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Nigeria @ 53; Problems & Solutions

Nigeria’s independence in 1960 came with great expectations. But today, 53 years on, the dream of a greater Nigeria remains a mirage. Many problems bedevil the Nigerian nation. I will sum up these under 3 headings.

Economic problems

Nigeria has enormous material and human resources. Yet, we run a mono-product, mismanaged economy. We have the 8th largest crude oil reserves in the world (Sanusi, 2010). Crude oil produces 95% of government revenues (Atiku, 2013). Yet, we are one of the largest importers of petroleum products (Sanusi, 2013). We have a population of 160 million people, abundant land, and water. Yet, we import rice and tomato paste from China (Sanusi, 2013). We are the world’s largest producer of cassava. Yet, we import starch and ethanol (Sanusi, 2013).

Sadly, the oil sector on which the economy stands is not labour intensive. So, it produces very few jobs while agriculture which employs 70% of the nation’s labour force is left undeveloped (Carrington, 2013). This means the enormous oil wealth benefits a tiny fraction of the citizenry. Hence, unemployment stands at 23.9% (CIA, 2013) and 112 million Nigerians live below $1 per day (BBC, 2012).

Social problems

Nigeria is the third most ethnically and linguistically diverse country in the world (Lewis, Gary & Charles), with over 500 languages (Adegbite, 2010) and 550 ethnic nationalities (Wente-Lukas). Sadly however, our strength of diversity is also our greatest weakness. An unimpressive mix of religious intolerance and ethnic patriotism have shattered national unity and rendered our motto – “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress” – a mere assembly recital.
Political problems

The end of colonialism in 1960 brought about government of the people. Government by the people which the 1959 general elections ushered in was restored in 1999 when an interregnum of military dictatorship came to an end. Sadly however, 14 years since the restoration of democracy, we are yet to have government for the people. Elections are still not free and fair, living standards deteriorate daily and the effects of the 2011 post-election crises still ravage the nation.

How do we get to the Promised Land?

First, government must diversify the economy by driving development in the small business sectors, especially agriculture. This will help us stop importing what we have, redistribute wealth and stem unemployment and poverty. We must emulate the Chinese economy which produced 500 million jobs between 1980 and 2012 thanks to 50 million small business owners (Enwegbara, 2013).

Also, the beauty in Nigeria’s diversity should be glorified by all – government, private sectors, traditional rulers, religious leaders and individuals. We should emphasize the poverty and security threats that afflict us in common and cooperate to combat them, not the religious or ethnic differences that make us diverse.

Finally, we must entrench true democracy. The government should sincerely combat corruption and make elections free and free. The citizens too must seek enlightenment which is essential to political participation.
Conclusion

Solving Nigeria’s problems is a shared responsibility. Arise, compatriots, to serve our fatherland.

It will not be easy, but we can do it.
References


