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Business Environment and Competitiveness Across Nigerian States

Big Ideas Podium
Ending Poverty in Nigeria: Donald Duke Calls for Strong Will and Strategy

In his welcome remarks, the Executive Director of AfriHeritage, Professor Ufo Okeke-Uzodike observed that despite the relative improvement recorded by Nigeria in the World Bank ease of doing business index, the country is still one of the worst places in the world to do business. He said though Nigeria, in 2017 had slightly progressed from its previous position of 169 out of 190 to her current position of 145, quite a lot still needed to be done to get the country truly ready for business.

According to him, “In most states around the country, it remains extremely stressful and very costly to start a business, register property, secure credit, or obtain construction permits”. He further argued that there are also other prohibitive costs that hinder business activities such as chronic lack of electricity and poor security in many areas.

“Many business owners are harassed and stifled by multiple points of taxation. Many others face complex challenges in building on legally purchased lands as communities extort money or push back against state fiat in disposing communal land with little or no compensation”, he asserted.

He acknowledged the impact the economic and growth recovery plan of the government as well as the various policies geared towards ensuring ease of doing business in Nigeria have had on the growth of the economy which ostensibly resulted into the country’s current status as one of the top 10 ‘most improved’ economies in the world.

“Nigeria’s performance in 2017 is attributable to the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan and reforms such as Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan that deployed ostensibly “innovative” approaches. There were also other key reforms such as greater ease in starting a business, registering property, securing credit, paying taxes, and dealing with construction permits”.

Continue on pg. 16
Ending Poverty in Nigeria: Donald Duke Calls for Strong Will and Strategy

Former Governor of Cross River State, Donald Duke, has called for a clear vision, strong will and strategic planning on the part of policy makers, and determination and discipline on the part of the citizenry in order to end or bring to the barest minimum, the menace of poverty in Nigeria. Duke who was the guest speaker at the October 5th edition of Big Ideas Podium observed that Nigeria, as a country, has never lacked in postulating a vision, but lamented that no matter the vision any government in power may have, if there is no strong will or realistic strategy to attain such vision, it will certainly fizzle out in a while.

The Big Ideas Podium is a national platform for public policy debates with the objective of addressing burning and crucial issues that affect development and governance in Nigeria, West Africa, and Africa. The Big Ideas Podium which is organized by the African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage), Enugu, encourages the deployment of both intellectual and empirical insights as it scrutinizes societal and national problems with a view to developing shared understandings of, and proffering recommendations for policies or solutions to social, economic, governance and political challenges facing Nigeria and the African continent.

In his speech titled: “Ending Poverty in Nigeria: Using what we have to get what we want”, the charismatic former chief executive of Cross River State under whose tenure the state witnessed a tremendous lift in critical aspects of development and governance, including tourism, infrastructure development, urban and rural sanitation, education, healthcare, etc. cited examples of several national visions set by various governments in the past to get the country out of poverty line, but were not realized due to lack of STRATEGY of implementation and the WILL to do so.
"We have several examples to show, ‘housing for all by the year 2000’, ‘vision 2010’, ‘vision 2020’, ‘vision 20,20,20’. All ambitious cliches, but hollow in execution because neither the WILL exists and or the STRATEGY for implementation is befuddled”.

In his assessment of the economy the country has run over time, he referred to it as a “wacko economy designed to create jobs and opportunities in foreign countries”. He warned that this time bomb will eventually explode if nothing is urgently done to reverse the trend. “In all this we are sitting on a bomb which is gradually detonating but we fail to appreciate this because the fizzes are far away”.

Proffering a solution on the way forward, Duke said Nigeria needs to design an economy with about 15% annual growth rate in the real sectors of the economy, he said this ought to happen consistently for about ten years in order to bring the country’s economy at par with the burgeoning population of about 230million by 2030 people.

According to him, “$2.5 trillion economy, averaging a per capital income of $10,500 that would generate growth in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, intellectual property and information technology. Not based on an increase in commodity prices, particularly crude oil, which only makes available an increase in the foreign currency available to spend, contributes less than 10% to the GDP, aids corruption, stifles entrepreneurship, encourages laziness and kills industry”.

He averred that only an unparalleled WILL, such that we have never been able to muster from independence can achieve this.

He believes that the country can leverage on its abundant human and material resources to make this happen. He tendered two big Ideas that can be a game changer: proper and maximum utilization of the abundant energy resources in the country, for instance, converting the flared gas in the Niger-delta which is enough to power the gas turbines required to electrify the whole of Africa, to useable fuel.
Secondly, lowering interest rates and elongating tenured finances, as these will encourage more borrowing and investment by the private sector in manufacturing, agriculture, etc.

He also posited that although agriculture has been generally touted as a way out of Nigerian’s economic predicament, with reference to food security, job creation and foreign exchange earnings, but lamented that until the country’s agricultural productivity is industrialized, it will perpetually remain at the subsistence level and therefore may not mean much to the country’s economy.

In his contribution, former Governor of the Central bank of Nigeria, Prof. Charles Soludo, agreed with the guest speaker that given the rapidly expanding population of the country, one of the possible areas of advantage is the exportation of human resources to other countries, but emphasized that such human resources must be skilled in order to make a meaningful impact.

Professor Stella Okunna, one of the paper discussants agreed largely with the guest speaker on the need for VISION and WILL as imperatives in driving the country to the “Promised Land”, but added that perhaps, education should be the main key factor. Lamenting the poor standard of education in Nigeria, the professor of Mass Communication and Dean, Faculty of the Social Sciences at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and former Commissioner for Information in Anambra State, observed that education should be the driving force towards the nation’s development but regrettably, the educational policy of today does not even impart employable skills to the youths upon graduation.

Earlier in his welcome remarks, the Executive Director of AfriHeritage, Professor Ufo Okeke-Uzodike set the tone for the day’s discuss when he provided a rich background to the worrisome threat posed by poverty in a country that ordinarily should not have any relationship with poverty. According to Prof Okeke-Uzodike, “poverty is an issue that is fundamental to national peace, without peace, no society can plan long-term or develop effectively”.

The Afriheritage Chief Executive wondered why Nigeria, in spite of its acclaimed abundant human and natural resources, skilled manpower, strong zeal for success and very determined citizens, still finds itself where it is today and her people being ranked as one of the most deprived people in the world?

He observed that Nigerian citizens are among the most educated professionals in virtually all fields of human endeavour elsewhere, but regretted that all that have not reflected in the development index of the country at home. He said “the blame for the dysfunctions may be placed on our collective heads. Our bad policies, our bad governance, our unbelievable greed, our corruption, our bad attitude, our self-centeredness, our impunity, and our politicization of ethnicity, region, religion, and even our local community combine to make Nigeria one of the worst places to live on earth – certainly for poor people”.

He said the day’s event would explore what is needed to be done within the available resources and capacities to reduce the poverty scourge in Nigeria. The program did not only inform and aid the understanding of poverty in Nigeria but also the associated policy issues and decisions.

The event was well-attended by scholars, professionals and the media.
Introduction
The Big Ideas Podium is a national platform for public policy debates on burning and salient issues that affect or shape development or governance in Nigeria, West Africa, and the African continent. It encourages the deployment of both intellectual and empirical insights as it scrutinizes societal and national problems with a view to developing shared understandings of, and proffering recommendations for policies or solutions to social, economic, governance and political challenges facing Nigeria and the African continent.

The October 5, 2017 edition of the Big Ideas Podium was anchored on the theme: “Ending Poverty in Nigeria: Using what we have to get what we want”. The presentation and much of the discussions focused on the need for the Nigerian leadership and the citizenry to harness its enormous human and natural resources to steer the country out of the woods, based on the paper titled: “Ending Poverty: Using what we have to get what we want”.

Observations
⇒ Nigeria has the fortune of having qualified human and natural resources, a large and diverse population and one of the best weather of any country in the world. Its large and progressive population together with abundant mineral resources can be used to transform the nation into a rich country if they are well utilized and managed.

⇒ However, with a population that will reach 200 million in less than three years, our per capita income is very low, meaning that poverty is highly prevalent in our society.

⇒ Poverty is at the heart of where we are: at the heart of the problems that bedevil the country. Given our God-given resources (human and natural), we have no reason to house a large population of poor people. Despite huge potentials in terms of human and natural resources, Nigeria ranks among the lowest globally in development indicators.

⇒ Our life expectancy is about 54 years, yet we export a large pool of medical doctors to other countries. While other countries’ life expectancy is rising, ours is either stagnated, or going down.

⇒ The problem is squarely on the door steps of the leadership. However, it is important to understand that these leaders did not emerge from the moon. They are products of our communities and societies. So, if the leaders do not perform, it follows that something is also wrong with the communities and societies that produced them, and the rest of us.

⇒ Nigeria is about 194 million in population presently. It is projected that by 2050, it will hit 400 million. If Nigeria cannot feed 194 million people today, what plans do we have to feed 400 million by 2050?

⇒ Nigeria’s problem is not lack of VISION, but lack of WILL and good STRATEGY to mitigate the disaster that has been wrought upon this nation over the years.

⇒ Nigeria has always had ambitious visions and policies, but execution is hollow due both to the lack of will and a committed strategy for implementation.
Nigeria suffers from high inflation rates because the wealthy indulge in luxury goods that are usually imported; this has the net effect of depriving the economy of the needed multiplier effect or impact.

Nigeria’s entire economy is premised on maintaining an exchange rate mechanism that encourages imports, unattractive for exports and manufacturing. In other words, it runs a ‘wacko’ economy, designed to create jobs and opportunities for foreign countries.

Increase in commodity prices alone, particularly crude oil (which contributes less than 10% to the GDP), does not aid the economy. This is because it only makes available an increase in the foreign currency available to be spent, aids corruption, stifies entrepreneurship, encourages laziness and kills industry.

The Asian Tigers have succeeded without as much human and material resources as Nigeria is endowed with. If they can be where they are today, Nigeria should even be better.

Nigeria runs a top-down economy rather than a bottom-up economy. A bottom-up economy would have enabled the citizens to be gainfully employed thereby enabling the government to generate its revenue largely through taxation, instead of the present practice where the government operates a rent-seeking economy.

The implication of the above is that rents and duties are obtained by the government and then it tries to infuse or monetize the economy top down, causing the economy to be largely dependent on handouts, and thereby becoming a ‘goodwill’ economy. This makes the citizenry to be heavily dependent on government patronage.

Nigeria, until recently flared an estimated 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas daily. This is equivalent to 25 million liters of diesel which is enough fuel to power all the turbines required to electrify Africa. This we did for well over 30 years.

Nigeria's finance sector is bedeviled principally by two twin evils: high interest rate and short tenured finances. The former is as a result of an assumed high inflation rate and cost of doing business and the latter the unavailability of credits due to low savings.

Agriculture is touted as the way out for our economic conundrum, especially as regards food security, job creation and foreign exchange conservation. But until agriculture is applicable to industry, it will perpetually remain at the subsistence level.

Nigeria's trade policy is devoid of strategy, more especially as there is no specialization. Trading within and amongst West Africa in dollar denominated currency where there are regional banks such as Ecobank, UBA, Zenith and GTB does not augur well for the economy.

**Recommendations**

- Education is a very important tool of tackling poverty. The abundant human resources should be empowered through education, training and retraining, while the material resources should be properly utilized. This is because there is a strong relationship between illiteracy and poverty.

- In order to reduce the rate of inflation, Nigeria’s economic managers should properly redistribute wealth and cause more people to be income earning.

- Management of the economy is not only measured by how low the government can keep the exchange rate, since this is mainly beneficial to...
their wealthy acolytes. Government should rather create more jobs in the real sectors of the economy. This will help not only in the redistribution of wealth but also enabling citizens to earn a living.

- To further remedy the situation and bring about a reversal of the level of poverty in the country, Nigeria needs to design an economic blueprint that can ensure a growth rate in the real sectors of the economy of about 15% annually, consecutively for 10 years to bring the country to terms with its projected population growth, and its need and place in the comity of nations.

- With a projected population of about 230 million persons by 2030, this economic blueprint will ensure a minimum of $2.5 trillion economy, averaging a per capita income of $10,500 that would generate growth in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, intellectual property and information technology.

- Nigeria should take a cue from the Asian Tigers which have succeeded without as much human and material resources as Nigeria is endowed with. Our material resources should serve as a catalyst to fast track the process.

- Nigeria should change from running a top-down economy to running a bottom-up economy. This will enable the citizens to be gainfully employed and thereby helping the government to generate its revenue largely through taxation. In other words, the wellbeing of the government is to be dependent on the productivity of the people.

- Instead of continuing with the wasteful practice of gas flaring, Nigeria can process this flared gas and pipe it nationwide as a subsidy (even free) for productive investment, helping to ameliorate other hardships experienced in doing business in a difficult environment. It can also help to fuel our economic growth, catalyze productivity, increase GDP, increase employment and make goods made in Nigeria globally competitive.

- To strengthen Nigeria’s finance sector, the tax system should be streamlined and strengthened, especially at the local government levels. Presently, it is so haphazard, discretionary and confusing that it is a major disincentive for investment. An effective tax administration system will create more revenue for the government.

- Encouraging the widening and enforcement of insurance will also create a vast pool of funds that will further ensure the availability of credit. Government should therefore ensure that an effective insurance policy is not only in place but also implemented effectively.

- Nigeria should discourage the importation of goods it has comparative advantage in producing. Import substitution by local manufacturers is imperative, if not for foreign exchange conservation, at least for job creation.

- Agriculture is the surest way out of our economic conundrum, especially as regards food security, job creation and foreign exchange conservation. But it is not yet applicable to industry, and it has perpetually remained at the subsistence level. Government should therefore encourage farmers with subsidies to engage in mechanized farming to increase agricultural output.

- Nigeria’s trade policy should be refocused and in tune with the demands of the time. Moreover, trading within the sub-region should be made in the local currency of the member states and exchanged for the appropriate local currency of the seller state via any of the regional banks.
The African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage), On Tuesday, 14th November, 2017, hosted its Associate Fellows based in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, to an interactive session in the nation’s capital. The event which took place at Valencia Hotel, Wuse II, witnessed an impressive turnout of Associate Fellows who have not been very active in the Institution’s activities especially in the last two years or more.

Welcoming the Associate Fellows to the meeting, the Executive Director of AfriHeritage, Professor Ufo Okeke-Uzodike, thanked his guests for honouring the invitation and said he was delighted to meet with the Fellows and to interact and share with them on how the Institution can re-invent its successes of the past years, after several attempts to have the meeting in Enugu failed. According to him, “the essence of this interactive session is first for us to

- Nigeria should aggressively pursue a housing program of up to 2 million units in new towns using alternate building methods. The Naval housing scheme/model in Calabar should be replicated on a national scale to bridge the 20 million housing shortage.

AfriHeritage and Abuja Based Associate Fellows: A Night of Positive Interactions

- Poverty will greatly be reduced if government ensures that every Nigerian is skilled, has access to healthcare, and has the requisite infrastructure to further his aspirations and the basic technological knowhow to function in a digital world.
meet, discuss on ways we can have a better and more rewarding relationship, particularly on the expectations of, and from an associate fellow of the Institution”, he admonished the Fellows to re-invent the same enthusiasm which helped the Institution achieve some milestones in the past.

The Executive Director who set the mood and agenda for the night’s discussion identified such areas as possible areas of collaboration; re-classification of fellowship of the institution; incentives and reward system; acknowledgement of membership in publications as well as 2018 workplan of AfriHeritage as issues for deliberation.

Responding, the Abuja based Associate Fellows thanked the Executive Director and the Institution for enabling such an interaction which was long overdue, given the fact that they were yet to meet the Executive Director since his assumption of office middle of 2016. They observed that a few issues have hindered a free flow of interaction between the institution and its Associate fellows. According to Dr Frank Amagwu, one of the Associate Fellows, AfriHeritage is still a top-notch research institution in Nigeria and elsewhere.

As a way forward, the Associate fellows in Abuja agreed among themselves to become more involved in the activities of the Institution. They therefore resolved to hold quarterly meetings and interactive sessions even without waiting for the promptings of the Institution. According to them, Dr. Frank Amagwu and Mr. Chidiebere Ibe are to coordinate the meetings and keep AfriHeritage regularly updated.

In conclusion, the Executive Director once again, thanked the Associate Fellows for finding time to share with the Institution, he also appreciated them for their immeasurable contribution towards the success story of AfriHeritage. He assured them that the Institution will surely consider very seriously the resolutions reached at the interactive session.

**AfriHeritage and German Cooperation: Working Towards A Strategic Alliance**

The African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage) and the Deutsche Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH are looking forward to a strategic alliance towards the realization of their respective goals. This was the subject of partnership development meeting in Enugu, between AfriHeritage and the German government agency (GIZ) charged with the responsibility of assisting African migrants who are interested in returning to their home country to do so without the risk of facing unemployment and other economic considerations upon their return.

Representing GIZ at the meeting, Dr Austin Obinna Ezejiofor, Coordinator, Migration for Development Programme, revealed that the German government through his organization is assisting many African migrants living in Germany to, upon their voluntary decision, return to their home country and settle down either permanently or on temporary basis, contributing to the overall development of their home country through the application of their skills acquired while in Germany. He said they do this by assisting in bringing to the knowledge of the returning migrants, many job opportunities that fit their skills, experience and qualification, but may not be known to them. According to him, “this is being done through the placement of highly skilled and qualified returnees into local organizations that require their services, but may not ordinarily afford their wages”.

Some staff of AfriHeritage were among a cross section of participants in the PERL training program in Enugu, between 5th and 8th December, 2017. The training which was titled: **Create, Store and Share Knowledge for Policy influence: A Short Course for Knowledge Hubs**, was part of PERL’s support program for knowledge hubs in the South–east region of Nigeria. The course held at the magnificent Gates Hotel, Enugu and was facilitated by a number of resource persons including Mr Bamidele Thomas, Enene Ejembi, who are knowledge management experts and a host of others. The training which were specifically designed for researchers and communications personnel was meant to enable the participants gain best practice processes and approaches to manage knowledge effectively; improve skills to produce high quality policy research products. It was also designed to increase the ability of the participants to shape popular and elite opinion and trigger actions for good governance. In addition to the above, the course was designed to create a greater awareness of the role of knowledge hubs in bridging the gap between knowledge and policy, and improving policy making.

Other participants were drawn from the Development Strategy Centre (DSC) and Institute for Innovations in Development (IID), all in Enugu. Various trainings and hands-on exercise in the areas of knowledge management, policy briefs, repurposing research, role of knowledge hubs, policy influence/advocacy, social media and citizen engagement, etc were executed over the course of the training. Those who attended the course from AfriHeritage include: Emeka Odom (Communications Manager); Emeka Iloh, Queeneth Ekeocha, Chizoba Obidigbo (Research Unit); and Adachukwu Onwudiwe (Librarian).

Meanwhile, the training was preceded by an exchange/study visit to BudgIT’s (a knowledge hub) office in Lagos, South-western part of Nigeria.
BudgIT is noted for its research and advocacy particularly in the areas of budget analysis and implementation. The intention of the visit was to exchange ideas, share knowledge and have an on-the-spot knowledge of how BudgIT does its work and to also get some briefings on the innovative and creative ways of disseminating research findings, stakeholder engagement and evidence-based policy advocacy being pioneered by the outfit. The Afri-Heritage team made up of the Emeka Odom and Adachukwu Onwudiwe joined other colleagues from IID and DSC and the Perl team on Monday 27th November, 2017, enroute to Lagos. At BudgIT, Mr Atiku Samuel, Head of Research, shared with the team, the operations and strategy of the various arms of the knowledge hub. The 2-day event was rounded up enriched the knowledge and experience the participants in research and policy advocacy and community engagement.
Scholars and professionals in the various relevant fields of knowledge gathered at the African Heritage Institution on Thursday 7th and Friday 8th December, 2017, to affirm their seal of confidence and authentication to the various research works undertaken by the Institution in the last one year, particularly in the areas of methodology, theoretical background, hypothesis, sampling, interpretation/analysis of data and presentation of findings.

The event which came as a Research Review and Validation Workshop was well attended by university dons, scholars in research institutions, professionals and the media. Some of the research works that came under focus were those undertaken in the year 2017.

Setting the tone for the day’s deliberations, the Executive Director of the African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage), Professor Ufo Okeke-Uzodike said the purpose of the exercise was to mainly, among other things, ensure that the institution is kept on its toes in the area of producing quality research. “This review workshop seeks largely to do four things:

To keep us on our toes about the work we do at AfriHeritage with regard to our obligation to do quality research, and research relevant to our context; to further raise official awareness about the continued importance of research & ordered policymaking. Public policies should be evidence-based,” he says.

Professor Okeke-Uzodike lamented the very poor attention paid to research development in Nigeria by governments. He emphasized the importance of investing adequately in research and development activities, saying such investments will always ultimately lead to prosperity. He wondered how a country that starves research institutions of adequate funds can make relevant policies for the country, policies that are backed by evidence. “How can policymakers craft effective policies for the youth when they have little or no clue about the extent of the key problems facing the youth – level of unemployment, drug abuse, high levels of school dropouts, etc? How can policymakers address the problem of over-fishing when they know little or nothing about our fisheries and wetlands”, he queried.

Some members of the Review and Validation Panel include: Dr Freedom Onuoha of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Dr Ikenna Alumona (Anambra state University); Dr Ernest Aniche (Federal University, Otuoke) among others.
The Board of Directors (BoD) of the African Heritage Institution (AfriHeritage) met in Abuja, the Nigerian federal capital territory in the month of December 2017 to deliberate on some major issues concerning the progress, welfare and development of the renowned research institution, including approval of the Institution’s work plan for 2018; audited financial report and appointment of external auditors for 2017 accounts. The meeting which held at the Valencia Hotels, Wuse II was chaired by the Chairman of the Board, Professor Chukwuma C. Soludo. Other members of the Board present include: Bishop Mathew Kukah, Professor Akpan Ekpo, Professor Osita Ogbu and Professor Ufo Okeke-Uzodike (Executive Director)

**BOARD MEETING IN ABUJA**

The restructuring of Nigeria has been the staple of conversations across the country for quite some time now, in the light of the glaring inability of the extant political, economic and legal structures of the country to support the actualization of the Nigeria of our dreams. It has gotten a cross-section of Nigerians talking fervently – from bloggers to newspaper columnists, and from casual observers to political bigwigs like the Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu, and the former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar.

However, the issue of restructuring has also continued to divide opinions. While many Nigerians are of the belief that there is a pressing need for the restructuring of the country, others have distanced themselves from the idea, and an intermediate group has asked for clarification on what exactly restructuring entails. I want to unequivocally align myself with the school of thought that supports the political, economic and constitutional restructuring of Nigeria wherein power will be devolved from the center back to the federating units.

Clearly, the country (as presently constituted) is incapable of accommodating the needs and aspirations of its citizens. Restructuring will – at least in theory – tackle some of the challenges embedded in the current configuration by addressing the structural imbalance in the polity, freeing the federating units from the stranglehold of the center, promoting healthy economic competition among those federating units and quietening the cries of marginalization.

Nonetheless, unlike many other advocates of the restructuring of Nigeria, I do not believe that it is the elixir to all of the country’s ills. Simply revamping the political, economic and constitutional frameworks of the country will not bring about the transformation that we desire, because Nigeria’s problem goes beyond its defective administrative structure. There is also the systemic defect.

When Nigeria is restructured, what is the guarantee that the newly minted structures of the country will not be abused by those in power and the masses alike the same way that the current structures are? For instance, Nigeria presently has laws proscribing virtually every offence imaginable, from bribery to
examination malpractice and from traffic misdemeanor to domestic violence, yet we are one of the most lawless countries in the world, flouting laws at will and obeying them only when it is convenient.

The incidents of motorists breaking basic traffic rules all in a bid to get to their various destinations in record time are commonplace on Nigerian roads. Demanding monetary inducement before performing official duties has become the norm. What is the guarantee that our disposition to these laws and responsibilities will suddenly change when administrative power is devolved in Nigeria?

Similarly, there are two anti-graft agencies set up to tackle the country’s culture of corruption, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), yet the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) alleged that Nigeria lost $32 billion to corruption between 2010 and 2015 – an average of more than $5 billion per year! What is the guarantee that these bodies and agencies will suddenly be up and doing in a restructured Nigeria?

Then again, a certain Federal Character Principle is enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution and a certain Federal Character Commission was set up to enforce it, yet a President of Nigeria can make more than 70% of his political appointments from one section of the country and no one will even bat an eyelid. What is the guarantee that the gatekeepers of the Nigerian democracy will be alive to their responsibilities when a regional premier or a state governor (depending on which variant of federalism we decide to adopt) blatantly contravenes provisions embedded in their regional or state constitution in a restructured Nigeria?

If Nigeria decentralizes its police system, what is the guarantee that a state governor will not deploy it as his private army to bully the populace and harass his political opponents? Restructuring will not solve these ingrained problems. It will only mitigate Nigeria’s superficial problems in the short-term, while the systemic ones linger and grow more deleterious and intractable.

Over the years, the fundamental factor that has scuttled and undermined Nigeria’s progress and viability is the fragility of our institutions. The absence of strong institutions in Nigeria has made it almost impossible to enforce rules, whip people into line and ensure that actions and inactions have consequences. This feeds into and is, in turn, reinforced by a host of other defects that have bedeviled our polity, including bad leadership and misgovernment, disempowered and spectating followership and a morally bankrupt value system.

The more advanced societies and democracies that we often look up to, like the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and France, have been able to function effectively because of the presence of strong institutions therein that enable their systems to self-regulate, check the excesses of the ruling class and empower the citizens to be alive to their civic rights and responsibilities.

Accordingly, it has left their leaders with no choice but to render selfless service to their communities, while the followers have been empowered to expect and demand good governance from their leaders and enlightened to understand that the task of building a virile, functional and progressive nation is not the exclusive preserve of those in leadership.

Conversely, due to the absence of such institutional mechanisms and regulatory frameworks in Nigeria, we have been going round in circles. The leaders have taken advantage of this to exploit the system and convert leadership into a vehicle for embezzlement, self-aggrandizement, nepotism, cronyism, influence peddling, political repression and other forms of malfeasance. The hapless followers, failed
by their leaders, have also been forced to exploit the system in order to make ends meet, thereby instituting a value system and political culture of rascality, materialism, subterfuge and corruption.

In his 2009 state visit to Ghana, the former President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, advised African States to build strong institutions in order to escape from the maze of underdevelopment. But, the question is: how can these strong institutions be built? Since leaders chart the course that everyone else has to follow, the onus lies on them to build these strong institutions. Hence, the natural first step in building strong institutions in Nigeria is sanitizing our leadership recruitment process so that individuals with the drive and motive to alter the status quo and institutionalize good governance and the rule of law will get in and those with vested interests and questionable character will be shut out.

Nigeria, just like those advanced countries that we look up to and aim to emulate, is not lacking in individuals with the commitment to make positive change. The problem is that our electoral process does not allow them to get in. Our leadership positions are sold to the highest bidders at the expense of the candidates with the best ideas, while those who will maintain the status quo and toe the established line are preferred to those who could shake it up. Our electoral process and justice system must be strengthened so that the votes of the electorate will really count and the outcome of elections will no longer be determined in the homes of party chief-tains and godfathers.

Secondly, since a country gets the government it deserves, it is pertinent that the electorate and the general public are empowered to make the right choices in the democratic process and elect candidates with unimpeachable character and proven track records over those who make vague promises and dole out a few naira notes and bags of rice at polling stations. They must also be enlightened on their civic responsibilities and be made to understand that the task of building a strong, progressive and sustainable society must not be left to the leaders alone.

Only when these are accomplished will the restructuring of Nigeria have the effect that Nigerians envision. In the absence of that, then the entire process of restructuring becomes just another academic exercise and cosmetic change that deals with the superficial issues instead of tackling the underlying causes of the problem.

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Continued from pg. 2.

He said BECANS series which have for several years been at the forefront of tracking the ease of doing business and competitiveness in Nigeria provides a veritable tool for policy evaluation and redirection towards the overall institutionalization of ease of doing business in Nigeria.

Taking an over-view of the BECANS series, the Executive Director of the Anambra State Invest
Press Coverage!
The Institution’s events where publicized by different media organizations within the period. Some of them are;

LEADERSHIP Thursday 16th November, 2017 pg. 33.
LEADERSHIP Weekend – Saturday, 16th December, 2017 pg. 17.
NATIONAL LIGHT Thursday 14th December, 2017 pg. 21.
BLUEPRINT Wednesday 20th December, 2017 pg. 33
BLUEPRINT Wednesday 20th December, 2017 pg. 34
LEADERSHIP Weekend Saturday 7th October, 2017 pg. 18.

Different Blog Sites e.g. ELANZA news.com, Buzznews.com, enugunow.com, etc. publicized AfriHeritage Events.
Many radio stations, e.g. Dreams FM, Solid FM, Urban FM, Caritas FM, etc.
Many Blog sites, e.g. etc.