

DRUM COMMODITIES LIMITED**NIGERIA'S BUHARI AND THE CHANGE AGENDA****DAVID AKE**

On 29th March 2015, Nigeria elected a new president. This short paper provides a description of President Muhammadu Buhari's Change programme as the country continues on its path away from military rule.

Nigeria is the most populated nation in Africa comprising roughly 180 million people. As a result, the electioneering campaigns of the 2 main political parties drew a great deal of interest from the world – the People's Democratic Party (PDP), headed by former president Goodluck Jonathan, and the All Progressive Congress (APC) that is now in government led by President Muhammadu Buhari.

The main thrust of the PDP campaign was centred on "Transformation" hinging on consolidating the alleged dividends of democracy brought about by PDP during the 16 years it has provided governance since the end of military rule in 1999. Conversely, the slogan of the APC was "Change". Many Nigerians were so dissatisfied with the infrastructural and economic wellbeing of the nation and its people, the "Change" slogan resonated with people across the country. Ultimately, the majority voted for the change agenda of Muhammadu Buhari, who the people have backed to fight corruption and be the face of a new Nigeria. Buhari's victory was declared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) headed by Professor Atahiru Jega.

The significance of a credible and largely free and fair presidential election in Nigeria is immense and not only provides relief to millions of Nigerians, but to the entire world. This is more so because many prophets of doom had predicted that Nigeria as a unified geographical entity may cease to be in 2015. This to a large extent was predicated on the presidential elections, coupled with the threat of extremist Islamic fundamentalists comprising Boko Haram in the northern part of Nigeria, giving many a great cause for concern.

The transition of power from the former ruling PDP to the government of APC was a novelty in Nigeria; it was the first time that a ruling party in government handed over power to an opposition party after a free, fair and credible election. This was made easier by Goodluck Jonathan conceding defeat in a telephone call to President Muhammadu Buhari and congratulating him for winning the election before the formal announcement of the result by INEC. This was not only a first for Nigeria, but in many respects represented a new departure for the entire continent of Africa. Too often, the transition of power following national elections is accompanied by instability caused by the "sit tight syndrome" of many African leaders who see power and governance as their birth right.

It was not a surprise when President Muhammadu Buhari in his inaugural speech on 29th May 2015, tagged 'Democracy Day' in Nigeria, paid tribute to the outgoing president for his part in bringing about a free and fair election in Nigeria. In Buhari's words, "I would like to thank President Goodluck Jonathan for his display of statesmanship in setting a precedent for us that has now made our people proud to be Nigerians wherever they are. With the support and cooperation he has given to the transition process, he made it possible for us to show the world that despite the perceived tension in the land we can be a united people capable of doing what is right for our nation. Together we cooperated to surprise the world that had come to expect only the worst from Nigeria. I hope this act of graciously accepting defeat by the outgoing president will become the standard of political conduct in the country".

Within the context of a desire for alterations to the political and economic life of Nigeria, it is appropriate to explore President Muhammadu Buhari's regime of change to Nigeria's course of good economic strategies and the anti-corruption crusade of the new government.

CHANGE AGENDA: A REFLECTION ON NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC PATHWAY

President Muhammadu Buhari is expected to work with a 6 point agenda to deliver the “Change” promised to Nigerians. This is if the recommendation of the Ahmed Joda led Transition Committee, which appears to be the economic blueprint for the new administration.

In the report of the Transition Committee on Governance obtained in a news report, 6 vital initiatives were recommended for Mr Buhari to entrench the culture of good governance in Nigeria and revive the country's ailing status in the comity of nations. The report recommended areas of reform for good governance to include: the public sector, the electoral process, the police service, amendment of the constitution, the judiciary and re-professionalising the military.

The Joda report also advises President Buhari to undertake reviews of operations and structures in other areas including: the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria and Federal Inland Revenue Service.

Modest reform has already taken place at the Central Bank of Nigeria since the assumption of office of the Buhari led government. A single account system has been introduced for all government ministries, agencies and parastatals. This means all government owned establishments will only now do business with a unified single account held by the CBN with the aim of curbing diversion of funds and corruption in the system.

On the other hand, this change of policy, though laudable in it aims to reduce corruption, will inevitably result in bureaucratic bottlenecks and may even of discourage lending to government agencies from donor bodies, especially from overseas, since the capital they lend is usually tailored towards specific goals. By maintaining a single account, a possibility exists that these monies could be diverted to other sectors and projects that were not the intended recipients. Also, administrative delays are likely to occur in accessing the funds for developmental projects. A further policy change has tightened up on the availability of foreign exchange; any importation or transaction with business partners abroad must be accompanied by an application to the CBN to permit it and then to make available foreign exchange for such transactions.

This was most pronounced by the government's restriction on the volume of importation allowed on 41 goods such as rice, frozen foods, wheat and other raw materials for manufacturing. Also, the CBN has directed that all services rendered in Nigeria either by local or foreign companies must be transacted in Nigerian Naira.

The economic direction of the Change regime of President Buhari was made clear in his message on the celebration of Diaspora Day 2015 with the theme “Diaspora and Nigeria Change Agenda” when he stated that his administration's medium and long term strategy is to build an economy led by a strong and responsible private sector.

The government is ready to intervene by providing physical and economic infrastructure as well as social policies that would provide opportunities and support for the 110 million extremely poor Nigerians. In this regard the administration is aiming to generate consistently 5,000 MW of electricity daily by early 2016. The government aims to complete a variety of outstanding energy-related projects to lay the foundation for the generation of 10,000 MW and 15,000 MW in the short and long terms.

Buhari's government is pursuing reform in the hydrocarbon industry and is reorganizing the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation and is holding the officials accountable for past revenue losses. The government aims to improve the capacity of the country's oil sector to reduce the 37 per cent of foreign exchange used for the importation of refined petroleum products.

The new government is working to ensure self-sufficiency in food production. It is also making concerted efforts to boost the production of rice, wheat, and cotton to help reduce the foreign exchange requirement for the importation of these same products. Rice importation alone is estimated to consume around \$4 billion annually. Seven rice producing states are working together with the Federal Government to develop areas to achieve self-sufficiency in rice production within 30 months. President Buhari has stated that the agricultural and agro-allied value chain remained a priority of government in job creation plans as it would support local agriculture.

The government is set to create a friendly and efficient environment for investments by removing bureaucratic bottlenecks in approval processes, adding that the incentive regime to investors in the country will also be reviewed.

The Buhari led government is said to be set to return all garment and textile factories to full production within the shortest time possible.

CHANGE AGENDA AND THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CRUSADE

The bane of the Nigerian nation in its social, political and economic life is corruption. It has eaten deep into the entire fabric of the nation and its people. Regrettably, corruption in its many forms has become a virus that has continually afflicted Nigeria hampering the ability of the nation to make great strides in developing the critical sectors of the economy. It was not a surprise therefore that the majority of Nigerians queued behind the change revolution being led by the government of president Buhari.

Political elitism and political “godfatherism” have played a large role in the country. In the past, political party members have expected rewards of juicy appointments for contributing resources to the political victory. They imposed a model that recognized profits and rewards for investors’ contributions. Hence, it was no surprise when in his inaugural speech, president Buhari stated “I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody”.

This pronouncement by President Buhari signals great hope for Nigerians. However when concerns were raised about financial inducements and reckless political spending during the campaign, none of the major contenders, including Buhari and Jonathan, questioned the sources of electoral funding because doing so at the period might jeopardise their political aspirations.

Buhari is seen by many Nigerians to be incorruptible and as such many have consistently remained supportive and are convinced that Buhari is the best choice to tackle corruption. The new president is expected to embark on a comprehensive investigation of past administrations instead of the largely selective approach being observed at the moment.

The initial political appointments by President Buhari were seen to be largely sectional because most of the appointees hail from his support base in the north of Nigeria. However, many patiently waited for his nomination of ministers and their assigned ministries. The list of nominated ministers is a combination of both the untested, who are not identified with corruption and the tested, many of whom are alleged to be corrupt.

The full list of appointed ministers and their portfolios is as follows:

1. Chris Ngige from Anambra is Minister of Labour and Employment.
2. Kayode Fayemi from Ekiti is Minister of Solid Minerals.
3. Rotimi Amaechi from Rivers is Minister of Transportation.
4. Babatunde Fashola from Lagos is Minister of Power, Works and Housing.
5. Abdulrahman Dambazau from Kano is Minister of Interior.
6. Aisha Alhassan from Taraba is Minister of women Affairs.
7. Ogbonaya Onu from Ebonyi is Minister of Science and Technology.
8. Kemi Adeosun from Ogun is Minister of Finance.
9. Abubakar Malami from Kebbi is Minister of Justice and Attorney-General.
10. Hadi Sirika from Kaduna is Minister of State, Aviation.
11. Adebayo Shittu from Oyo is Minister of Communication.
12. Suleiman Adamu from Jigawa is Minister of Water Resources.
13. Solomon Dalong from Plateau is Minister for Youth and Sports.
14. Ibe Kachikwu from Delta is Minister of State, Petroleum.
15. Osagie Ehanire from Edo is Minister of State, Health.
16. Audu Ogbeh from Benue is Minister of Agriculture.
17. Udo Udo Udoma from Akwa Ibom is Minister of Budget and National Planning.
18. Lai Mohammed from Kwara is Minister of Information.
19. Amina Mohammed from Gombe is Minister of Environment.

20. Ibrahim Usman Jibril from Nasarawa is Minister of State, Environment.
21. Hajia Khadija Bukar Ibrahim from Yobe is Minister of State, Foreign Affairs.
22. Cladius Omoleye Daramola from Ondo is Minister of State, Niger Delta.
23. Prof. Anthony Onwuka from Imo is Minister of State, Education.
24. Geoffrey Onyema from Enugu is Minister of Foreign Affairs.
25. Dan Ali from Zamfara is Minister of Defence.
26. James Ocholi from Kogi is Minister of State, Labour and Employment.
27. Zainab Ahmed from Kaduna is Minister of State, Budget and National Planning.
28. Okechukwu Enelamah from Abia is Minister of Trade, Investment and Industry.
29. Muhammadu Bello from Adamawa is Minister of Federal Capital Territory.
30. Mustapha Baba Shehuri from Bornu is Minister of State, Power.
31. Aisha Abubakar from Sokoto is Minister of State, Trade and Investment.
32. Heinekan Lokpobiri from Bayelsa is Minister of state, Agriculture.
33. Adamu Adamu from Bauchi is Minister of Education.
34. Isaac Adewole from Osun is Minister of Health.
35. Abubakar Bawa Bwari from Niger is Minister of State, Solid Minerals.
36. Pastor Usani Uguru from Cross River is Minister of Niger Delta.
37. President Muhammadu Buhari from Katsina is the Minister of Petroleum.

Only time will tell if the Buhari led cabinet of ministers and government will be able to tackle corruption and insecurity and come good for the Nigerian people. The desired positive change in the country's economic and political life now lies in Buhari's hands and his commitment to fulfil his election promises.