is chaired by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, with the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation as Vice Chairman. Under the auspices of the Steering Committee, my Bureau has recently completed a National Strategy for Public Service Reforms. The Strategy, first developed in 2009, has been fully refreshed and updated, and is due to be presented to the Federal Executive Council in March. The Strategy aims that Nigeria's public services will be world-class by 2025. Before the cynics dismiss it as "unachievable, given where we currently are", let me remind you that "where we currently are" is that our Federal Inland Revenue Service is already world class; our National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration (NAFDAC) is already world-class and two of their laboratories were recently awarded the internationally recognised ISO 17025 accreditation, meaning that food, drugs and cosmetics that they certify can be sold on the international market; our Debt Management Office has been recognised by the UK Government and others as being capable of exporting expertise to other developing countries; the GDP rebasing carried out by our National Bureau of Statistics has been validated internationally as credible and robust; our National Drug Law Enforcement Agency is respected across the world; and our banking system is an important and valued member of the international banking environment, with Nigerians able to use their bankcards across the globe. And do not forget that our response to Ebola has been hailed as world-class. Our task is to ensure that more parts of the public service are lifted to the same standards, learning lessons from the successful organisations and initiatives that we already have.

The National Strategy for Public Service Reforms addresses all the issues raised in Otiye's paper. It rests on 4 pillars:

1. An Enabling Governance and Institutional Environment (led by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation);
2. An Enabling Socio-Economic Environment (led by the National Planning Commission)
3. Public Financial Management Reform (led by the Ministry of Finance)
4. Civil Service Administration Reform (led by the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation).

The Strategy has three phases: A 'Reinvigorating' phase between now and 2017; a 'Transforming' phase by 2020; and a 'World Class' phase by 2025. Each of the pillars have a number of building blocks that will lead to the achievement of clear target results at each phase. There are also robust monitoring and evaluation, change management and communication plans, including a requirement to report progress to the Federal Executive Council and Nigerians quarterly. The development of the Strategy has been based on wide internal consultation and validation. The draft strategy has been acclaimed around the world as one of the best in the developing world. As soon as it is approved by the Federal Executive Council as a government White Paper, we will commence extensive national consultation with civil society and all key stakeholders.

Therefore, we have a clear strategy for public service reforms based on robust independent analysis and validated by an extensive public perception survey.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by reiterating the importance of public service reform in any vibrant democracy. It is indeed a topical election issue, if not THE topical election issue, and it is apt that Speakers' Corner Nigeria has scheduled this discourse. Nigerians should be aware that their country has engaged in a number of deep and important reforms in the last 15 years. The Obasanjo administration engaged in a lot of rule-based reforms that were absolutely necessary at the time, given that we were returning to democratic rule after years of military impunity. A key outcome of those reforms was the debt relief that Nigeria secured from the Paris Club. The Yar'adua administration strengthened the rule of law and achieved peace in the Niger Delta. A key outcome of the Amnesty Programme is that Nigeria moved from 60% production capacity at the height of the restiveness to full production capacity. The Jonathan administration has focused on those key levers, such as manufacturing, agriculture and transportation, on which our rapid development as a country depends. This has accelerated the growth of our GDP and Gross National Income in a very short period of time. Equally importantly, the Jonathan Administration has ensured free, fair and credible elections in the country. Given the correlation between free and fair elections and public accountability, this is vitally important achievement. We are on a trajectory of improvement, modernisation and reform.

I will encourage us all to go out and vote, and to use our votes wisely to ensure that Nigeria continues on that reform trajectory towards world class public services, rather than returning to the dark days of arbitrariness and impunity.

Let me, once again, thank Speakers' Corner Nigeria for this opportunity and thank you all for your time. God Bless Nigeria.