

## **Nigeria Needs a New Lease of Life**

By Peter Obi and Datti Baba-Ahmed

Nigeria is a nation challenged. This is crystal clear. Given the severe reversal in quality of life and development, the present state of our nation is simply no longer sustainable.

Leadership lies at the heart of the problem. While our country remains confronted by a handful of natural disasters, it is leadership woes and limitations that have kept Nigeria on its knees.

Moving Nigeria forward and meeting its needs now and in the medium and long terms, requires a complete paradigm shift that must begin with purposeful and transformative leadership; leadership that can think disruptively, within and outside the box.

Today, Nigeria sits on the lowest rungs of global development indices. Insecurity is at an all-time high. Our economy is in a bad shape. The Naira is in free fall. Prices of goods and services are skyrocketing. This is even as family incomes dwindle, and good-paying jobs evaporate. Our country is hugely indebted. Capital flight from Nigeria reportedly is at 82%. A significant portion of our revenue goes to debt servicing. Government can barely meet its statutory obligations.

Staff unions of academic and medical institutions are embarking on paralyzing strikes. Currently, 18.5 million children are out of school. Unemployment is at 35%. National cohesion and resilience is at its lowest ebb. Electric power supply remains as epileptic and unreliable as it has been for decades.

Consequently, Nigerians are hungry, angry and fed up with bad leadership. The choice of whether to continue along this trajectory or to seek a new course is no longer a matter of debate.

Nigeria needs an enabling environment in which domestic and foreign investors are incentivized and protected. Tackling insecurity should no longer be a cliché. It requires consistency. It calls for robust and reformed federal and state policing. And it is imperative that genuine grievances be addressed without compromising national sovereignty and security. It is time for the state to tackle criminality seriously, both within and outside governance circles.

There is a clear correlation between a poor and disenfranchised society and one that relapses into criminality. National remediation has thus become imperative. The parallel track requires an assertive reinvigoration of Nigeria's economy to ensure people are lifted out of poverty.

Nigeria is also confronted with a combination of circumstances that undermine her overarching governance needs. These challenges are not insurmountable. However, they require curated leadership and governance responses. The prevailing era of deprivation, insecurity, poverty, visceral violence and bloodletting must end. But these challenges will not end if the government remains inactive and resigned to these stark realities.

It is time to urgently rescue Nigeria from implosion. People can certainly pursue personal, partisan and group interests. But in times of serious challenge, true patriots must rise above self-interest and sectional considerations to build a resilient society in the national interest. The primary mission, as we see it, is to secure, unite and make Nigeria productive once again. We must invest in our human capital development to match what we need in today's technology-driven 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

Never in its history has Nigeria been so divided. There is a serious trust deficit between Nigerian leaders and the national public. Furthermore, our society today is so terribly, even insidiously, polarized. Our country attaining true nationhood should, therefore, be a matter of priority to every well-meaning Nigerian.

This means that along with the government's responsibility to protect and guarantee the security of lives and property, a united Nigeria should be on the front burner of our national discourse. We find no better way of uniting Nigerians than for leaders to engender the trust and confidence of the people in the leadership. Nigerians need a leadership they can trust.

Moving Nigeria forward requires essentially a twin-tracked approach. It requires self-sufficiency in food and improved power supply. Beyond oil, Nigeria must turn her vast arable lands in the North into her new oil. We must get our industries running optimally again. We must progressively generate 4,000 megawatts of electricity annually for the next decade. When we have accomplished these goals, then we will have created employment opportunities that will translate to lowered criminality.

Conventional wisdom suggests that in life, we must make a choice: to take a chance, or our lives will never change. Nigerians need to make hard choices with a view to ensuring that in her nascent democracy, the government commits to the unfettered promotion of the rule of

law. We must guarantee that governance is henceforth inclusive, cost-effective, transformative, and less transactional. We must ensure that national investments are transparent and regenerative. It is imperative that we shift from consumption to production. This must be the new national mindset.

Securing, uniting and making Nigeria productive requires steady and trusted hands. That assurance is something all Nigerians desire. In fact, beyond desire, they demand it vehemently. From our vantage position, these demands are now imperative. Nigeria needs a new lease of life. We are ready to deliver it.

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