NIGERIA AT CROSSROAD: RE-POSITIONING THE NATION POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, faces persistent political and economic challenges, and widespread poverty. This article examines the country's woes and proposes comprehensive solutions. The paper argues that Nigeria's transformation hinges on institutional reforms, economic diversification and inclusive governance. Recommendations such as enhancing the transparency and efficiency of the electoral process, effective decentralization strategy, strengthening anti-corruption institutions and economic diversification through agriculture and infrastructural development, implementing these measures requires a strong political will and leadership commitment, citizens engagement and participation, and strategic successful implementation of these measures as outlined in the paper can yield to improved governance and transparency, economic growth, diversification, and political participation, among others. This article concludes by providing a road map for Nigeria's political and economic resurgence, highlighting the need for collective action and commitment from government, citizens and stakeholders.*

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Crossroad, Re-positioning, Nation.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and a major player on the continent; it is located on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea between Cameroon and Benin as well as Niger and Chad, between the 14º and 4º of northern latitude and the 3º and 15º of eastern longitude. Its territory is 924-thousand-kilometre square which is divided by 36 federal member states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) according to the present public administration system. Its highest point is the Chappal Waddi on the Cameroonian border, its height above sea level is 2.419 m. The coast of the southern parts of the country lies along the Atlantic Ocean known as the Gulf of Guineas. It shares a boundary with Lake Chad in the northeast. Popular and remarkable geographical features in the country are Mambilla Plateau, Adamawa highlands, Obudu Plateau, Jos Plateau, River Niger, River Benue and Niger Delta (Adewale, 2022).

The country - the Federal Republic of Nigeria – is one of the most significant countries of Africa both from the point of economy and demography. This is the reason why some Nigerians like to call their homeland the "Giant of Africa". Owing to its geographical location, Nigeria has a tropical climate, during both of the seasons (rainy and dry) temperature is relatively high. In the southern part of the country the rainy season lasts from mid March till October while in the north from May till October which is viable for agricultural purposes.

Nigeria is a very rich country in natural resources: it has 34 different mineral resources, including gold, iron ore, coal and limestone. It has been proven that the country has 37.2 billion barrels of petroleum, and 187 trillion cubic feet reserves in natural gas. The average daily yield of oil exploitation is around 2.3 million barrels per day, but in case of need it can be increased to 4 million barrels. The previous British colony obtained its independence on October 1, 1960, however Nigeria is still a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.

However, despite the aforementioned attributes of Nigeria such as mineral resources, agricultural capabilities, manpower among others, the country faces multifaceted challenges that span political instability, economic vulnerability, and social fragmentation. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies to foster political stability, economic prosperity, and national unity. This paper explores how Nigeria can navigate these crossroads and offers recommendations for moving forward.

POLITICAL REFORM

Political reform in Nigeria is crucial for ensuring democratic stability and governance effectiveness in the country. Nigeria's political landscape has been marred by issues such as electoral fraud, corruption, and lack of transparency, which undermine public trust and hinder development. Recent efforts, including the introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), aim to address these challenges by enhancing the credibility of elections (Ojo, 2023). However, more comprehensive reforms are needed to address systemic issues. Strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring judicial independence are key components of political reform. The judiciary must operate without political interference to uphold the rule of law and ensure accountability (Ogunleye, 2022). Additionally, decentralizing power to local governments can improve administrative efficiency and address regional disparities (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2020). Anti-corruption measures are also essential; robust frameworks and independent agencies must be empowered to combat corruption effectively and transparently (Ezeani, 2021).

Strengthening Democratic Institutions

A cornerstone of political stability in Nigeria is the robustness of its democratic institutions. The Nigerian electoral system has faced criticisms regarding fairness and transparency. Recent studies highlight that improving the electoral process is vital for democratic integrity (Alemika, 2021). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made strides with the introduction of technologies such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) (Ojo, 2023). However, ensuring the effective implementation of these technologies and addressing challenges like voter intimidation and electoral fraud are crucial for restoring public trust in the electoral process.

The judiciary's independence is another critical factor. Political interference in judicial matters undermines the rule of law and erodes public confidence in governance (Ogunleye, 2022). Strengthening judicial institutions by ensuring their autonomy and enhancing their capacity to handle corruption cases is essential.

Decentralization of Power

Nigeria's federal structure often leads to a concentration of power at the federal level, which can exacerbate regional inequalities and administrative inefficiencies. Decentralization can address these issues by empowering local governments to address specific regional needs (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2020). Effective decentralization requires a clear delineation of powers between federal and state governments and adequate resources for local administration.Decentralization will greatly reduce the burden on the federal government which will inevitably allow states and local governments to bring about meaningful developments to their citizens.

Anti-Corruption Measures

Corruption remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria. Despite efforts by the government and anti-corruption agencies, corruption continues to impede development (Ezeani, 2021). To combat this, Nigeria needs to enhance its anti-corruption framework by strengthening institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). Implementing stricter regulations, increasing transparency, and encouraging public participation in anti-corruption efforts are vital steps that can help reduce the issue of corruption in the country.

Strengthening Political Parties

Democracy as the cornerstone of modern governance thrives on the strength of its institutions, which includes political parties as they play a pivotal role in shaping the democratic landscape, and in the functioning and sustenance of democracy. They also serve as the organizational framework through which citizens express their political preferences by bringing together people with the same political ideology to compete for public office, and influence policy decisions.

By providing a structured way for citizens to organize around shared values, parties are able to ensure that a wide range of views is represented in the political arena. Thus, the ownership of political parties should not be seen as a one-man affair; everybody should be given equal opportunities. It is equally important that parties adhere to established rules and procedures

guiding the party as this ensures that they are not weakened internally through the litigation of cases arising from their activities such as party primaries and elections of party leadership.

As such, the need to strengthen political parties is not merely a matter of organizational development but a crucial prerequisite for sustaining the democracy of a nation. The significance of political parties goes beyond the mere function of contesting and capturing or retaining political power – it is vital to our democracy's survival as military governments do not recognize political parties as a platform to contest elections and form new governments.

However, Nigeria's political parties have not lived up to expectations as democratic institutions: they regularly flout their own constitutions and rules, they do not have ideologies that set them apart from others, and far too often, their primaries are so riddled with irregularities that it is the courts that often decide the winners when it should be the members.

Accountability and transparency are integral qualities that contribute to the overall health, effectiveness, and legitimacy of a political party. A party that embraces these principles not only strengthens its internal cohesion but also enhances its standing in the eyes of the public, reinforcing the democratic foundations on which it operates, playing a central role in shaping policies, fostering civic engagement, and ensuring the effective functioning of the political system. This means that the process of selecting candidates and party leadership should be transparent and inclusive, as this will reduce the likelihood of the court deciding the party's leadership or its candidates in elections. The fate of who emerges as party candidates and leadership should be decided by party members and not the court. This can help prevent conflicts within the party that might spill over into legal challenges.

Another important function of political parties is their ability to effectively translate their policy platform into actionable measures once in office, as this shows their readiness to serve the people. It is also important that opposition parties should serve as a watchdog that will scrutinize the actions of the ruling party, holding them accountable for their decisions and providing an alternative vision for governance.

Lastly, parties should engage in and provide avenues for public discourse and debates that elevate the level of discussions in the society on tackling governance issues. They should also carry out campaigns that enhance political literacy among citizens, increasing the capacity of these citizens to make the right choices at the ballot box. Importantly, they should also invest in the capacity development of party members' skills and capabilities.

A party that prioritizes capacity building will foster a cadre of competent leaders and policymakers that will enhance its ability to implement effective and well-informed policies. If its members are skilled in the various aspects of governance and policy making, the party will remain connected to the interests and concerns of its constituents. Regular engagement with the public through town halls, surveys, and other feedback mechanisms ensures that the party's policies align with the needs of the people it aims to represent.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

Nigeria's path to economic development hinges on strategic diversification, infrastructure improvement, and human capital investment. The nation's heavy reliance on oil exports exposes it to global price volatility, necessitating diversification into sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing (Olawale & Ojediran, 2022). Investing in these areas can reduce economic dependence on oil and create new revenue streams.

Infrastructure development is equally vital. Nigeria's infrastructure deficit in transportation, energy, and technology impedes economic growth. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are an effective strategy to address these gaps, leveraging private sector investment and expertise to improve infrastructure (Oyebode, 2023). Such investments not only enhance operational efficiency but also attract foreign investment and stimulate economic activity.

Human capital investment through education and vocational training is another key strategy. Aligning educational programs with labor market needs and expanding vocational training can address skill shortages and reduce youth unemployment (Sanni, 2023). Equipping the workforce with relevant skills fosters innovation and productivity.

Diversification of the Economy

Nigeria's economy has historically been heavily reliant on oil, which makes it vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. Diversification is crucial for achieving sustainable economic growth. Recent research emphasizes the need to invest in sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing (Olawale & Ojediran, 2022). For example, agribusiness and agro-processing can not only reduce reliance on oil but also create jobs and stimulate rural development. Government policies should support innovation and entrepreneurship by providing incentives for startups and SMEs. Investment in technology and infrastructure, such as broadband internet, can facilitate the growth of a digital economy and enhance competitiveness (Adeniran, 2022).

Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development is a critical driver of economic growth and national progress in Nigeria. The country's infrastructure deficits, particularly in transportation, energy, and technology, hinder economic activities and limit development opportunities (Oyebode, 2023). Addressing these gaps through strategic investments and reforms is essential for fostering sustainable growth.

Investing in transportation infrastructure, including roads, railways, and ports, can significantly enhance connectivity and efficiency in goods movement. Improved transportation networks facilitate trade, attract foreign investment, and support regional integration (Adeniran, 2022). Similarly, upgrading energy infrastructure to ensure reliable electricity supply is crucial for supporting industrial activities and improving quality of life (Olawale & Ojediran, 2022). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are an effective model for infrastructure development in Nigeria. Leveraging private sector investment and expertise can accelerate project implementation and improve service delivery (Oyebode, 2023). Additionally, incorporating technology into infrastructure projects, such as smart grids and digital transportation systems, can enhance functionality and sustainability.

Prioritizing infrastructure development not only boosts economic productivity but also addresses social inequalities by improving access to essential services. For Nigeria to achieve robust and equitable growth, a comprehensive and inclusive approach to infrastructure investment is vital.

Youth Employment and Education

Nigeria's large youth population presents both challenges and opportunities. To harness this demographic dividend, the country needs to focus on education and job creation. Recent reports indicate a need for significant reforms in the education sector to align curriculum with market needs and promote vocational training (Sanni, 2023). By investing in education and skill development, Nigeria can reduce youth unemployment and foster a more innovative workforce.

Therefore, by implementing these economic strategies, diversification, infrastructure enhancement, and human capital investment, Nigeria can build a more resilient economy, drive sustainable growth, and improve the overall quality of life for its citizens.

NATIONAL UNITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

National unity and social cohesion are essential for Nigeria's stability and progress, given its diverse ethnic and religious composition. Promoting inclusivity and tolerance is crucial for fostering a unified national identity. Educational programs and media campaigns that highlight common values and celebrate diversity can help bridge ethnic and religious divides (Chukwuma, 2021). Ensuring equitable representation of various groups in political and social institutions also supports inclusivity and strengthens social cohesion.

Addressing conflicts and promoting peace-building efforts are vital for national stability. Nigeria has faced significant internal conflicts, including insurgency and ethnic violence. Community-based peace-building initiatives and reconciliation programs are effective strategies for addressing the root causes of these conflicts, such as poverty and marginalization (Nwachukwu, 2022). Investing in conflict resolution mechanisms can promote long-term peace and stability. Also, enhancing civic engagement is another key component of national unity. Encouraging active participation in governance and community activities empowers citizens and fosters a sense of shared purpose (Ibrahim, 2023). Strengthening civil society organizations and supporting grassroots advocacy can enhance democratic practices and social cohesion. By focusing on inclusivity, peace-building, and civic engagement, Nigeria can build a more cohesive society and strengthen national unity.

Promoting Inclusivity and Tolerance

Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity requires careful management to ensure national unity. Promoting inclusion and tolerance in Nigeria is essential for fostering national unity and social harmony amidst its diverse ethnic and religious landscape. Efforts to enhance inclusivity and tolerance address the root causes of discrimination and social fragmentation, paving the way for a more cohesive society. Educational initiatives play a pivotal role in promoting inclusivity. Curricula that incorporate the histories and cultures of various ethnic groups can foster mutual respect and understanding among students (Chukwuma, 2021). Moreover, media campaigns that highlight the benefits of diversity and challenge stereotypes contribute to a more tolerant society (Ibrahim, 2023). Policy reforms are also crucial. Ensuring equitable representation of

all ethnic and religious groups in political and social institutions helps address grievances and prevent marginalization (Adewale, 2022). Strengthening anti-discrimination laws and enforcement mechanisms can protect vulnerable groups and promote fair treatment.

Community-based programs that encourage dialogue and collaboration among different groups further support social cohesion. These initiatives can mitigate conflicts and build bridges across divides. By integrating these strategies, Nigeria can enhance social inclusion, reduce prejudice, and build a more unified and resilient nation.

Conflict Resolution and Peace-building

Conflict resolution and peace-building are critical for Nigeria's stability, given its diverse ethnic and religious landscape. The country has faced persistent conflicts, including insurgencies and communal violence, which undermine national unity and development. Addressing these conflicts requires a multifaceted approach that tackles both immediate violence and underlying causes. Recent peace-building efforts in Nigeria emphasize the importance of community-based initiatives. These programs focus on fostering dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting groups, addressing grievances, and promoting mutual understanding (Nwachukwu, 2022). Effective conflict resolution involves not only negotiating ceasefires but also implementing long-term strategies that address socio-economic disparities and marginalization, which often fuel unrest (Chukwuma, 2021).

Government and civil society collaboration is essential in these efforts. Strengthening local institutions and involving communities in peace-building processes can enhance their effectiveness and sustainability (Ibrahim, 2023). Additionally, integrating conflict resolution training and peace education into national policies can help prevent future conflicts.

By addressing both the symptoms and root causes of conflict through comprehensive peace-building strategies, Nigeria can achieve greater stability and foster a more cohesive society.

Enhancing Civic Engagement

Enhancing civic engagement in Nigeria is crucial for strengthening democracy and fostering national unity. Civic engagement involves actively participating in political and community processes, which helps in promoting accountability, transparency, and inclusivity. In Nigeria, increasing civic engagement can address the gaps in governance and strengthen democratic institutions. Recent efforts highlight the importance of empowering citizens through education and awareness programs. Initiatives that educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities can encourage more informed and active participation in governance (Ibrahim, 2023). Additionally, promoting platforms for public dialogue and involvement in decision-making processes helps bridge the gap between the government and the people (Adewale, 2022).

Supporting civil society organizations and grassroots movements is also vital. These organizations play a crucial role in advocating for community needs, monitoring government actions, and mobilizing public opinion (Ogunleye, 2022). Moreover, leveraging digital technologies and social media can amplify civic engagement by providing platforms for debate, organizing campaigns, and facilitating direct communication between citizens and policymakers. By fostering a culture of active citizenship and leveraging modern tools, Nigeria can enhance civic engagement, build stronger democratic institutions, and promote a more inclusive society.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria stands at a critical crossroads, facing significant challenges in its political, economic, and social spheres. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that involves strengthening democratic institutions, diversifying the economy, and fostering national unity. By implementing comprehensive reforms and strategies, Nigeria can navigate its current difficulties and build a more stable, prosperous, and united nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. **Electoral and Judicial Reforms**: Enhance the transparency and efficiency of the electoral process and strengthen the independence of the judiciary to restore public trust and ensure fair governance.

2. **Decentralization**: Implement a more effective decentralization strategy to empower local governments and address regional disparities.

3. **Anti-Corruption Framework**: Strengthen anti-corruption institutions and enforce stricter regulations to combat corruption effectively.

4. **Economic Diversification**: Invest in non-oil sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing to reduce reliance on oil and stimulate economic growth.

5. **Infrastructure Investment**: Improve infrastructure through public-private partnerships to support economic development and attract investment.

6. **Educational Reform**: Revise educational curricula and expand vocational training to align with market needs and reduce youth unemployment.

7. **Promote Inclusivity**: Foster inclusivity and tolerance through education and equitable representation in political and social institutions.

8. **Conflict Resolution**: Address the root causes of conflicts and invest in community-based peacebuilding initiatives.

9. **Enhance Civic Engagement**: Encourage active civic participation and strengthen civil society organizations to build national unity.

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