

THE MISSING LINKS AND CHALLENGES OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS: THE CSO OBSERVER PERSPECTIVE

Paper delivered by

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BACKGROUND

Let me first and foremost, salute the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) for extending her invitation to me, and for affording me an opportunity to participate in this great Conference. I highly appreciate.

As we will always say, the sub-theme of this Conference is aptly chosen and will go a long way in assisting all of us who are participants in the electoral business in Nigeria namely the electoral umpire, the security agencies, the political parties, the media, the government, civil society, prominent associations like the NPSA and the citizens in adjusting ourselves and attempting to establish an enduring electoral process, the outcome of its activities would be credible and generally acceptable.

Karl Marx, the world's greatest political theorist, once said that the philosophers have succeeded in describing the world in various ways but that the challenge, however, has been to change it. The objective of this Paper is not to describe what happened in the fraudulent 2019 general elections alone, but to attempt to prescribe credible and lasting solutions to the challenges and the missing links in the act.

My Observations from the Presentations at the Opening Ceremony

Yesterday, as I entered the hall of this Conference, I carefully listened to the presentations of some of the eminent resource persons that this Conference had assembled. I agreed totally with some of the views expressed by these Scholars but differ with others. I respond to the issues as follows:

1. I totally agree with Professor Ike Onyishi that some persons in all the professions and arena of endeavours, not just Political Science, have refused to move with time and, therefore, do not improve themselves even in this period when the world has become a village and no one can live in isolation. I also agree with him that we must build our capacity in acquiring modern skills so as to be able to compete with our colleagues

elsewhere and so can cope with the nascent trends in the global community.

2. With Professor Kimse Okoko, that the lopsidedness and gross injustices in the Nigerian society is majorly responsible for the corruption in the electoral practices in Nigeria and that Nigeria is neither a nation nor a Federation. His citation of Kano state which had 44 local governments before Jigawa was carved out of it by military regimes and which still retains 44 LGAs after the creation of a new state out of her is an excellent citation or example. Jigawa has 27 local governments, even more than Lagos state which has more population, responsibilities and which brings more resources to the national table for sharing. Lagos State has only 20 LGAs, thus having less local governments than Kano State, even as Kano has mothered a state. The Niger Delta Region, the Golden Fowl, that lays the Golden Eggs, has less LGAs than certain zones that bring little or nothing to the national treasury. They labour more and earn less. Similarly, disturbing, is the fact that while Kano and Jigawa have 71 LGAs, the entire South East Zone has just 95 LGAs. Prof, I agree with you in toto. The major cause of the crisis confronting Nigeria is huge injustice and imbalances in the system.

The 2014 National Conference meticulously discussed these crucial issues and at the end of its 4½-month sitting, produced a very credible report that could have addressed these conflicts or crises if fully implemented. Unfortunately, it (the report) was dumped by both former President Jonathan government and the current President Buhari regime.

In the present Administration, there are cases of lopsided appointments and other state actions accompanied by some avoidable security challenges, all of which do not encourage a healthy understanding among the various ethnic, class, religious and ideological configurations that make up Nigeria. I am very sure that until Nigeria is thoroughly structured, it will be very difficult to sustain peace and development in country.

MY DISAGREEMENTS

In the same vein, I have disagreements with these gentlemen in some other areas.

1. I do not agree with Ike Onyishi's submission on Dr. Jeremiah Agbalaka that his claim on discovery of the cure to HIV-AIDS had no scientific

backup or was untrue. I almost jumped up from my seat to shout **No** to this but preferred to be civil and wait till today. Dr. Agbalaka discovered cure to HIV-AIDS. Our soldiers who were on ECOMOG peacekeeping operations to war-torn African countries and who were tested positive to the dreaded disease in Abuja were taken to him for treatment. After they were treated, the soldiers were sent back to Gwagwalada Teaching Hospital and other diagnostic centres in Abuja for further tests and were certified negative to the ailment when diagnosed. Prof. Nwambebe, then DG, Nigeria Institute of Pharmaceutical Research described the Agbalaka vaccine as useful for “preventive and curative” treatments. Same sentiment about Agbalaka’s invention was confirmed by Dr. Manneson Rabiou who was in charge of Research at the Centre.

In the year 2000, Obinna Elibe, a HIV-AIDS patient was treated with Agbalaka’s vaccine, a feat which compelled Dr. Ike Abonyi, then Publicity Secretary of Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) to congratulate Agbalaka for his *locus classicus* discovery. The FGN’s grouse with Agbalaka was not that he didn’t invent the preventive and curative vaccine but that it (the FGN) didn’t have the facilities to test his invention. Based on this failure, the FGN refused to recognize Agbalaka’s break through achievement in this field. The FGN’s action was informed by the threat of America through her Head of UNISAID in Nigeria then, Mr. Peter Piot, that American government would stop any further support or grants to Nigeria if she recognized Agbalaka’s achievement in the cure for HIV-AIDS. Our investigations showed that America had entered into an understanding with certain advanced countries that if any of their nationals would invent cure to HIV-AIDS, she (America) would share in the profits. So, efforts must, therefore be made to disprove an African’s achievement in the field. This case was also taken to the National Assembly where Agbalaka and his team proved that he invented cure to HIV-AIDS.

When there was an attempt to flown Agbalaka to America for his vaccine to be tested, General Victor Malu, then Chief of Army Staff, having witnessed what Agbalaka’s achievement had done refused to let him to be taken to the United States to be eliminated. He understood the conspiracies being built against Agbalaka by the West through our ignorant and self-serving rulers. Malu set up a military security team that guards Dr. Agbalaka till date.

The Late Chief Gani Fawehinmi Chambers was hired by Agbalaka to challenge government’s criminal, unpatriotic and ignorant action. Gani

Chambers filed a legal action against the Government which lasted for 6 years before Agbalaka won. Anyone doubting this can contact Barrister Edwin Anikwem, then Deputy Head of Gani Chambers and who handled the case; on 08033065294 and Cintus Chima Nweze (Ph.D) Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria (JSC) and one of the most brilliant, sincere, just and highly intelligible Judicial scholars that society has produced.

3. I do not agree with Prof. Okoko that because the system has been bastardised and infested with madness and impunity, that sincere, credible and patriotic individuals should not try politics. Noooo!!! Doing so would justify Edmond Burke's historic statement that all it takes for evil men to take-over the society and poison it, is for good men to stand aloof and do nothing. Nigeria is bad and drifting seriously but how can we redeem and reposition her except by good, honest and just citizens participating and organizing to overthrow the terror and authoritarian regime? I think that his advice would have been to urge the good element in the words of V.I. Lenin to unite, organize, unite!!!

I am convinced that if the progressive academics in Nigeria (either ASUU or its affiliates like NPSA) could come together to forge a strong unity between them and other progressive elements and associations such as the radical student, working class, civil society, women and artisan movements, we shall be able to free Nigeria from the armpit of corrupt, visionless, idealess and dishonest politicians and begin to build and usher in a new, virile, viable, organized, democratic and progressive society that would be anchored on justice, fairness, truth and freedoms. Unless we do this and, very urgently too, we will wake up one day and see no country called Nigeria anymore. This is because the features of a failed and pariah state already stare us on the faces and to arrest further drifting is to tow this objective, socialist line of action to restore, redeem and emancipate our society from the criminal grip of the plundering political elite and their vicious local and international conspirators.

4. The position of Professor Hassan Saliu that we should take it easy with those who do not want to work hard in order to carry them along is dangerous, can set us back and won't achieve anything good for us. The society is moving in geometrical progression and we can't afford to undertake retrogressive steps or options in order to carry others along. Nigeria must move with the world.

The 2019 General Elections

There is no denial the fact that the 2019 general election was fraught with monumental irregularities, was grossly rigged and notoriously violent and, therefore, not free, fair, credible and acceptable. Those of us who were in the field saw this. We read and watched it in the local and international newspapers, radio and televisions and the international observer groups came, saw and wrote what they observed. The European Union Observer Mission, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) Reports on the election under review dismissed it as corrupt and fraudulent and hugely indicted the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), the Security Agencies and the political parties for their ignoble roles in undermining the credibility and acceptability of the 2019 polls.

This position was same with the local elections observers and indeed most honest Nigerians.

The Academia and their Worrisome Roles in the Conduct of Elections in Nigeria

It is important too to mention the unpleasant roles of the Nigerian Academia in the conduct of elections in Nigeria. We are well aware that most of the Chairmen of the Electoral Management body in Nigeria, especially in recent times, have been chosen from among the academics. Since this era, we have witnessed the worst election scenarios in Nigeria when we think that reverse ought to have been the case. Apart from the fact that most of the chairs of INEC have been academics, the State Returning Officers are either Vice Chancellors of the universities or prominent Professors. How come, therefore, that the outcome of our Polls have become worse with our best in the saddle in the conduct of elections when they would have been better and best. NPSA and, indeed, the entire Academics must interrogate themselves and come out with possible and acceptable solutions to the malady. There is the need to consider serious punitive sanctions against their members who undermine the electoral process. This can serve as deterrent to others who may tend to tow this same unpatriotic and dirty line.

Aside the aforementioned, there is also another need to reconsider our curriculum in our tertiary institutions and do close monitoring of the teaching class with a view to observe how teaching and learning in our universities are conducted. This is important because the type of characters we produce from these citadels of learning determines the behaviour and

character of the State and its institutions because the actions of the State and its institutions cannot be above those of the personnel that operate or run them. We have erring lecturers who offer nothing to the system but who are left unpunished.

While some do not teach but sell poorly researched and unproductive handouts through which students and their sponsors are plundered, others engage in all kinds of immoral practices that distort and abuse the rights of the students and their colleagues. This was not the same in the past and so, the academics must go back to the drawing board in order to reappraise the system so as to find out where we got it wrong and how to fix it.

It is a clear matter that some of our graduates not minding the grades or degrees they make, are not employable. Some cannot write correct English. Among this population, are those who would go back to the university or even to lower education sectors to impart “academic knowledge” to our children. How can anyone do better than s/he was taught? This is agonizing and demeaning and does not prepare our society for greatness, growth and success. We must produce graduates who must show clear distinction between the traders in Oshodi or Otu Onicha market and themselves. The situation has become awfully bad and the time to take actions by declaring emergency on our education Sector is now.

What are the challenges and what links got missed?

From what we observed in the field during the elections, we identified the following challenges as the missing links:

- The challenge of a free, fair & participatory elections – the credibility challenge.
- The challenge of the Academia in the electoral process.
- The challenge of early recruitment, training & equipment of the electoral Staff – the preparation challenge.
- The challenge of a secure and protected election – The security Challenge.
- The challenge of adequate funding & release of funds in time to allow for early and good preparations.
- The challenge of awareness creation, enlightenment & social relation.
- The challenge of allowing the process a free hand to operate, including buying and selling of votes, carrying and stuffing of the ballot boxes – the corruption challenge.

- The challenge of government interference in the conduct of a credible election.
- The challenge of accreditation of credible civil society groups to observe the elections, and;
- The challenge of meeting the demands and desires of a plural society in elections viz: the ethnic, religious, political, gender, class and other social configurations.

Addressing the observed Challenges & Missing Links

In order to address the challenges identified overleaf, I recommend the following:

1. That the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) be unbundled into three independent institutions or bodies viz:
 - The Commission that would continuously register eligible voters and deal with all the issues relating to registration of voters, political parties and recognition of credible elections observer organisations.
 - The Commission that would prepare for and conduct the elections, including recruitment, training & equipment of both regular and Ad-hoc staff, and;
 - The Commission that would keep the record of, apprehend and prosecute both pre- and post-electoral offenders.

On the dismal roles of the Academics in the conduct of elections in Nigeria and to encourage good teaching and learning conditions in our school, the following are recommended:

1. Place sanctions on the erring members by withdrawing their certificates of qualifications or demotion of the perpetrators to lower levels.
2. Prosecution of such persons in the court of law after s/he has been de-robed academically for crimes against humanity because election issue is a very sensitive and serious matter, and;
3. Applying the same sanctions on the erring academics in the campus in order to rebuild the strength of character of both the teaching staff and their students.

CONCLUSION:

Strong sanctions or punishment must apply to worst cases if we must succeed in our attempt to redeem, refocus and reposition Nigeria, including the organization of her elections. We must also come out from our classroom criticisms to popularly participate in elections because we cannot leave the space for the evil ones and, thereafter, complain that all was not well. All cannot be well when those who are in charge are not well. No good football team which wants to record victory in a football tournament, goes to such a competition with its worst and not the best Eleven. The academics in Nigeria have left our political space for our worst eleven with minimal interventions but wish that Nigeria becomes a just, free, peaceful and developed society. Impossible. We cannot get the best from the worst.

I have strong convictions, however, that when we rise up to take over our society like many nations in the world have done through different dimensions and processes, we shall rescue, redeem and reposition Nigeria. In the 1980s, Professor Eskor Toyo of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) rose up to challenge and mobilized Nigerian academics, workers, students, civil society activists, artisans and peasants for the formation a Labour Party. It was one of the most worrisome shocks to the military dictators and they willfully refused to register it as a political party.

In Calabar Municipal Council, about the same period, Eskor worked with the progressive students, academics, workers, artisans and the Left to enthrone Etubom Bassey Ekpo Bassey as the Chairman of the Council. We can still do it in Nigeria if we want not minding the wickedness of the political class and their stolen wealth. Only an ideas person with socialist inclination and who is clear about the historical, ethnic and class dynamism of Nigeria can lead Nigeria out of this rot. NPSA and CLO can work together to mobilise other progressive groups and Nigerians to achieve this nationalistic and genuine objective and help in building a strong, equitable and happy Nigerian society. It is doable and we can do it.

Thank you for listening & God's amazing grace.