

Governance, Leadership, Ethics: How To Build A Thriving Economy

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Being the Speech delivered by Mr. Olufemi Awoyemi, Founder/Chairman of Proshare at the Convention on Business Integrity's 7th Annual Christopher Kolade Lecture on Business Integrity held on Friday, June 28, 2019 at The Lekki Coliseum, Lekki, Lagos State, Nigeria.

“Behind any process of corporate decline, there is an infinite string of deceptions”.
– Pedro Nueno

As a nation, we have allowed the bearers of bad news become the pallbearers of our happiness. We have, for too long, focused on the plant instead of the soil that nourishes, and must now live with the inconvenient truth of our existence - that we cannot build a thriving economy without a thriving society founded on principles, precepts and statutes that supports and promotes excellence and equity. There cannot be a meaningful conversation about business integrity in the absence of sovereign integrity.

My task today is to make that case.

Good evening distinguished guests, host, patrons and stakeholders of the integrity oasis created by the CBI.

Like all Oasis, the audience here represent either a mirage or the exceptional few – those who have convinced themselves that *‘we are the good ones’* in an ethically challenged environment. It will literally cost us our lives in this quest, as the sovereign mortality rate continues to drop comparable to the drop in access to quality of life enablers (*which for those who can afford it, is getting costlier relative to earning capacity which may force some to join those they sought out to change in order to make up for the shortfall*). This is an existential question we must have the courage to confront and solve.

The spirit and theme of CBI's 7th Annual Christopher Kolade lecture on Business Integrity reveals itself through our daily interactions - we see it, feel it and touch it in every encounter, engagement and exchange; such that we all have an experience of the issues, or are in some ways ourselves, the problem we seek to resolve.

I will therefore not bore you with the nuance of the topic but rather delve into the substance of the self-diagnosis that made such a topic relevant at a time when nations are concerned about sovereign competitiveness and geopolitical positioning.

One more thing I would like to dispense with upfront is that government cannot simply legislate change, it has to be attitudinal, process and policy driven; and reinforced through the signaling effect of governance.

Most respected and well-intentioned thought leaders, policy wonks, retired public officers, business leaders and clergies have spoken up loudly in recent weeks about the economics, political, leadership, moral and corruption challenges Nigeria needs to correct. There is nothing new to be said about the symptoms, the diagnosis and the prescriptions. You simply need to pick up any newspaper or go online to fill your craving for bad tales. It is a constant stream of tales from the real to the imaginary; the in-thing is to criticize, complain and caricature the country, the leadership and fellow citizens.

Social scientist will tell you that there is a method to this madness, and will justify same.

Curiously, in my over five decades as a citizen of this country, I have seen Nigerians do very well in multinational firms operating in Nigeria; at top knowledge management entities, and on engagements/missions outside the country.....; I have equally seen Nigerians from all works of life and of different ages go on to excel in the diaspora.

The issue, it would seem, appears to be situated in **the system of governance** i.e. the way society is structured – the way society organizes itself, the way it governs and the citizenry values it promotes by way of the signaling effects of its actions.

It is my submission therefore, after decades of close observation and interaction at various levels that ***the Nigerian governance system was not designed for an ethical leadership or integrity based economic governance that can thrive - holding its operating parts accountable for the pursuit of excellence, offers rewards and incentives for conduct and has consequences for breach of the social contract between the state and citizens.***

If and where governance does happen, it is an exception; or it served a pecuniary interest or purpose. Excellence is not the norm in Nigeria, and examples abound to corroborate this.

For context, Nigeria is currently experiencing a ‘perfect storm’ – a situation where a rare combination of circumstances aggravates existing fault lines drastically; and in this case, we have a cocktail of economic development issues, insecurity, diminished consumer purchasing power, economic hardship, leadership inertia, regulatory overreach, failing institutions, weakening infrastructures and a glaring disconnect between the growing productive population and economic opportunities in the country.

The delusion of grandeur, of greatness and of invincibility we carried ourselves with has shown itself to be a convenient mask worn to describe ‘potential’ rather than reveal reality. This is the legacy of years of self-indulgent leadership that for purposes of illustration delivered Nigeria's largest steel plant, the *Ajaokuta Steel Company* with over 4,000 housing units in 23 estates, tens of thousands of pensioners, and after spending over \$8 billion; has never produced steel of commercial viability since it was established in 1979.

Truth is, we have always been this way and a cursory literature review from the colonial days to date, will show a consistency in the problems then and now, with slight changes only in amounts involved and level of indifference and extravagance exhibited.

By extension, corporate governance abuse has become pervasive, ethical conduct an exception, and behaviour, attitudes and governance deeply rooted in survival rather than existence. Yet, while the need for an urgent reset is shared by all, we appear stuck in the mud, decades after talks and paper presentations from local and diaspora thought leaders.

The need for this paper to go away from the usual is therefore imperative.

In the course of this presentation, I intend to save myself from the burden of pampering to our constant need for drama; make qualitative statements around the subject as succinctly as possible within the time allotted to me; and hopefully offer a template for the much needed conversation around the positives available in this flawed system we can scale up to crowd-out the growing negatives.

This is what you get with the choice of guest speaker to this distinguished assembly of leaders of Nigeria's corporate and political society.

I am the **mirror image** of Nigeria – birthed by decent parents with good motives who sacrificed a lot for a better tomorrow, flawed but limited in choice of peers and influencers, from a traditional family culture of dependency and patronage, in survival mode based on an absence of public safety nets, grew up with a confused notion of success, progress and greatness, executed a flawed leadership recruitment process in business and personal life, had unclear rules of engagement, was prone to impulse, contended with unlimited expenses off a limited income (*with huge demands from society to meet structural failures*), had lots of dependents yet continued to play big brother to neighbours, blamed others without ownership for lifestyle choices and contribution to population, did whatever is possible and necessary to meet routine fees and dues when in and out of work, borrowed to meet operating expenses, built home without a mortgage, banked without access to consumer lending, insured but struggled with claims, paid taxes but wish he didn't as he still had to pay to non-state actors; studied accounting but of necessity repairs generators often, friendly with police officers and anyone in uniform really as a survival tactic, had many guiding rules but selectively applied them while hoping, praying and waiting for a miracle, hoping to catch a break.

I was like every other Nigerian trying to make a headway where none was existed, till I reached rock bottom.

Redemption came fortuitously, a function of grace, and after restitution can today stand emboldened, and holding out hope that my story, not unlike others is the mess we need to become our message, our motivation for a C-Change – that we can turn this around if we do not give in to the voices of negativity; YET, to re-build, we would have to own our own narrative(s) and confront the truth that has held us back for decades.

It is on this premise that I wish to anchor this paper, my testimonial on Nigeria and the sovereign integrity question.

I wish to present this around four *thematic areas* and offer some thoughts around impact, implications and what is possible.

The Nexus: Thriving Society = Thriving Economy

Ìgbòrò tì dàrú (*a Yoruba street lingo literally meaning the neighborhood is in chaos*).

You will permit the seeming obscenity of this street lingo, an ode to the spirit of the *late Professor Pius Adesanmi* whose influence on public discourse encouraged the manner of expression that allows messages to be illuminated by the philosophical nuggets always hidden in the lingos and cultures of the Nigerian street. The discomfiture on your faces is understandable, yet the more uncomfortable truth I wish you'd address your minds to, is the extrapolation which simply says that - "**Street ti take over**"

In the street, the rule is that there are no rules, just survive - stay awake, strike when opportunity presents its, scheme to stay alive, be always ready, don't snitch (*whistleblowing*), form or find a crew to roll with, winning is everything, kill or be killed....in short, it's a zero sum game.

This reflects the current operating environment.

In this type of society, progress often occurs by default, not by design; thus ethics is optional, as the key motivation for entrepreneurial endeavor is mostly driven by survival instincts and self-preservation. Compliance here is doing what is right when you are watched, Ethics requires you to do what is right when nobody is watching....in the street philosophy, there difference is blurred.

Trust in traditional institutions, in this scenario is diminished or lost and people create, find or otherwise look up to others who are able to earn their trust. A good example is how Nigerian youths responded to the *#EndSARS* campaign and now go to and swear by the name of Sega when dealing with police related matters, or how people go to the *EFCC* to report capital market infractions than the bodies set up for same; and how people look up to vigilantes to match security threats. You can come up with a long list of such instances in our daily lives if only you care enough to pay attention to it.

This is not a cover or an excuse for bad behavior, even in the streets, there is a clear line drawn in the sand against this as those who followed the great icon *Fela Anikulapo-Kuti* would attest to, or those members of the original *Wole Soyinka* group can equally acknowledge. The discipline demanded here is uncompromising.

The simple truth is that a thriving economy and good quality of life are inextricably linked to, and dependent upon, a purposeful leadership that enables citizens to thrive in a safe, equitable, supportive and rule-based environment. Where people cannot go about their business or where there is no trust in institutions of the state for redress, they inevitably device means, processes or create entities to fill the void. Sovereign integrity is thus compromised and every other thing we build on it will falter.

It is trite knowledge that a country can achieve progress either by design or default, the latter being unsustainable but crucially, if well understood, can be used as a learning opportunity and designed to work.

According to *Pedro Nueno* , “when a company falls ill, unlike people, it is usually easier to diagnose the problem. In the field of corporate analysis, there is no such thing as an autopsy because when a company dies, the causes are usually long before the fatal event actually happens. It is obvious that the companies did not fall ill, suffer, writhe in their dying throes and finally die after the leaders left; far from it, the process had long been on while they were there and because they failed to come to any agreement on how to avoid it, only allowed someone else to play the role of an undertaker. “

The same principle applies to a sovereign.

The honours, accolades and encomiums we gave our leaders while on their seats can now and should be withdrawn. They were earned by building their houses on a pack of cards.

In some quarters, it is believed that there however may exist genuine force-majeurs that makes a compelling case for an entity to die or become extinct. While I believe that this is plausible, I am quick to dismiss it as a charitable disclaimer of the leadership in question because it says a lot about the quality of management that was in place; not being able to anticipate such a major catastrophe.

“The death of a company can be likened to that of a person who has diabetes but does not follow a diet, who has liver problems but drinks alcohol, who suffers from chronic bronchitis but smokes, and although that person’s health clearly deteriorates from day to

day, he or she refuses to give up his or her health destroying habits until the deterioration is irreversible.

He dies, not because the doctors did not present the fact, but because he embraced the self-deception paradigm that he can do it, perhaps expecting a cure to appear from above.”

This is a clear testimony of man’s tendency to value outward appearance more than reality! This tendency equally and readily manifest itself in sovereign matters, were the executive appears genuine, but their true intentions are not matched by the quality of their actions and decisions.

In the conflagration of entrenched self-interest(s) of the key players of management/owners, a decision is arrived at which either achieves a turnaround or goes to postpone the time and role for an undertaker to carry the can.

They wear a mask for all to see hoping to get real later (*believing the deception so well that it becomes the only truth known to them*).

Even at this, they often forget that a dying company or country, like a fallen tree, can still provide food for many parasites. A chunk of it can equally be replanted to create a new one. Rather than allow the sovereign to die or get to an irreversible situation, they can be placed on a sure path of recovery to help keep the society functioning.

That is what I believe is the task before the audience today.

So what have we learnt about the society we have created and the reality we are in?

From the model presented (*see illustration*), it would appear that we operate mostly in a default mode as revealed by the lack of interconnectedness of plans, processes and people.

We achieve episodic successes here and there but somehow, somehow, we leave things to chance; or in the Nigerian parlance, we “wobble and fumble” our way to a result.

Episodes of squabbles over bonuses due to our national footballers, male and female, has remained a sad feature of our participation at continental and global events; but it mostly points out that the ‘**Default Mode**’ is permanently activated and remedial actions taken over the decades have not addressed the problem. It’s a governance/system issue.

While successful nations subject the preparation, planning and prosecution of their engagements to disciplined rigour, hinging their expectation of a favourable outcome on the models built; ours is premised on chance - not hope, for **hope** exist around a reasonable basis of expectation. **Chance** on the other hand is a gamble. An ecosystem, in the absence of underpinning systems of conduct, order and leadership; built around chance, cannot thrive.

Faced with a multifaceted crisis and the collapse of values, institutions and the middle class, those to whom we look for leadership appear stunned, overwhelmed or clueless. Even where they have the courage to act, they appear to have no idea of what to do or how to stem the tide. The citizens are struggling as average incomes, adjusted for inflation, have fallen and continue to do so. We are playing roulette with lives unfortunately.

We need to protect our leaders from themselves; their notions of leadership appear to be in direct conflict with the younger generation’s need for forward-looking, adaptable and creative mindsets willing to think the incredible and pursue the uncommon. This requires

starting from ‘low-hanging fruits’ as simple as upgrading internal government processes and procedures to allow for efficiency and effectiveness.

Very few examples exist for society to take a cue from as the system lacks institutionalized learning opportunities that reinforce governance and leadership, the problem is both public and private. Bad behavior is more or less a national sub-culture inherited and sustained from a military era where social accountability was non-existent. This notion of followership and leadership is a dive to the bottom and reinforces the notion that ‘**Igboro ti daru!**’

Let us interrogate a few examples of how the absence of ethical based leadership and governance has impacted our economic development:

- **A Culture of “Like Man, Like State”:**

The shared values and mentalities of the followership mirror that of elected officials. While we are quick to call out elected representatives for huge take-home pays and wealth acquired in office, we never fail to invite them for everything and anything, and demand from them huge contributions, donations, support and gifts. We see, and use them as donors (*collecting our own*) and take offense when they show up but do not ‘shake bodi’.

It has been argued by some thought leaders that if the leadership is so inept, corrupt, incompetent and inefficient, how come the private sector has not scaled up to turn into a sector of excellence, of high customer service delivery, of technological advancements and of efficiency.

The argument advanced supports the premise of this case that there is something inherently wrong with the system of governance that, no matter how well or often you shake the society, you will end up with a critical mass of people with the values, mindset and beliefs to sustain the substandard governance we have and practice.

The solution they posit lies in creating such an oasis, scaling up massively to create a crowding out effect of the rot inherited across board.

- **A Culture of militarized mindset:**

Decades after our military misadventures in governance, we have done little to transit our language, structure and system of governance away from the command model established to support that leadership mindset, to one that supports a knowledge driven economy.

Social scientists that have looked at this retort that the country currently runs under a militarized mindset that finds it difficult to, or has little incentive to re-arrange itself in a way that does not symbolize uniforms, horsewhips and guns. The society is thus organized to **respect the authority** of the gun barrel than the greater authority of adherence to proper processes and procedures.

When systems are allowed to work the nuances of individual conduct have minimal impact of a systems ability to deliver on its purpose or institutional mandate.

For example, in Lagos State, **non-state actors** and their agents constitute another tier of government based on the street philosophy of ‘**Owo Union**’. This philosophy sees the NURTW and RTEAN in Lagos setting levies, collecting same and generating more money than the average LGA or LCDA on activities under their control based on the accountability structure adopted; a challenge of

governance, leadership and ethics in delivering wholesome economic development, as funds for road maintenance and servicing are now shared at source.

Another case in point is that of LASTMA – where vehicles are ‘arrested’ for sundry violations. With a good knowledge of the serious problems that existed before the creation of this body, it would only be fair to acknowledge the good work done to date. The next step must be how to address **the transition from a problem solving agency to a problem creation one?** Lagos State is in a unique position to lead here.... It has operationalized Drivers licence issuance, vehicle licence issuance, resident registration and tax records to use and by aggregating these information sets can give access to the traffic management body to issue fines, without creating the burden of seized vehicles in its yards and on the roads, creating traffic nightmares in tow. Anyway, seizing a man’s vehicle, probably his source of income is counter productive, unless all other options have failed.

Illustration - NURTW & LASTMA

These militarized mindset is more pronounced in some of our laws (*i.e. the land use act for example*) and the language of communication. People respond to uniforms than to plain clothes officials, from minor civil issues to serious conflicts....and for effect, people put up ‘*military zone*’ signs at the front of their houses or place stickers of the security agencies on their cars to seek an advantage.

One give away of this mindset is the use of the word “**with immediate effect**” in official communications; not ‘**with effect from**’ as you would expect with a civilian mindset premised on thoughtful considerations that anticipates events and plans ahead. It is as if we are in a constant **state of perpetual emergency**. Everything cannot be an emergency and even at that, we should learn to distinguish between the *emergency* in a process driven general hospital from that of a war zone emergency ward. In the former, actions are taken based on processes to save lives while with the latter; it is to reduce loss of lives.

The psychological trauma plays out in ways that promote a culture of ‘anyhowness’, and everyone is in on this.

- **A Culture of Appeasement:**

From the private sector to the public sector, there is a huge **tax on civility**. Right from an early age, you learn how to make your voice heard, your presence felt and your needs met by shouting, screaming, threatening and ‘*demonstrating craze*’.....otherwise, no one listens to or attends to you.

From dealing with banks, telcos, insurance firms, bus drivers, taxi operators, office front desks, artisans, shop attendants, suppliers, land owners, contractors and public servants, people appear to have wholesomely taken the words in **Matthew 11:12** literally to heart in justifying conduct, viz: "***From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.***"

This seemingly innocuous trait has now blossomed and emboldened a social deviancy we are now contending with. Our history has shown that the **unintended consequence** of a culture of appeasement for violent protest has signaled to all that the only time you will get heard is if you resort to self-help to get what you want or are agitated about.....indicating an absence of trust in the

traditional institutions of state competent to deliver timely, equitable and just conflict resolution, problem solving and grievance resolution. This problem has metastasized into a full blown sense of entitlement in **chaos as a resolution tool**.

The recent incident at the Nigerian High Commission in the United Kingdom offers us a teachable moment of how this toxic permissible behavior can play out negatively against brand Nigeria. I wish to comment on this by looking at the opportunity it affords us, to once again, react, this time decisively to a lingering issue – our foreign affairs strategy.

For one, best practice requires that passports symbolize the primary physical affinity of a citizen with his country, and the process of obtaining one should speak to how the country values the citizen. It should not be an arduous process bereft of what modernity and technology has enabled us to do seamlessly – i.e. allowing initiation electronically or by post and delivery by registered post with authentication on delivery (*supported by communication*).

Second, embassies are outpost for investment and investor marketing, processing and sourcing, diaspora remittance promotions and skill/technology sourcing for the country. We have to interrogate our foreign policy governance strategy, process and personnel to ensure we deliver the interconnectedness missing.

Lastly, in an era of data privacy and importance of institutional trust, the Nigerian immigration must resist the urge to publish citizens' private data page on social media as a response to a crisis. There are rules around where such is permissible, and this incident was not one of such. Indeed, it negatively impacts trust in the institution.

- **A Culture of Negative Signaling and Indifference to Ethics:**

There is this belief that public office is an opportunity for self-enrichment and those who don't are damned by society. You see this in the number of congratulatory ads, letters, send-forth parties and community receptions held for elected officials and government appointees. The society has perfected a unique patronage and pressure system that guarantees at a minimum, a return on investment for the organisers. Very few are able and have been able to resist it. Even our religious bodies are not left out of this cultural phenom, as you see many holding thanksgiving services for their electoral victories and appointments followed by a grand reception where "aso-ebi" and gifts follow as would any other *owanbe* gathering.

In stark contrast, no red carpets are rolled out for a retiring/returning public service official who has not 'made money' by the society's value standards. S/He is a pariah amongst friends, family and community members.

The reward system operate actually promotes, encourages and empowers people to be unethical. The media plays a key role here as well. They under-report positive ethical conducts and overplay the negatives, thus reducing it to a game of 'chance or preference', where those caught are 'unlucky or not smart' and those with issues, *unfortunate*.

I recall that the elder statesman in whose name this lecture is being held **withdrew** his chairmanship of the Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), in November 2013 because he considered that the **agency's operations were becoming tainted with corruption and**

politics, thereby losing its credibility. The case was underreported. In 2015 when he made this disclosure, he said some officials of the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan were practicing “***something that was lower than the transparency***”, **expected of an interventionist agency like SURE-P.** He went on further to state that he **met with resistance** when he raised the issues and was overruled by some powerful forces within the administration. It is noteworthy that Mr. Kolade, now 86, when quitting his position as chairman of SURE-P simply cited advanced age at the time, underscoring the **culture of self-censorship** that goes along with signaling an ethical stance in our clime.

It must be made clear that **corruption** is not a ‘*thing*’ but a person, a process, a policy that needs fixing. This is an important clarification that is often lost in the rethoric around the fight against corruption. It is a consequence of an abuse of process, failure of enforcement and an ethical challenge with economic consequence.

That corruption festers in spite of public declarations and pronouncements is easily located in the disconnect between policy and processes, but it is much more an economic issue facilitated by the society’s attitude to, and acceptance of the *street survival philosophy* expounded above.

The decline of the sense of economic opportunities for the working class and the social distance between the working class and elites has grown exponentially. The attendant anxiety around survival, a narrative added by politicians, has exacerbated an already tense situation in the household as the common denominator of our economic plans; creating moral hazards in governance.

Interventions to address the poor (*something we are all agreed on*), without a grand plan to move them into the tax bracket where they would contribute to the funds needed to sustain the bridging principle, will always be a palliative and not a solution.

It is therefore important that policies, processes and people must be aligned to fulfill clear socio-economic mandates that form the stanchions or pillars of a thriving economy.

Ethics is the foundation that provides the base for policy integrity. If a nation finds it difficult to grow the integrity and purpose of its vision/mission; leadership is necessarily called to question.

Dani Rodrik, Ford Foundation Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government put this very succinctly: “*When Adam Smith was laying out his arguments for his system of natural liberty and an argument for free markets, he was also very clear that a market system is based on a system of public order*”.

“*Over time, the nature of market society has changed and evolved. It's no longer simply a tolerable system of administration of justice, extensive safety nets, and regulatory apparatuses to take care of the extremes of markets. As long as those complimentary institutions are in place, I think there is a harmonious balance between a market society and an open society – in a political sense this can, perhaps, be achieved.*”

Interrogate the Recruitment Process of Leaders and Heads of Institutions

The process by which leadership emerges in Nigeria is by all measures and metrics, flawed. **This is not my opinion but an executive summary** of all the statements, letters and speeches made by the leaders themselves in and out of office.

The process rests on a web of socio-economic and political relationships that are self-serving, self-sustaining and programmed to favour the privileged, patrons and preferred against the majority and lower social class. It has always been this way and remains the most daunting of challenges to address. While I cannot claim to have a solution, permit me to attempt a guide for the audience around the key issues.

Historically, our governance process has evolved, it evolved into one that sustains a system of cronyism, prebendalism and kleptocracy. Again, these are not my words, but that of the leaders and the evidence back them up on this.

This system is not sustainable and has created an environment of inequity, inequality and a mad rush for public office as a survival response to gaps in opportunities in everyday life.

This evidence is seen in data showing the declining well-being of the average Nigerian over time. Indeed over 80m Nigerians are presently categorized as extremely poor; this has occurred despite periods of rising oil prices during 1999-2014.

The Linkage between Quality of People and Diversification of the Economy

A little digression here will be necessary for context, and to address the soft issue around the well intentioned plan to diversify the economy and the approach taken.

Understanding Non-Oil

Non-Oil trade is not about commodities but about people and technology; it is about de-risking and harnessing competitive advantages. The quality of human resources available to a country determines the limits or boundaries of the quality and earning capability of non-oil exports of a country. Top notch people will produce high non-oil trading volumes. Take **Japan** for example. Japan has no precious metal reserve, no crude petroleum deposits and no cash crop, but the economy has a GDP of \$4.8trn (*10 times the size of Nigeria's*) with a population of 127m people and an export growth rate of 6.7%. It shows clearly, and as we have seen with other non-mineral producing nations, a country has latent resource in its people.

For those that quarrel over export diversification, data clearly shows that Nigeria's export is diversified. The problem is not diversity but human capacity; **in other words** the creativity, competence and capability to drive productivity. It is also the most critical factor in the shift in focus from trade balances to current account balances that deliver FDI's and remittances, and in this case high quality remittances (*obtained from having a diaspora populated by highly skilled, sought after professionals, not low income earners*).

Sadly, the country's current economic architecture we are embarking on does not lend itself to desired future outcomes.

Growth and Development is the result of ideas not resources. Resources are '*dead*' assets that remain passive and inactive until they are galvanised by an external resource that puts them to productive use. In other words, dead assets receive potency from '*live*' assets that are embodied in knowledge and technical know-how.

Coming from a background of a produce dependency in the 1960's and 1970's, Nigeria continues to wallow in a poor but deep-seated mindset of **commodity sales and export**, be it Oil or Non-oil. This is precisely the kind of thinking that turns a mole hill into a mountain. Painting a hut does not turn it into a palace. If Nigeria must break free from legacy burdens it must tear down the hut and redesign, reengineer and rebuild the house from the ruins of the old structure. .

I acknowledge that we would need oil money to fund our diversification drive, but that is tough when our receipts all go into debt servicing and recurrent expenditures. It is time to think out of the box.

Evidently, resource rich countries that lack even a modest technical/technological foundation flounder amongst the comity of advancing economies. Stuck to a thread-mill of physical resources, these countries become low level players in the global economic ecosystem because resources without technology is like a loose trouser without a belt; it falls down.

The future cannot be a prisoner to the past otherwise poverty becomes second skin to an unimaginative generation of economic managers. **Nigeria's true strategic resource advantage is not commodities.**

What It Means to Be A Non-Oil Economy

To encourage a Non-Oil alternative economy for securing sustainable growth, it must be nurtured with a proper developmental mindset. Non-Oil, as currently publicized, suggests that the country progresses along the path of commodity exports, the difference being rather than export oil we can equally export a variety of other commodities. **This strategy is doomed.** Why?

Commodities are a global *buyers-market* in which *sellers* will have little say. Disruptive technologies will make commodity sellers perpetually stuck at the lower wrung of the global economic pecking order. What makes economies thrive is uniqueness not contesting in crowded markets that are '**commoditized**'. Nigeria needs to adopt an approach where competition is for superior brainpower and not brawn.

What does this mean?

This means that Nigeria has a large pool of talented manpower both locally and internationally that can be constructively leveraged to:

- Provide top quality technology-based services to support the development of different sectors of the domestic economy e.g. *the concept of a digital map as a mobile location finder was designed and developed by a Nigerian; UBER, the mobile taxi app was equally a programme developed by a Nigerian, and several other applications that are currently global product champions have Nigerian antecedents;*
- Provide a basis for the re-education and retooling of local labour in the area of the application of technology to a variety of every day uses;
- Galvanise the domestic educational system to refocus its curriculum to deliver required labour needs for higher quality of service and productivity; and
- Propel the export of indigenously developed technology for a global market. *Currently HUAWEI has taken over the mobile smart phone market ahead of Apple, this is because the Chinese have developed top-notch human resources that*

can effectively compete at a global level. We should find our niche and support the talents we have in this area such as John Tani Obaro, Dr. Aloy Chife, Victor Asemota, Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, Tayo Oviolu, Ade Bajomo, Gbenga Sesan, Bayo Adeganbi, Tunji Eleso and a host of other top notch players in the tech space.

The assumption that economic diversification means the spreading of economic risks or resources within similar product sets (commodities) is not just wrong but DANGEROUS. The whole concept of portfolio diversification requires that the spreading of investible resources is done amongst different asset classes that tend to have **negative correlation**. In the context of exports, the clever way to diversify and reduce the country's economic vulnerabilities is to develop products or services that have nothing to do with primary commodities that tend to have positive correlation where prices tend to move in the same direction.

To get competitive positioning the market expects a competitive market proposition, as the market is not sentimental; it is brutally frank and honest. **To achieve competitive advantage Nigeria must sell a compelling competitive story in a market segment that is not crowded by sellers of homogenous products.**

Contrary to common arguments, Nigeria's country trade growth has done much better than Nigeria's GDP growth that has since 2016 tracked the global pattern of growth at between +9% in 2016 and +10% in 2017. Trade growth in 2017 was +15% up from -15% in 2016. So we can see that despite the good showing, we are not able to reverse the economic trajectory. *Chart 1 Nigeria's Trade Growth, World Growth, GDP Growth*

We need to note that the market realities of yesterday are not the same as those of today.

The best way to understand this is in the decomposition of the most successful businesses between 1980 and 2010 and between 2010 and 2019. The change in key economic players is instructive and highlights the need for Nigeria to think outside sterilized policy boxes. Below is chart that brings the point home.

See illustration of Changing Businesses

So, on the issue of the recruitment process for a Nigeria desirous of building a thriving economy, there can be traction on the economic management front earlier than on the political front.

Taking advantage of a new administration focused on economic growth, we can leverage both our diaspora and local hands to sign up on the task of rebuilding the economy.

There is a reason why successful nations were able to accelerate their growth. They humbly tapped from their diaspora citizens to kick-start new approaches and made sure that they built up a critical mass of such talents in such a way that they helped those at home to upscale their competencies so that both resources complemented each other.

We must never fall into the illusion that we can do it all by ourselves here. We need to humble ourselves and strategically attract the help of our brothers and sisters who are making their marks internationally to rebuild the economy.

Let me share a short story from the book **Start- Up Nation**, the best-seller on Israel's "**economic miracle**" authored by Dan Senor and Saul Singer, describing in vivid detail how Al Schwimmer was persuaded by Israel's first prime minister, Ben-Gurion to found the country's aviation industry.

The fantasy of an Israeli aircraft industry took shape on a bumpy flight over the North Pole in 1951, inside what was to become the first aircraft in Israel's new national airline. The conversation was between a pair of opposites: Shimon Peres, the erudite, future president of Israel, who in 1951 was the chief arms buyer for the new Jewish state, and Al Schwimmer, a swashbuckling American aviation engineer from Los Angeles.

Peres and Schwimmer were on one of their many flights over the Arctic tundra in used planes purchased for Israel's fledgling air force. Flying over the North Pole was dangerous, but they took the risk because the route was shorter – no small consideration when piloting planes that were falling apart.

Al Schwimmer was a raconteur, who'd been captivated by the airline business in its earliest days, when flying machines were an exotic novelty.

He was working for TWA when the United States entered World War II and the entire airline was drafted into the war effort. Though not officially in the US Air Force, Schwimmer and his fellow fliers were given military ranks and uniforms and spent the war ferrying troops, equipment, and the occasional movie star all over the world.

During the war, Schwimmer's identity as a Jew meant little to him and had almost no influence on his thinking or way of life. But seeing a liberated concentration camp and the newsreel footage of countless bodies and speaking with Jewish refugees in Europe trying to reach Palestine transformed him. Almost overnight, Schwimmer became a committed Zionist.

When he heard that the British in Palestine were turning back ships full of European Jewish refugees, Schwimmer came up with what he was convinced was a better way: fly over the British Navy patrols and smuggle the Jews in by landing them at hidden air-fields. He tracked down Ben-Gurion's (the primary national founder of the State of Israel and the first Prime Minister of Israel) secret emissary in New York and pitched him the idea. For months, the representative of the Haganah, the main underground Jewish army in Palestine, sat on the idea. But when it became clear that the British would soon withdraw and a full scale Arab-Jewish war over Israel's independence would ensue, the Haganah contacted Schwimmer.

By this time, they had an even more urgent need than smuggling refugees: building an air force. The Haganah did not have a single aircraft and would be completely exposed to the Egyptian air force. Could Schwimmer buy and repair fighter planes and smuggle them into Israel? Schwimmer told Ben-Gurion's agents that he'd start immediately, even though he knew he would be violating the 1935 Neutrality Act, which prohibited US citizens from exporting weaponry without government authorization.

This wasn't just chutzpah. This was criminal.

Within days, Schwimmer had tracked down a handful of Jewish pilots and mechanics from the United States and the United Kingdom, for what he told them would be the first civilian Jewish airline. He was obsessed with secrecy, and did not even want to bring them into the fold about the idea of building fighter planes. Few were even informed that the planes were destined for Israel.

When outsiders inquired, the cover story was that they were building a national airline for Panama and would ferry cattle to Europe.

Though the FBI impounded the largest aircraft he bought – three Constellations – Schwimmer and his gang succeeded in smuggling out other aircraft, some by literally flying over the heads of the FBI agents who'd demanded that the planes be grounded. At the last minute, the Haganah cut a separate deal to buy German Messerschmitts from Czechoslovakia, which Schwimmer was also drafted to fly to Israel.

When the 1948 War of Independence came, Schwimmer's aircraft fought off Egyptian planes that were bombing Tel Aviv. In certain battles, the barely trained Israeli pilots were

instrumental in ensuring that the Negev desert – a relatively large triangular swath of land starting a few miles south of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, between the Egyptian Sinai and Jordan – became part of Israel.

After Israel prevailed in the War of Independence, Schwimmer returned to the United States, despite being a wanted man. The FBI had figured out the smuggling scheme, and the US Justice Department had built a criminal case against him. His trial, along with those of a number of the pilots he had recruited, was a public sensation. The defendants pleaded not guilty, on the grounds that the law itself was unjust.

Schwimmer got off with paying a fine, which was widely seen as exoneration.

Once Schwimmer was cleared, it didn't take him long to get back into the smuggling game. By 1950, Schwimmer had joined forces with Shimon Peres, then a young Ben-Gurion protégé working for the new Israeli Defense Ministry. Peres had tried to buy thirty surplus Mustang aircraft for the Israeli Air Force, but the United States had decided to destroy the planes instead. Their wings were sliced off and their fuselages cut in two.

So Schwimmer's team bought the cutup planes at cost from a Texas junk dealer, reconstructed them, and made sure they had all their parts and were operational.

Then the team disassembled the planes again, packed them in crates marked "Irrigation Equipment," and shipped them to Israel.

But because of the urgency with which they had to get the aircraft to Israel, a few of the planes were left assembled, and Schwimmer and Peres flew these to Tel Aviv. And that is how they found themselves in 1951 talking about a future Israeli aviation industry.

Ben-Gurion wanted to know what Schwimmer was working on. Schwimmer told him about the renovations he was carrying out.

"What? With this tiny collection of machines you can renovate planes?"

Schwimmer nodded.

"We need something like this in Israel. Even more. We need a real aviation industry. We need to be independent," Ben-Gurion said. This was exactly what Schwimmer had discussed with Peres, while flying over the tundra. "So, what do you think?"

Unbeknownst to Schwimmer, Ben-Gurion had recently instructed the Technion to build an aeronautical engineering department. In giving the order, he'd said, "**A high standard of living; a rich culture; spiritual, political and economic independence . . . are not possible without aerial control.**"

"Sure, I think you're right," said Schwimmer, falling into the prime minister's trap.

"I'm glad you think so. We'll expect you to come back to Israel to build one for us."

Schwimmer stared dumbfounded at Peres.

"Just do it, Al," said Peres. Schwimmer resisted. He immediately began thinking of the **run-ins** he would have with the Israeli Air Force chiefs and the small but powerful Israeli establishment. Plus, he didn't speak Hebrew. He wasn't a party insider. **He hated politics and bureaucracy.** And the Israeli combination of socialist economic planning and cronyist politics could be stifling for anyone, let alone someone trying to build an aviation industry.

He told Ben-Gurion that he could build the company only if it would be free from cronyism—no political hacks getting jobs. A private company, organized along commercial lines, he told Ben-Gurion.

“You’re just right for Israel. Come,” Ben-Gurion responded.

Schwimmer did go to Israel. Within five years, Bedek, the airplane-maintenance company he founded with two Israelis, became the largest private employer in the country.

By 1960, Bedek was producing a modified version of the French Fouga fighter plane.

At an official unveiling and test flight of the plane, dubbed Tzokit (“swallow” in Hebrew), Ben-Gurion told Schwimmer, “This place isn’t just Bedek anymore.

You’ve gone beyond repairs. You guys have built a jet. The new name should be Israel Aircraft Industries.” Peres, who by now was deputy defense minister, translated the new company name.

Peres and Ben-Gurion had managed to recruit an American Jew to help provide one of the biggest long-term jolts to Israel’s economy, all without asking anyone for one investment dollar.

The story above encapsulates all our realities and current challenges and offers an opportunity for us to refocus our strategy on engaging our best assets wherever they may be. More importantly, is the leadership lesson it offers for recruitment in public and private institutions, and overcoming institutional biases and resistance.

Interrogate the Policy Frameworks in Place

Policy frameworks must be sensitive towards the primary goal of uplifting the quality of life of the Nigerian household as the unit of primary socio-economic concern.

Addressing the standard of livelihood of the Nigerian household takes care of tackling the many issues of the nation. If policies are constructively targeted towards lifting the real income per capital of Nigerians with greater dispersion of the benefits of growth amongst citizens, then the unintended consequences of growth without development would be corrected.

See illustration of Economic Growth Matrix

One of the most productive segments of the Nigerian population does not live in Nigeria. They are those millions of Nigerian professionals who work abroad and make large remittances back to the country estimated at over \$2bn annually. This is a population of Nigerians we can treat better than we currently do. Sadly, we treat those at home far worse, it is as if we are doing them a favour.

Some examples will strike a chord. They show what we can do better to get the citizens on board in this change project.

Case 1:

Dr. Ameyo Stella Adadevoh was the Lead Consultant Physician and Endocrinologist at a private hospital in Lagos, Nigeria where she worked for 21 years. She had never seen Ebola before but was able to diagnose and contain Nigeria's first-ever Ebola patient, Patrick Sawyer, in quarantine despite pressures from the Liberian government, in July 2014. She fought stringently to stop him from leaving and exposing the population to the deadly virus.

According to **Mcginger Ibeneme MBBS** “She contracted Ebola in the process and died a most painful death. It was like self-sacrifice. She had organ failures , kidney shut

down, multiple seizures and strokes, profuse bleeding, heart failure and later on, death. She died for Nigeria. Adadevor has not been properly honored by her country. Equally, Nurse Justina Ejelenu who worked with Stella and also contracted the disease in the line of duty, died without doing anything for herself or her family. No one remembers her.”

Case 2:

Olusegun Adeniyi, Chairman Editorial Board of Thisday, on Thursday, June 27, 2019 in an article titled “*Buratai and the Fighting Troops*” makes a case for how governance, leadership and ethics affect outcomes.

“Notably, when 54 soldiers were sentenced to death in December 2014 by a military court, one of them took to his Facebook page to write: “I am a soldier and I am sentenced to death by the Nigerian Army, because we did not go to fight Boko Haram without equipment. We ask(ed) for weapon instead (they) gave (us) death sentence.” The pertinent question here is: If we send soldiers to the war front without the necessary arms and ammunition and they also know that if they die, their families will not be taken care of, why should we blame any of them for showing ‘insufficient commitment’?”

Case 3:

Former National team coach, the Dutch man, Clement Westerhof was only recently given the keys to a house he had been promised in 1994 by the government, a whole 25 years later! This is totally unacceptable official conduct; we are better than this.

There are a whole more around this recurring act that only fuels the need to not comply and find other ways and means to earn a living. It demotivates and diminishes productivity.

It is this type of stories that makes people question and have trust issues with the government and traditional institutions of state authority.

Signaling matters

Illustrating this must be the well-received decision to honour the man that symbolizes the democratic struggle in Nigeria, late Chief M.K.O. Abiola by the current government.

They federal government has in the last one year, taken steps to complete the reconciliation steps by honouring the event and the man. One of such was the renaming of the modern Abuja National Stadium in his name. This is good, yet the way we honour the dead is by honouring the living. The policy around this must be designed to ensure that there is **continuous activity in the stadium** that ensures the name will be used for national, continental and global events. This wholesome approach to policy decisions would signal an effort that goes beyond tokenism, raise the value of having your name on public buildings and the premium that such award bestows on citizens. Such a policy will also be extended to other stadiums across the country, none the least the first National Stadium in Surulere, Lagos which can be a useful tool for the regeneration of that municipality i.e. turning it into an “**O2 type arena**’ with upgraded facilities for conferences, tech events or/and a larger incubation/innovation hub through a PPP; the value of properties in the neighborhood will skyrocket and deliver an economic impact that will transform the economy of the entire local government and environs.

For policies to be meaningful, **ideas must be haunted by big, hairy and audacious goals** (BHAG). Nigeria’s new generation of citizens feel constrained and disoriented by

policies of an older generation unable to situate rules and regulations within the dictates of the times.

Currently, we do not have a regulation around crowd funding while young Nigerians have gone ahead to buy-in to the governments policy on agriculture and are promoting agriculture-based investments through crowd funding platforms.

The inability of legislation to lead rather than follow trends can be a dampener on the enthusiasm of young Nigerians to excel in emerging industries such **as ICT, AI, and Informatics**. The issues around Intellectual property, patents and trademarks remain unresolved encouraging alternate options to get around the problem.

The new economy unfolding cannot afford to wait for policies to play catch up, it is on a trajectory that cannot be stopped but definitely requires oversight, not limitations. These young men and women are determined to succeed and compete with their peers from other nations and the least we can do is support them.

If Nigeria is to grow a sustainable employment-generating economy then policies must be proactive rather than reactive and ideas must be big, bold and visionary. Timidity will not drive an economy waiting to employ a population growing at 3% per annum.

A few further examples of Nigeria's weak system of policy, process and people are chilling commentaries on the need to review governance as swiftly as possible. We offer an insight into these reality here:

Case 4:

A Nigerian entity introduced a foreign Chinese and Singaporean investment group to the country to explore investment opportunities. Despite initial formal letters sent 6 months to the planned trade mission to Nigeria and follow up letters delivered in person 4 weeks to the date and acknowledged, that the Chinese and Singaporean investors were to arrive in the there was NO official response on what to expect.

From records seen, copies of letters were delivered to the office of the Vice President and S.A to the President on Economic Matters under the Vice President's Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Power, Works and Housing, Minister of Trade and Investment, former Minister of Finance and the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC). The letters were delivered both electronically and in person.

After the frustration of no response, the Nigerian promoter resulted to filing a complaint through the Deputy Chief of Staff, who directed him to use the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) portal to make a formal complaint. On filing the complaint with PEBEC, the response was near instant and a staff at PEBEC took up the matter with the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC).

Thereafter he finally got an e-mail response from Executive Secretary/CEO of the NIPC who delegated her Director to handle the matter. Unfortunately, the Director was already on annual leave so could not respond or attend to the issue. The promoter sent a follow-up email to the NIPC CEO and then she re-delegated the task to a Deputy Director who efficiently coordinated visa's on arrival, meeting and putting together an official team.

This example speaks to the lingering challenges of the user interface with government and points to the point made earlier about interconnectedness of government agencies and the gap in the nexus between private and public sector engagement, both foreign and local.

Case 5:

An Investor, the Chairman and President of a foreign company with an equity portfolio worth over \$100 billion USD decided on Nigeria as a destination for the PWF.

Systems challenges created problems here again. The company submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) for a number of projects related to supplying renewable energy of between 100MWp and 300MWp, the construction of Housing Units and Commercial Properties and the construction of Specialist Hospitals among other projects but the approval processes have been trapped in a carefully crafted web of *officialese*.

The projects to be financed by this investor would propel the governments' *Next Level* agenda but they have been caught in the web of a system more interested in patronage than economic development. The problem is us not our stars, it's the system of governance.

Interrogate the Signaling Effect on the Youth

Nigeria has one of the youngest populations on the planet, an otherwise competitive advantage if properly understood and fully allowed to blossom. This population has a different mindset, it needs to be driven by ideas, creativity and constructive social, economic and social engagement.

This requires a mentorship system that grooms a generation of world-competing leaders prepared to advance the next phase of the country's march to progress.

The tragedy is that there are no mentors, or more accurately, we have the wrong type of mentors in the current leadership mix for this delicate segment of the population.

Rather than see aspirational opportunities of Nigerians conquering the world of science, social science and the arts, the new generation is easily caught in the deadly web of daily survival, stunted expectations, duplicitous and hypocritical moral standards, a lifestyle demand without access to safety nets, structured openings and constant pressure in a social media age. The energy required to help build a new nation is lost in schemes, plans and adventure in escapism, especially for those in the lower rungs of society.

It is a no-win scenario and soon, those energies are diverted to quick rewarding schemes without any consideration for ethics. It is all about the now for most.

What can be done immediately?

To build a nation founded on ethics, governance and a purpose-led leadership to deliver a thriving economy is a huge task. We can however start by eliminating self-limiting attributes.

The parameters of these execution imperatives and signaling indicators can be incorporated into the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set for the yet to be appointed ministers and heads of critical agencies.

Some of these reforms will deliver a firm foundation for transparency, a critical enabler for ethical governance, and will include:

Regulation Review – adopting a hands-on approach to developing a legislative agenda promoted by and supported by the private sector through the **NESG-NASSBER** partnership will be one sure way of bringing every stakeholder into the urgent need to address the gaps between practice and archaic regulations and practices for which The **Ease of Doing Business** team has been working on. The urgency required will be represented by the executives forward planning with the legislative chamber on prioritisation, sequencing and timelines for delivery.

Deployment of Technology – we can immediately make transitions in the following areas:

- **Trademarks and Intellectual property rights** – by developing a website that satisfies the requirement for publishing marks as well as the processing of requests and approvals.
- **SEC** – introduce the US SEC EDGAR-type model (and upgrade) to give easy and reliable access to information on everything from rules, applications, submissions, approvals, supervision, enforcement, plans, returns by licencees and trade associations, register of operators, renewals at the stroke of a few keys.
- **Court Systems** – decide on Creating a national or/and state level central server for all court cases to be logged in using unique case reference files to help improve the record system in our courts. This system can be robust enough to allow for filings, searches, date scheduling, judgment recording, referencing, due diligence search and enquiry by government security and other approved agencies with accommodation for the use by qualified legal practitioners.
- **Corporate Affairs Commission** – simply adopt the company house UK model or consider models in sub-saharan countries where the process of business and company registration is made effortless. Beyond that, have a central point where filings of annual returns, change of status or details, searches, enquiries and other governance related issues including sanctions can be deposited, processed and made available for public use.
- **Police Services** – create a central database for service men and women as well as their activities including HR, admin, finance, reporting incidents, case files, prosecutions scheduled and discharged, armoury records and allocations, register of local gun salesmen, list of persons held and offences at each operational outpost or in the stations, watch list and easily cross referenced across the nation.
- **Traffic Registry** – this is self-evident and cooperation with the states, a common registry on cars and ownership which will be useful in crime prevention, insurance management, customs support and aid the FRSC, VIOs and other licencing authorities deal with current problems.
- **Passport Applications** – a clear need for this is will be beneficial to our ability to manage visa requirements apart from the obvious needs of citizens for a faster and more efficient system of passport application, processing and delivery locally and internationally. We can at least know all those who carry the Nigerian passport.
- Others

The above can be fully conceptualized, configured and delivered by competencies available in the country, including the necessary skills training, process reform and implementation necessary thereof.

Language as a National Integration Policy – we should encourage the teaching of all 3 major languages and dominant foreign languages to position the citizens for national integration through commerce and social interaction; as well as prepare and empower the citizens to play in a fast developing African and global market. Canada offers us an

example here with how they united the country through language (English and French); and there are other examples to glean from. African integration has been a challenge for a reason - *Language & Culture* being the two sticking points. Children are particularly known to find the acquisition of new languages easy, so the primary schools should be the starting points for this new and deliberate policy of integration.

Trade – construct the narrative around the free movement of goods, services & people from every economic zone, creating a network of dynamic economic activity along cross national value chains leading to deeper internal economic integration i.e. the **interconnectedness of the whole value chain of** Airports, Sea Ports, Dry ports, Rails, Road Transportation, Warehouses, Ferries, Maritime as one single-unit of competitiveness linkages for the sovereign in a national plan, designed to create partnerships with states governments – and thus achieving concurrence to address a single issue, and not a desegregated problem(s).

See illustration for Economic Growth

The Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission of Nigeria, working with the National Planning Commission had in **2011** put together a document detailing the public-private partnership opportunities for the transformation agenda for Nigeria; indicating both **bankable and un-bankable projects** that the country needed to embark upon. We may have to review and update the document to re-engage the investment community.

See illustration of Bankable and Unbankable Projects - 2011

Closing Thoughts

In the course of preparing for this speech, I conduct a snap survey on the theme of the presentation and the result was quite instructive.

I selected a diverse group of forty-two (42) persons I felt represented the spectrum of the Nigerian society, and I asked them a simple question:

“Kindly provide me with names of persons or institutions you admire (from either or both the private and public sector) that embodies the following: ethics, leadership, governance and positioned to support a thriving economy”.

The survey response revealed the following:

- 52% of respondents said they could not find anyone or entity worthy;
- 40% provided names of individuals mostly from the private sector;
- 3% included names from the private sector;
- 5% included names of persons either dead or retired;
- 21% mentioned at least 3 common names of specific persons and institutions;
- 0% mentioned up to 10 names; and
- 28% mentioned more than 5 names of persons and institutions.

The take-away for me from the exercise was that people have become programmed to expect, believe and accept the worst from the country.

When I called a majority back and went through a list of names of persons and institutions (private and public) in the country that would meet the yardstick applicable for each category, they acknowledged and retorted that it did not cross their minds.

I can relate with that. We are easily programmed by the constant stream of the news and information on both traditional media and social media about the ills, pains and problems

of living in the country that it becomes our accepted reality. The society is an easy target for disinformation as their experiences gets amplified by the stories they read, hear and watch.

Soon enough, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy which manifests in the indifference, apathy and detachment from real, serious and important developments we see. The negativity that is nakedly displayed on social media has assaulted the subconscious of the average Nigerian to an extent that the good that comes out of the country is instinctively rejected as an abnormality or simply false. If only we paid more attention, and give credence to the study of social sciences, we would have these professionals and academics giving wise counsel on how we should deal with these problems. We need their skill sets, now more than ever.

That said, two clear groupings have emerged in the society we need to pay attention to.

- Those who have bought into the negativity and see an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ perspective of our reality, offering themselves as tools for disinformation, hatred, and stereotyping; and
- Those who have decided to *step up* to the challenge of our times by pulling themselves up and confronting their daily grind, hopeful that there work will be the change to make the country great again. They are committed to the task of rebuilding, reshaping and refocusing the country and its narratives to deliver for themselves and the next generation a befitting country.

This is the real challenge for our leaders in business, government and civil society to address. We must encourage the latter group and work hard to convert those in the former group. We will do this by signaling to the public that sovereign integrity is the goal, and the examples provided here can offer a guide on how this can be done.

See illustration of Positive Examples

On the screen now is a list of names you may agree or disagree with, what you cannot do is deny that the names here have played a key role in the society. We can build on that and promote the good we know about them to help create the touch points for a new generation.

After decades of poor examples in governance and leadership we appear to have become trapped in a pool of social despair where hopelessness is an easier option than fighting for a recalibration of our reality.

The responsibility of this audience, the oasis, is to break the mould. The pot carrying the toxic notion of our collective incompetence to govern ourselves must be smashed.

The challenge and responsibility of leadership is to insist that no matter how hard, how dark or how bad things appear to be today, the prospects of a better tomorrow are bright. Admittedly hope is not a method, but where the torch of hope shines brightest the opportunity to believe in the future seems best. We cannot lose hope and our leaders should not lose their humanity.

To forge a future that justifies citizen’s belief in a meaningful future, leadership must see the citizens as assets to be developed and deployed. Nigerians are not waiting for a ministers list; they are waiting for leadership action towards freeing the economic space to unleash the innate creativity of each and every person.

See illustration of Process To people To Integrity

It is my submission therefore, at the very least, that if the government cannot assist the citizens to actualize their legitimate aspirations they should take steps not get in the way of those who wish to seek greatness.

Nigerians are full of hope and expectation and they simply need their government to engage, by encouraging them to execute and agree on a common understanding of the **rules of engagement**.

Once that is clarified, government can restructure itself to provide requisite enablers, safety nets and development friendly supervision / enforcements to govern conduct.

This is the missing middle in the integrity question for Nigeria and its businesses.

I have a lot more to say on the subject, but I must abuse the courtesy extended to me. That after all, is what integrity based conduct is all about.

Let me join others in thanking Mr. Christopher Kolade for his leadership, mentoring and exemplar status for the nation and humanity. I am grateful to you, the host, our Excellency here present, and the esteemed audience for indulging me.

Thank you.

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June 28, 2019, Lagos, Nigeria

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