

NIGERIAN YOUTH IN THE TRAJECTORY OF RETHINKING THE GUIDING PHILOSOPHY FOR A DEMOCRATIC NIGERIA: INTERFACING INTER- GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE WITH NIGERIAN PROJECT

*Dr. Tunji Olaopa, Executive Vice-Chairman, Ibadan School of
Government and Public Policy – ISGPP*

Youth has no age

—Pablo Picasso

Education is...the foundation for our future. It is empowerment to make choices and emboldens the youth to chase their dreams.

—Nita Ambani

If the state of the Nigerian youth reflects Nigeria's future, then we need to give a voice to them that echoes through several generations of what has been and what can be.

—Tunji Olaopa

Introduction

This paper is the crystallization of a thinking process that I started as permanent secretary, Federal Ministry of Youth Development up to year 2014 which birth a youth development strategy and action plan, a vision that was taken forward as a flagship programme of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy - ISGPP, as inter-generational dialogue/youth leadership development series kick-started at the ISGPP inaugural conference in February 2016.

The youths have always and everywhere been recognized as a potent force for national development. The most recent demonstration of this fact, even in its negative and reactionary form, is the Arab Spring and the force of social change which the youth championed using the full complements of social media technologies and exuberant energies that have been frustrated for far too long. With the Arab Spring, we have a contra-indicated consequence of the disjuncture between youth and national development that falls below all demographics and democratic expectations. Put in other words, the Arab Spring typifies a situation in which policies have failed to pluck the depth of youth potentials through a creative investment that ensures that the nations moves on at the juncture of an incessant and dynamic interaction amongst all significant factors of national development.

In “Investing in Youth for National Development,” James Gribble gives a statistical insight which populates most demographic understanding of the state of the youth in the world vis-à-vis national development. Essentially, the point is that we all have the opportunity to find a creative way of utilizing the productive energies of the over 1.2 billion world population, aged between 15 and 24. This effectively constitutes almost half of the world’s population which is expected to continue growing “for at least 20 more years” (Gribble, 2010: 1). The mandate of policymakers, therefore, is to invest in youth friendly policies which, in the first instance, make available fundamental knowledge that helps the youth “make choices that support the pursuit of educational goals and the development of life skills necessary for national and local leadership positions” (*ibid.*). Policymakers have a deep responsibility, for example, in engaging in proactive discourse on the reproductive health needs of the youth. This is largely because all over the world, sexual diseases like HIV/AIDS,

unplanned pregnancies and an alarming youth mortality have become a few of the dangerous conditions undermining the productivity of the youth. Thus,

Ignoring the reproductive and sexual health of youth today will have dire global consequences for decades. Each day, about 6,000 youth are infected with HIV—the majority of whom are young women in developing countries. Each year, youth also experience more than 100 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections, which increase their risk of HIV. Young women have high rates of unintended pregnancy—as many as 40 percent of adolescent pregnancies in Latin America and the Caribbean are unintended, as are between 11 percent and 77 percent of pregnancies among teens in sub-Saharan Africa. In low- and middle-income countries, complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death among young women ages 15 to 19, and their maternal death rates are twice as high as for older women. Providing youth with access to reproductive health education, services where they are welcomed, and accurate and comprehensive information will empower them to make healthy decisions (*ibid.*).

The African youth demographics are worse in terms of the relationship between youth empowerment and national development. And this is all the more so because more than 65% of Africa's total population today that are under the age of 35; there is a further 35% that stands in the demographic gap between 15 and 35 years (this makes for about 200 million people between age 15 and 35). These figures are expected to double by 2045. Two immediate points are derivable from this statistics. First, that figure makes Africa the continent with the highest concentration of youths. Second, this fact makes the continent the most prepared to make a developmental leap based on the assumption that the youth constitutes a veritable platform for policy advocacy that would ensure that their energies are translated into productive objectives. That, however,

seems to be the most we can say about the youth and their demographic import for now.

Beyond these statistics, there are dire troubles. First, close to 75million of the youths are unemployed. Those who are employed are trapped in unproductive jobs that promised no future advancement. The vast army of the unemployed is otherwise engaged in the thriving informal criminal economy which deprived the continent of their productive energies. And regularly, close to 10 million—a figure which continues to rise—youths are offloaded to the labour market every month. The sociological implication of this is too numbing to be considered. The labour market therefore constitutes the basic test of any policy efforts that must be considered on their behalf. For example, according to Garcia et al (2008), the youth are the most vulnerable to demographic and macroeconomic conditions. Some of these conditions include: policy failures which often affect the youths, lack of requisite skills which are required to facilitate an easy school-to-work transition, and the increase in the number of youth cohorts who struggle for the labor market with the youths. Yet, the youth, in that clichéd slogan, are the future of Africa’s tomorrow. The challenge therefore is that of how to move from the gloomy statistics of the present to a future policy dynamics that would allow Africa, and especially, for our purpose here, Nigeria to jumpstart the critical task of harnessing the boundless energies of the wandering youths for urgent task of nation building.

In the final analysis, investing in the youth turns on the old but fundamental problematic of leadership and its political and policy dynamics which either promote or undermine national development. The African Union (AU) recognizes the cogent link between leadership and youth development in the development equation in Africa. It argues, for instance, that

Clearly a new emergent and integrated Africa can be fully realized only if its demographic advantage “large population of youth” is mobilized and equipped to help drive Africa’s integration, peace and development agenda. This vision emanates from the belief and conviction that a strong and accountable leadership and successful integration needs to be anchored on participation; the investment in youth; and mainstream the great potential of the population of which the Youth are an essential pillar (2011: vii).

And this is significant within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which serves as the theoretical and practical policy framework for rethinking the crucial connection between good leadership and good governance in Africa. The crafting of the African Youth Charter therefore flows from this recognition and willingness to involve the African youth in the development dynamics of the continent. The "African Youth Decade 2009-2018 Plan of Action" was equally conceived as the "roadmap" for the implementation of the African Youth Charter.

However, even with these significant steps in the right direction of democratic consolidation in Africa, there is still the challenge of a practical and pragmatic policy framework that channels the recognition of the role of the youth into national development thinking and the eventual evolution of the developmental state in Africa. In this monograph, I will be unpacking the challenge of taking Nigeria seriously within a generational context that unravels the critical linkage between a dysfunctional leadership matrix, a debilitating national development and democratic framework and the urgency of an inter-generational dialogue as a democratic imperative for refocusing policy cogency in Nigeria's policy making predicament.

Taking Nigeria Seriously

In *Taking Nigeria Seriously* (2012), Odia Ofeimun, the seminal and radical Nigerian poet and political commentator, provides crucial historical argumentations to underscore the significance of giving attention to the trajectory of Nigeria's political history and development future. The bottom-line of Ofeimun's call for a more serious and collective attention to Nigeria and her national project is founded on the "belief that Nigeria is an eminently savable country which has not enjoyed a struggle, hard enough, to reverse the trailer of ill-fortune that have overtaken and bedeviled her odyssey" (2012: viii). Ofeimun therefore intends that the hefty volume will attempt to unravel Nigeria's national question

...with a zeal aimed at further debate on the necessity for electoral reform and the nature of the reform; the need for a clear goal orientation in nation building; the movement away from the undertaker economics that have warped national possibilities; and the importance of addressing military disengagement from rulership

in the context of a democratic strategy. I have painted scenarios and offered alternatives that, I think, redress the imbalance in official philosophies. In discussing political parties and party finance, the capital market, education and resource control, I am actuated by how a common morality and a shared cultural expression can survive Nigeria's years of anomie and planlessness (*ibid*: ix). And Odia Ofeimun sincerely and enthusiastically did justice to his argument which commenced with an ethnic outline of Nigeria's trouble and ended with a strong recourse to Awolowo's federal solution to Nigeria's national question.

My little contribution is to expand and deepen his arguments from the realm of the national to that of the social question, and from an ethnic perspective to the urgency of a developmental state in Nigeria. A developmental state is one that takes development seriously as a decisional exigency which directs policies towards the empowerment of the citizens. This goes beyond just answering the national question and the discourse of federalism to the substantive matter of reforming and restructuring the entire policy architecture of the state to cancel the infrastructural deficit that has overwhelmed many African states, including and most especially Nigeria. An infrastructural deficit speaks to a dysfunctional social policy framework that fails to keep government intention in line with the genuine democratic expectations of the citizens especially in terms of basic infrastructures like water, electricity, roads, healthcare and education.

Social policy therefore refers to policy initiatives, social relations and institutional arrangements which energise human well-being. It constitutes a deliberate attempt, on the part of government, to intervene in the redistribution of resources among its citizens as a means of achieving welfare objectives that empowers the citizens. According to Adesina, social policy is

the collective public efforts at affecting and protecting the social well-being of the people within a given territory. Beyond immediate protection from social destitution, social policy might cover education and health care provision, habitat, food security, sanitation, guarantee some measure of labour market protection, and so on (cited in Edigheji, 2010: 9).

Adesina argues that, as stated here, social policy goes beyond what the state does; ‘social policy goes beyond “guaranteeing a minimum level of social well-being through social insurance, unemployment insurance, old-age pension, or pro-natalist social provisioning”; it includes publicly-mediated or guaranteed access to education, healthcare, employment, housing, and so on’(2011: 2). Thus, this wide vision of development agenda squares broadly with the idea of governance as a broad coalition among several actors intent on crafting and implementing policies that impact positively on the social welfare and well-being of the citizens of a state. In a fundamental sense therefore, taking Nigeria seriously is an indictment of a larger leadership arrogance that inject personal greed into a collective governance equation in a manner that short-circuit the dividends of good governance. A leadership deficit affects, as a first condition, the policy management function of government in a way that ensures a critical rupture in government capacity to govern. The ultimate objective of an effective policy management by government is to ensure that there is an efficient and democratic service delivery mechanism that translates social policy into a whole package of infrastructural dividends for the citizens.

The strategic framework that places the government in the mould of the provider and manager of policies for the delivery of public goods therefore needs to be backstopped by a reform paradigm which not only puts the government in the frontline of development thinking and implementation, but equally enables it to generate a good governance dynamics which satisfies the citizens. A reform agenda in government’s policy management function is required in terms of (a) conducive policy environment; (b) organisational and institutional infrastructure; and (c) policy analysis capacity (Kaul, 1997: 3). It is within these reform areas that the government can outline a developmental plan for transforming the nation. This plan requires a policy management dynamics that would serve as the rubric for the vision of moving forward. A conducive policy environment requires, in the first instance, that the policy makers—the politicians and the civil servants—have a shared sense of where the nation is headed in terms of policy dynamics, values and interests. A vision of development requires an environment within which the leadership outlines the direction of governance, i.e. efficient service delivery, and then channels the policy energies towards this through a synergy framework that would bring

together those who matter, especially within the civil service. The new culture of policy management, for Kaul,

...emphasises such trait as participation, accountability, and transparency. Participation, in particular by civil society and the private sector, is clearly of primary importance in all phases of the policy process. Moreover, fostering participation also ensures the responsiveness, accountability and transparency of governance. Other traits include the accountability of public officials and politicians for their policies and the proper functioning of public institutions; and transparency in the disbursement of public finance and in the operation of state power (*ibid*: 1).

Such a new culture of policy management can benefit immensely from what Sir Michael Barber (2007) calls the devolution and transparency paradigm of public sector reform. This model is contrasted to others such as (a) the command and control model which advocates a top-down management approach; and (b) the quasi-market model which recommends the processes of privatisation and outsourcing as management strategies. Each of these models is suited for different political contexts. The devolution and transparency model however offers obvious relevance for the Nigerian context because it provides the benefits of governmental control of the public goods while devolving their production to other governance actors for effectiveness and efficiency.

Nigerian Leadership and the Youth Challenge

There is a significant dimension of the leadership predicament in Nigeria which bears critical scrutiny since it flows from our earlier argument about the intimate connection between youth development and national development. One side to this disjuncture is that the Nigerian postcolonial leadership has consistently been made up of old men who have supervised the massive disenfranchisement and unemployment of the Nigerian youth. The statistical story of the Nigerian youth seems to have taken a dive even within the context of Nigeria's vaunted democratic experiment.

For instance, as at 2011, unemployment rate in Nigeria stood at 23.9% while youth unemployment stood at over 50%. Added to this is the grim statistics that there is an alarming 16% growth rate of unemployment. However, to those challenges can be added the spectre of violence -

religious, political, social, criminal. In other words, in the Nigerian context, we are confronted with an acute manifestation of how the youth can be diverted from their national responsibility and leadership destiny by rampant centrifugal forces of religion, ethnicity and political jingoism. And this in a nation that sorely and urgently need a creative rethinking of its development dynamics in a manner that recognizes the imperative of injecting a policy framework that invest heavily in the youth not only as the basis of the required human capital development, but equally as the pool for leadership regeneration. Hagher captures the prospect of the Nigerian youth:

Whenever the economic importance of Nigeria is recounted, oil, gas, abundant solid minerals are presented as signifying Nigeria's wealth. Yet, the true wealth of Nigeria resides elsewhere. It is the youth of Nigeria that abundantly puts it at a strategic resource advantage. If this resource is carefully nourished and developed, in a globalized world, where knowledge and skills determine the competitive edge, then Nigeria would achieve a quantum leap into modernity (2011: 137)

Contrary to this positive reflection of their potentials, the face of the youth in Nigeria reflects poverty, deviance, criminality, hopelessness, spiritual weariness and political lethargy. When we talk of the youth, we think of the *almajiris*, area boys, garage touts, domestic house helps, criminals, loafers, miscreants and others who are uneducated, mis-educated, disenfranchised, abused, and humiliated by the system which has no thought for them and their future. For political elites whose objective is personal aggrandisement, the youth bulge, which others celebrate as a demographic gift to be exploited for national development, constitutes a mere apparatus for political vendetta. In this condition, the youth in Nigeria have no tomorrow to lead. Rather, they are confined to a hopeless and anomie present where well-being is squandered on the altar of political expediency. According to Chabal,

In many countries (e.g. Congo, DRC, Nigeria, even Kenya) there are now myriad youth militias – some set up by politicians; others self-generated – that are now organised like alternative ‘societies’. Young people, generally cast adrift by social and economic circumstances, are hired or organise themselves as political gangs, community self-defence forces or just simply criminal bands.

Detached from their roots, they inhabit a world of brutality within which there is little respect for the body, or the person... There arises in this way a culture of brutality that dehumanises those who use as much those who suffer violence (2009: 155).

The real worry therefore is that many of this violated and disenfranchised youth may ‘never be reclaimed by any meaningful or viable social order. They are likely to drift through life seeking economic and political opportunities by means of violence’ (*ibid*: 158).

Consider the following essential questions that bear out this reflection about the state of the youth in national thinking:

- How many political parties in Nigeria have a youth wing that contributes to internal party policy?
- How many civil society groups are committed to youth development beyond the mere lip service to their significance?
- How many religious organisation, for that matter, look to the spiritual rejuvenation of the youth beyond the mere number that attends the church or the mosque?
- How many organisations are dedicated to youth empowerment in Nigeria?
- In what sense have the youth been integrated into national decision making process?
- Is there any longer active student movements that would challenge national injustices and political brigandage?

Contrary to this present situation, there was a time in Nigeria’s pre-colonial political history when the leadership of the Nigerian state was under the scrutiny of radical youth and youthful organizations which were concerned with the demands for national self-determination. During these post-war years, there was a deep concert between the nationalists, the trade unions, the students and the radical youths on what shape Nigeria could take after

independence. With the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), for instance, there was a radical trajectory that promised a unique platform for a truly nationalist collective action. Youth radicalism aimed at a better understanding of the Nigerian state and her future also led to the birth of the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) and its avowed objective of the “emancipation of the talakawas”. However, since the demise of the NYM in 1943, national independence in Nigeria has not been accompanied by an equal radical activism that preceded independence. We have witnessed a gradual death of the student unionism of the early independence years as well as the gradual exclusion of youth from participatory politics. Nigeria’s institutional framework then became increasingly youth unfriendly, and this to the point of constitutional affirmation of their irrelevance to democratic activism.

It therefore becomes obvious that our inability to respect the youths as an inevitable component of national development derives ultimately from our lack of diligence about making the constitution an enabling document that allows the youths several avenues for participating. For instance, the only reference to “youth” in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution surfaced in the term “National Youth Service Corps decree” mentioned in Part Three, 315 (5). Chapter two—Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy—section 17 (3f) states that “children, young persons and the aged are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect.” We are at a loss therefore to reconcile this constitutional contradiction.

But whatever the demographic statistics and the political myopia of the ruling class may assume, we are still confronted with the social dynamics that recommends not only the relevance of the Nigerian youths but also their manifest destiny in the rehabilitation of the national project. For Hagher,

It is also remarkable that no other generation is better equipped to collectively change the destiny of Nigeria like today’s youth. Developments in technology have put in their hands great power to contribute to national development. Their networks are excellent media for effective communication and collective action. For the first time in Nigerian history, the youth have a chance of worldwide non-kin peer groups with their Face book, MySpace, twitter,

emails, mobile-phones, and other social networking sites and the internet. No other generation in Nigeria, or human history before now, has been so fully equipped for strategic effectiveness (2011: 137-138).

The challenge is therefore that of how the Nigerian youth can be liberated from the vicious cycle in which they are caught: ‘on the one hand, the youths, as their rights and responsibilities, are called to eschew non-desirable elements in the society such as crimes and acts of violence. On the other hand, they are caught up in the web of such acts. A true representation of the situation therefore must affirm that to be responsible, the youths must be liberated from this vicious cycle’ (Chukwuebuka, 2011).

Constitutional reflections and reforms provide one sure way of reenacting the objective of injecting youthful energies and ideas into Nigeria’s democratic framework. Thus, to achieve the objectives of youth participation and empowerment requires several policy decisions and institutional initiatives that look to the youths as a constitutional necessity:

- The first initiative requires strengthening constitutional means for increasing the respect for the rule of law which in turn generates multiplier effects that enhance other democratic practices that benefit the youths;
- Constitutional enactments that remove exclusionary clauses restricting the youths from elective offices, and recognise in them viable participants in the governance processes;
- The evaluation and review of youth participation strategies in national affairs (i.e. the imperative of having a youth chapter in all political parties with youths serving as executives);
- The evolution of an elaborate national empowerment schemes that focuses the energies and attention of the youth;
- Education serves a significant function in the attempt to orient the direction of the youth towards national development; and

- The existing National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) can be capacitated with constitutional muscle that replicates its organisational strength in the 36 states of the federation as a ready avenue for youth convergence and deployment for national affairs.

The Nigerian constitution is the basic legal document that serves as the foundation of sociopolitical practices in Nigeria. A critical tinkering of its provision in manners that enable democratic adaptations and amendments is bound to significantly affect and induce a crucial institutional transformation of the political apathy that strangulates youth participation in national development. However, constitutional provisions are not sufficient in themselves to forge an essential social pact that will bind the youth to the ongoing struggle to reinvent Nigeria as a place where the youth matter in development and democratic matters. Or, to put it in another way, the rehabilitation of the youth into the Nigerian democratic sphere cannot be left solely to the constitutional enactments and reenactments which had been institutional weak enough to allow for the sidelining of the youth in the first place. Youth participation in the democratic and development matrix of Nigeria is a crucial dimension of Nigeria's predicament, but it is just one out of the total framework of dysfunction which we all need to confront and unravel. And one plausible means of doing this is to facilitate a grand inter-generational conversation between those who are aggrieved and those who supervised the injustice in a bid to ensure the healing of a fissure that has undermined national progress for far too long.

The Youth and Inter-Generational Dialogue

There is a generational angle to Nigeria's current condition that emerges from how various generations, from independence till now, have related with the idea of "Nigeria." Simply restated, my thesis of generational capital derives from the argument that every generation has a unique role to play in the transformation of a state. There are, in other words, certain specific historical, national and contextual circumstances at play at any point in time, and there are also some specific combination of individual endowments and capabilities required to engage those circumstances. Thus, if one generation refuses to confront its own responsibility and fulfill it, then it not only undermines the greatness and development of the country, but it also

burdens the coming generation with a weight of failures. This thesis requires that we rethink the leadership deficit in terms of generational deficiencies. It demands that we see the problem afflicting the concretization of the Nigerian Project as the winding and protracted crisis of generational encumbrances transferred from one period to another from independence. The crisis consists of not only the lack of personal example, but also the persistent near-invisibility of a collective generational will to offset the multidimensional deficits colonialism bequeathed to Nigeria.

From Awolowo-Bello-Azikiwe-Okigbo-Adebo to Gowon-Obasanjo-Ojukwu-Soyinka-Joda, we have two generational dynamics that have had significant consequences for the unraveling of national development in Nigeria. Given the intellectual and cultural ideology backing the colonial enterprise, as well as its existential consequences on the Nigerian masses, this first generation was confronted with the enormous demands of leadership, political imagination and intellectual rigour necessary to reconfigure the Nigerian political ship that the colonialists ran aground. But while that generation succeeded in bringing us out of colonialism, it failed in setting a postcolonial national dynamics that could lead to progress. This failure initiated a leadership gap which is transmitted to the next generation as an institutional albatross.

The next generation could not prevent a civil war that is still resonating in the plural dynamics in Nigeria. This second generation of Nigeria leaders had its responsibilities set out on a template of crisis. The Nigerian Civil War was already waiting to happen. The Nigerian elite, as a small group of people “who enjoy more than a disproportionate share of the distribution of wealth, power and status in the society” was confronted, at this juncture, and more than ever before, with the daunting task of national development. This task for the second generation involves the deployment of its enormous endowment, especially in intelligence and status, to ameliorating the anomic condition of the Nigerian state and society. And this is in addition to the baton-imperative of making the leadership template conducive for the next generation of leaders. Their predecessors had unwittingly denied them this same opportunity by initiating what Keith Joseph, the British politician, calls “a cycle of deprivation.” And by failing to rise beyond this terrible cycle, Soyinka minced no words in calling that generation a wasted one; wasted, in terms of the failure to turn the huge

potentials the generation had to the task of national renewal and rejuvenation. The generation failed to retrieve Nigeria from the grasp of deprivation and anomie in spite of the huge efforts channeled into the task.

And since the mid-90s, we have another generation—mine, call it the “professional/expert generation”—that has been in the shadow but is now in historical reckoning. It is the “Pro” generation because a great number of its members have achieved significance in professional fields and in almost all areas of human endeavour. This Pro-generation has matured into the context of democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. But it is confronted by the enormous weight resulting from the failures and deficiencies of the past generations. The logic of generational succession requires that the achievements/failure of the preceding generation be inversely proportional to the failure/achievement of the succeeding generation. Their achievements, that is, ought to have reduced the burden of the cycle of deprivation. The first immediate challenge of this generation is to clear all the historical and national debris and impediments that occlude the vision surrounding the Nigerian national project. Nothing can be made real if this antecedent task is not carried out. Second, we are faced with the task of formulating an overall generational consciousness of what Nigeria requires from our collective action. The reality before us is much more daunting and complicated. We are still very much disunited; the society is still anomie; democracy is still a mirage; and how to get from vision to destination is still confusing.

Thus, the Pro-generation to which I belong is confronted by two immediate condition—the condition of historical burden, and that of historical possibility. On the one hand, we are automatically the inheritor of the dynamics of omission and commission of the last two generations. For instance, the fact of ethnicity is one issue that cannot be wished away in our attempt to engage with Nigeria’s national project. In fact, the project became imperative in the first place Nigeria’s diversity became poisoned by the politicization of the ethnic fact in our national composition. On the other hand, we have laid out before us a significant architecture of historical and national lessons, shortcomings and failures that could enable us chart a proper course for the task of redefining Nigeria’s future. Posterity will

judge us for our capability to turn burden into a trajectory of future transformation.

Generational capital turns on the capacity of a generation to deploy its collective endowments and abilities, talents and energies towards ameliorating Nigeria's national predicament. The alternative is to just channel those energies and talents and endowments towards individual developments and aspirations. But then, that alternative will violate the rules guiding the socio-cultural context for the development of endowments. In the first place, most of us were born in Nigerians to Nigerian parents and we achieved maturation, intellectually and socially, in Nigeria. Most of us became what we are today in Nigeria. A providential argument would be that there must be a reason why we were born in Nigeria and endowed with whatever talents and endowments we have. If Nigeria as a context has been critical, one way or the other, in the nurturing of our talents, then it becomes a moral imperative to deploy those talents and gifts towards the redemption of the Nigerian state. and our responsibility is already set: It revolves round our capacity or otherwise to deploy global best practices towards the resolution of subsisting infrastructural crisis; supervising a serious productivity paradigm; tackling the existential monster of poverty through sustainable wealth creation as well as the upgrade of the productive and real sector of the economy; applying creativities to the facilitation of job opportunities for the millions of employable and unemployable youths and graduates; restore credibility and relevance to the educational system; and many more.

However, despite the burden of the cycle of deprivation which the other two generations have visited on this generation, there is a sense in which we can say that mine generation is the most blessed and in the best of times in terms of capacities and opportunities. First, we are coming to conscious awareness at the height of globalization and the worldwide revolutions in telecommunications and other significant technologies that have the capacity to reinforce capabilities and efficiencies. The contemporary democratic awareness combines with the broad global interdependence to facilitate a worldwide reform agitation that brings every nation to the table of good governance. Civil service reform therefore, across the globe, becomes the slogan that puts democratic governance on

its toes, continuously energized by cutting edge technologies and global benchmarks and best practices.

Second, this third generation is fortunate because it occupies coeval temporality with the next generation of Nigerian youth whose awesome knowledge, entrepreneurial creativity and restless spirit can be bent towards our national objective. The present generation of Nigerian youth is unique because, outside of their present predicament of unbridled unemployment and national institutional blockage, they are resilient, enterprising and sufficiently determined to succeed in spite of their crippling condition. There is a fundamental sense in which they are not burdened by the historical and national prejudices which have sapped the vitality of their forebears. Thus, our generation's professional shrewdness and their own ethnic blindness can be deployed towards ameliorating many years of ethnic and cultural confusion that have occluded the direction we need to take. On the other hand, this third generation to which I belong is also lucky because there are a sufficiently critical mass of the old national guards—from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to Emeka Anyaoku to Ibrahim Babangida, to T.Y. Danjuma to Akin Mabogunje, Wole Soyinka, Phillip Asiodu, Christopher Kolade, etc.—which could provide a crucial balance, between the old and the new, the past and the future, within which a new sense of historicity could be provided for reorienting Nigeria's national project.

But this reorientation will not happen as a matter of course. It requires a significant awareness of how these different generations intersect one another within the dynamics of discrepancies and possibilities, as well as the willingness to move forward through a cogent dialogic framework that brings the past, the present and the future together in critical conversation on what has gone wrong and how what has gone wrong could be translated into future progress through collective and concerted efforts. An inter-generational dialogue therefore serves as the cumulating framework for three important dynamics: One, there are the issues having to do with the unconnected historical dots relating one generation to the other in Nigeria's development trajectory. Two, there are issues resulting from why each generation has failed to impact Nigeria beyond discrete achievements and engagement. Three, there are also issues concerning the relevance of the lessons from the successes and failures of these

generations for Nigeria's future. The inter-generational dialogue is founded on the need to facilitate an elite alliance and network across and beyond ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious lines. It feeds into the professional but patriotic engagement with the Nigerian state in a manner that emphasizes the relevance of an uncontaminated elite factor in national development. It has the singular potential, outside of the constraints of politics and political economy, to not only undermine the centrifugal factors that have kept elite apart and at each other's throat over the obstacles the state places on their path. There is also the advantage of facilitating a genuine discourse across generations and historical contexts with the solid benefit of an accumulated understanding of what ails Nigeria and how her generational capital can be unleashed.

What remains essentially would then be a programme of action that translates the idea of a dialogic interaction amongst the four existing generations in Nigeria into a viable reform framework that could instigate serious and critical policy initiatives that could be transformed into institutional foundations around which Nigeria could make significant progress in terms of her national development objectives.

ISGPP and the Programmes of Inter-Generational Dialogue

The Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP) came into existence as an independent organisation devoted to research and executive education in support of governance and policy work in Nigeria and the rest of Africa. It serves as an innovative platform for community engagement on issues of governance, democracy and development. It therefore seeks to address skills deficits and advance knowledge required for transforming public institutions through the rethinking of the governance space, as catalysts for getting government to work better than they currently do for inclusive development and democracy.

ISGPP aspires to becoming a national think tank stepping into the policy-development gap in Nigeria that is filled with socioeconomic disarticulation, policy incoherence and political lethargy. In Nigeria, there is surely a profusion of good policies. But rarely do these policies make it through implementation to constitute a critical mass of social policy decisions sufficient for developmental progress. And in engaging this policy-

development problematic, the ISGPP lacks the benefits of organisational precedents, like the Brookings Institute, from which it could draw inspirations. Rather, there is a surplus of negative experiences. But this is all the more exciting because the Nigerian policy environment provides the challenging template for taking Nigeria seriously in terms of policy articulation and implementation.

ISGPP's main objective is therefore to be a problem-solving think tank that intervenes regularly in Nigeria's policy and development predicament. At the core of this objective is her Public Policy Group (PPG) made up of a multidisciplinary team—policy, industry, economics, governance, human rights, gender, education, social statistics/demography, foreign policy, public service, security, ICT, ethics/philosophy, communication/media, local government, engineering, legislative studies, etc.—inaugurated to rigorously explore and investigate the policy-research interface as a viable research programme. The modus operandi of the Public Policy Group is therefore to delineate the research programme into ten research clusters around which critical policy challenges and interventions can be made. These research clusters include (a) governance and politics; (b) economic growth and development; (c) management of economic fluctuations; (d) social development; (e) fiscal federalism; (f) exploitation of natural resources; (g) national security and defence; (h) education, science and technology; (i) climate and environment; and (j) international affairs. These clusters are significant in policy terms because they provide the concrete policy platforms which allow the ISGPP to converge a critical mass of academics and practitioners into a brainstorming dynamics that generate policy dialogues necessary for energizing continuing discourses on national development in Nigeria.

At its inaugural conference in February 2016, ISGPP constituted a panel on inter-generational conversation and networking as a significant plank in her modus operandi for interrogating Nigeria's national project. And since then, it has been at the forefront of the advocacy to unfold a programmatic framework within which the inter-generational dialogue could unfold as a viable means of unraveling the Nigerian postcolonial predicament. In terms of methodology, the ISGPP believes that the dialogue across generations in Nigeria would necessarily be constituted around a multidisciplinary professional framework made up of scholars, thinkers,

politicians, statesmen, entrepreneurs, young people, writers, professionals in various fields, professional organisations, NGOs, etc. It is this multidisciplinary framework by itself that will develop an agenda can be outlined underpinned by core objectives, significant comparative and historical lessons, expected outcomes, and methodological frameworks around multi-pronged initiatives and programmes that will move the Dialogue forward beyond rhetoric and advocacy to policy imperatives and implementations.

The initial agenda for the Dialogue and the initial preparatory discourse on the conceptualization, design and implementation of the Dialogue would be underpinned by several critical items. First, there will be an ongoing population of a database of relevant personalities and organisations that will be relevant to the inter-generational dialogue. The database will be domiciled in a functional and dynamic website dedicated to the idea. Second, there will also be a massive national and diasporic enlightenment and public education programme aimed at different segments of the Nigerian society. The objective of the enlightenment programmes will be to facilitate a significant buy-in from the Nigerian population, as well as from critical policy actors at various levels of governance. Third, there must be a strenuous effort at integrating the Dialogue idea into existing administrative, sociopolitical and cultural institutional platform in a way that facilitate the leveraging of these institutions as critical success factors. Fourth, there must also be a serious research component that allows the Dialogue to connect with significant insights in scholarship and history.

The Inter-Generational Dialogue proposal is bound to face a crucial institutional opposition from the Nigerian state. And this opposition will stem from the unfortunate perception of the idea as a possible threat to the legitimacy of the Nigerian state. To the contrary, however, such an institutional worry would be unfounded because the Dialogue idea is essentially an attempt at ensuring that Nigeria's efforts at achieving institutional stability and development progress from another dimension that does not contest the boundaries of established authorities and constitutional circumferences. The inter-generational conversation is an essentially patriotic idea at rethinking and reinventing the Nigerian national project from the premises that Nigeria is a viable work in progress and that Nigerians are willing to renegotiate their unity if they are given the

opportunity within a platform that is not compromised by politics and political maneuvering.

The second fundamental challenge to the realization of the idea of inter-generational dialogue would be funding. This is going to be an enormous project that, in the first place, cannot be a one-off even; and that, second, would pool personnel and personalities from across significant strata of the Nigerian society. It is certain that its success cannot be left to an individual, government or institution. It must necessarily kick off as the collective project of a coalition of patriotic Nigerians, the Nigerian diaspora everywhere, NGOs, state and non-state actors, government parastatals and independent think tanks. I am assured, and could almost take for granted, the goodwill and ready willingness of such prominent figures like Prof. Toyin Falola, Jibrin Ibrahim, Ayo Olukotun, Pat Utomi, Matthew Hassan Kukah, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Chude Jideonwo, Nkoyo Toyo, Odia Ofeimun, Prof. Bolaji Aluko, Prof. Charles Soludo, Prof. Attahiru Jega, and a host of others. I am equally assured of the traditional support deriving from HRH Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (Emir of Kano), Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi (Ooni of Ife), and Igwe Nnaemeka Alfred Achebe (Obi of Onitsha). At the institutional level, it is gratifying that the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OOPL) has equally taken up the gauntlet of a Governance Dialogue involving the youth. A collaborative agreement between ISGPP and OOPL, together with other willing partners, will provide institutional platforms that will inevitably strengthen the inter-generational dialogue project and give it policy muscles that resonate within the reform expectations of the Nigerian government to make her democratic governance more empowering for Nigerians.

In the final analysis, the inter-generational dialogue project is an attempt at rescuing the leadership impasse in Nigeria by deploying a broad-based platform that affords all the relevant strata of Nigerians an opportunity to weigh in on Nigeria's development predicament. In other words, rather than holding the Nigerian government to ransom as the representation of the leadership dynamics in Nigeria, the question is: Why don't we expand the leadership base across generations, past, present and future, and see what a robust conversation can come up with?

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