

Nigerian Muslims in Diaspora: A Blueprint for Meaningful Contribution Towards Nigerian Economic Development

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By

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Introduction

إن الحمد لله نحمده ونستعينه ونتوب إليه ونعوذ بالله من شرور أنفسنا وسيئات أعمالنا، من يهده الله فلا مضل له ومن يضلل فلا هادي له وأشهد ألا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له وأشهد أن محمدا عبده ورسوله، صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وأصحابه وسلم تسليما كثيرا.

All praise are due to Allah. We seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from whatever evil our hearts conceal and from the consequences of our evil deeds. Whoever Allah grants guidance will never be led astray. Whoever He leads astray will never find guidance. I attest that none is worthy of worship except Allah, who Has no partners, and that Mohammad (SAW) is His slave and Messenger. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him (SAW), his household, and companions.

"O ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam." [Surah Al-Imran 3: 102]

"And as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, verily Jannah will be his abode." (Surah Al Naazi'aat: verse 40 & 41)

Distinguished brothers and sisters, I greet you all in the best form of greeting prescribed to us by The All-Knowing: As-salaamu 'alaykum wa Rahmatu'llahi wa BarakaatuH.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Nigerian Muslim Forum (NMF), especially the Amir, for giving Nigerian Muslims Network (NMN) the opportunity not to only participate in the conference but also to present a paper. We feel honored to be part of this august gathering in this August.

The topic before me today is to suggest a blueprint – in the form of individual and collective action, attitude etc - that would ensure that every conscious efforts made towards contributing to the economic development of Nigeria yields the desired results. In order to adequately identify the necessary components of this

blueprint, it is paramount to understand what economic development of a country entails.

WHAT IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

Economic development of a country is a multi-dimensional concept that covers improvement to citizens' well-being in all its ramifications. So, a country is deemed developing economically when unemployment rate is plummeting appreciably, the gap between the poor and the rich is closing out (basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, and health care are adequately and uniformly distributed among the citizenry), signs of equality before the law becomes prevalent and seen as the norm in the society, appreciable safety of life and property is in place etc etc – the list is endless!

It is therefore clear that *economic growth* of a country, simply defined as the increase in value of the goods and services produced¹, is grossly inadequate² to measure a country's *economic development*. It could also be argued that *human development* - which is nothing but creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests³ - is a subset of *economic development*. The insufficiency of human development as a measure of a nation's development is well-noted⁴.

With this brief explanation of what economic development entails, Brothers and sisters, we are in a better position to evaluate the current level of economic development in Nigeria as well as necessary measures to ensure our country becomes one of the economically developed countries of the world. Most importantly, the role of Nigerian Muslims in Diaspora in the identified economic development measures would be identified.

CURRENT LEVEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is among the major oil-exporting countries to the United States, ranking 5th for both crude oil and total petroleum exports in 2007 and 2008. About a million barrel per day of both crude oil and petroleum are exported to America⁵. Nigeria has been exporting crude oil and petroleum since 1971 after joining

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Country (OPEC). Oil export remained the major revenue generator for the country.

Apart from oil, Nigeria is blessed with other natural resources such as tin, lead, iron ore, limestone, coal, niobium, zinc, and, last but not the least, arable land. Of these mineral resources that are in abundance, coal and tin are believed to be under-exploited⁶. Despite huge deposits of these natural resources, the mining industry in Nigeria is almost non-existent.

There are two main mining industries in Nigeria. They are the Nigerian Mining Corporation (NMC), Jos, and the Nigerian Coal Corporation, Enugu. These establishments are barely functioning now for reasons hard to fathom. During a three-day Nigerian Minerals Event (NIME) held in London in September of 2001, it was revealed that Nigeria mineral resources is approximately three times those of South Africa. South Africa mining industry is said to be worth about \$30 billion a year and earn the country three times more revenue than what Nigeria realizes from oil and gas sector! Our leaders are certainly not oblivious of the untapped potential of this sector. Former president Olusegun Obasanjo was quoted to have said:

"Despite the abundance of mineral commodities in the country, solid minerals account for less than 0.3% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It's totally unacceptable that we have to use our resources to import industrial minerals that we could ourselves exploit commercially"⁷

It seems the thrust of this message did not go beyond the four walls of the event venue as there is nothing to show in the mining industry seven years on!

The vast arable land was effectively utilized in the 1960s when Nigeria was able to feed her citizenry and was a major exporter of cash crops as one of the main foreign exchange earner for the country. The main agricultural products include palm oil, sugar cane, groundnuts, citrus fruits, cocoa, maize, coconut, yams, pearl millet, and cassava. The current sorry state sees Nigeria as a

major importer of these basic products. Population explosion from 1960 to date (almost quadruple from about 40 million in 1960 to over 140 million in 2006)⁸ could not, arguably, be blamed for the inability of Nigerian government to maintain its glory of the late fifties and early sixties. There are countries with populations far exceeding Nigeria's – e.g., China, India etc - that are able to grow enough to feed their citizen and for export. The only difference between late fifties and now is, perhaps, the change in the leadership and leadership mindset. Corruption, in various forms and levels, has been largely agreed to be the root cause of the persistent drawbacks.

The tourism industry in Nigeria, regulated by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation, would have been a major revenue builder save for the bad roads, erratic electricity supply, poor water quality⁹, and insecurity. The situation is so bad that Nigerian embassies abroad are like ghost towns when compared to other tourist-attracting countries' embassies. No one simply want to risk his life travelling to a country painted in the media, and to a greater extent truly so, as an insecure abode where fraudsters (a.k.a 419) usually have a field day. The increasing kidnappings of foreign nationals, especially at the oil region of Niger Delta, are other debilitating factors.

The poor state of basic infrastructure – grossly inadequate water supply, unreliable power supply, bad roads, etc – and insecurity did not affect the tourism industry alone but also other industrial sectors such as Petrochemical industries, Refineries, Textiles Industries, Car manufacturing Industries etc. Despite all these dark sides on the state of affairs in the country, there seems to be *light at the end of the tunnel* with recent developments.

PROSPECT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has been identified as one of the eleven countries (a.k.a Next 11 or simply N-11) of the world with promising outlooks for investment and future growth¹⁰. This revelation was made on December 12, 2005 by Goldman Sachs, a leading global investment banking, securities and investment management firm established in 1869, with headquarter at 85 Broad Street, Lower Manhattan area of New York City, USA. Goldman Sachs has

offices in financial centers all over the world. The remaining N-11 countries are Indonesia, Bangladesh, Mexico, Egypt, Vietnam, Iran, Pakistan, South Korea, Philippines, and Turkey. The company used, among other criteria, macroeconomic stability, political maturity, openness of trade and investment policies, and the quality of education to populate the list.

Some of us at this sitting may not be convinced of this forecasted economic development prospect for Nigeria given the various realities on the ground, especially the recent revelation of the typical psyche of some of the leaders we have in power. There is no doubt that the huge revenue from oil, as well as other sectors, is being drained somehow since previous governments have nothing really tangible to show for it. The activities of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have removed the blind on the face of some of the drainage points, despite the various allegations against the EFCC in the media as a mere political tool. The most recent, nay current, revelation is that of "honorable" Ambassador Sam Edem's saga. He was reported to have confessed to dashing out a whopping ₦800 million naira to a voodoo practitioner for various supernatural supports. Though the US-educated Edem, who is in his late fifties, claimed that he was hypnotized, the graphic details of the various deals revealed by the supposed illiterate Voodoo practitioner, identified as Perekambowei Oga, suggest that the bubble burst only when this *jujuman* could not deliver satisfactorily on some of his client's assignments¹¹. The *jujuman* revealed to the police that he has enjoyed patronage of governors and other high-ranking government officials. Who do we expect to patronize him if not those who count in billions?

On the evidence of positive signal for economic development, at least from a layman point of view, is freeing the country from the bondage of debt. With the main aim of financing projects that would alleviate economic suffering of her populace, Nigeria accumulated a significant foreign debt chiefly from the *Paris Club**. Almost all of the projects deemed financed by these debts

* Paris Club is an informal group of financial officials from 19 of the world's richest countries, which provides financial services such as debt restructuring, debt relief, and debt cancellation to indebted countries and their creditors. Debtors are often recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after alternative solutions have failed.

failed to live up to expectations either because of corruption or inefficient management. As a result, Nigeria defaulted on its agreed principal debt repayments plans. This led to accumulation of arrears and penalty interest which increased the size of the debt.

Nigeria made history in April 2006 when it became the first African Country to fully pay off its debt owed to the Paris Club. The debt was estimated to be \$30 billion. Payment of the debt was as a result of an agreement reached on October 20, 2005, after a long discussion between Nigeria authorities and its Paris Club creditors. Based on the agreement, Nigeria had to pay only 40% of the debt owed (12.4 billion naira). This relieved the country from debt servicing to the tune of about \$ 1.15 billion per year. This money could be spent on various poverty alleviation programs¹². Nigeria's debt owed to the Paris Club was part of a total debt of \$ 35.9 billion owed¹³.

With this background on economic development in Nigeria, we are in good position to specify blueprint for meaningful economic development.

BLUEPRINT FOR MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION

With the brief background on some of what are suspected as responsible for Nigeria's economic woes and the forecasted economic development prospects, some strategies could be mapped out that would ensure that Diasporians' contributions towards Nigerias' economic development would be meaningful. Such contributions could be made at both individual and collective levels in the following ways:

- ❖ A group of Diasporan Muslims could be formed to be a main driving force in sensitizing Nigerian Muslim organizations in Diaspora to make it part of their goal to device ways of assisting Nigeria's policy makers in realizing the objective of making the country one of the next generations of developed countries. Members of this group could be drawn from existing organizations outside Nigeria. This group should have a well-established contact with registered Islamic organizations on the ground for logistics purposes.

- ❖ The group so formed would identify various economic development programs – centered around poverty reduction, crisis prevention and recovery, environment and Energy, HIV/AIDS prevention etc - embarked upon by the government at both federal and state levels and coordinate with members on the ground to advise on progress monitoring strategies, in case this does not exist or inadequate, to ensure the monies invested by the government in these programs are judiciously utilized. These strategies could include advising the government to enforce monthly or quarterly progress report on the Directors of the programs to be made available to the media and program webpage, accepting feedback from the masses, adequate periodic auditing of the programs etc.
- ❖ The group should also, in conjunction with Muslim organizations within and outside Nigeria, be proactive in identifying economic development programs based on their various exposures to other developed societies and advise relevant government sectors accordingly.
- ❖ The group should coordinate with organizations on the ground to form close relationship with Muslim governors, commissioners, senators, ministers, etc – especially in states where Shari'ah has been implemented - to constantly advise them on the importance of being pace setters in their official duties and good ambassadors of Islam. They should constantly advise Muslims in the government at all levels – especially those who openly identify with Islam – to welcome constructive criticisms, which would further enhance their credibility and ensure that majority Muslim governments at all levels will be easily achieved in future elections. Such trend would result in shortening the road to having Shari'ah rule on a National level further.
- ❖ The group should encourage Nigerian Muslims organizations at home and abroad to participate actively in the fight against corruption by appreciating government efforts in place in this direction despite the misgivings from some quarters on the credibility of the exercise. The journey of a thousand years, they say, begins with a step. Other measures that may strengthen the resolve against corruption, not yet identified, should be suggested to the government.

- ❖ The group should advise Islamic organizations at home and abroad to encourage their members to actively participate in the various programs setup by the government to bridge the gap between Professionals abroad and at home such as conferences organized by Nigeria National Volunteer Service (NNVS) etc.

CONCLUSION

The current state of economic development in the country has been discussed with reference to experiences of the past few decades, particularly in the early sixties. Nigeria as one of the countries with potentials to become next generations of developed countries was also discussed. Although not exhaustive, the itemized points are aimed at identifying a few approaches that could be employed by Nigerian Muslims in the Diaspora to aid Nigerian government in building a country that would occupy the position of a developed country in the no distant future.

As we all know, actions in Islam are judged by intention. With the ultimate intention to propagate Allah's religion, all steps taken with such ultimate goal are rewarded even if the final objective is not achieved in our lifetime. The Prophet (SAW) was quoted to have said:

"Actions are but by intention and there is for every person only that which he intended." (agreed upon)

Wa Aakhiru Da'waana Anilhamduli'llaahi Rabbil 'Aalamiin (And our final call is Praise be to Allaah, Lord of the Worlds).

Was-salaamu 'alaykum wa Rahmatu'llahi wa BarakaatuH.

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