

NATIONAL POLICY ON DISPORA MATTERS: A REVIEW

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Abstract

After the military governments in Nigeria, the civilian governments beginning with Olusegun Obasanjo, through Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan to the administration of Muhammadu Buhari have made several efforts towards recognizing and welcoming the potentials of Nigerian citizens abroad through private-public partnership. This growing relationship has led to the need to address in a formal way the incentives for Nigerians in Diaspora to participate in the political economic development of the country. These discussions actually led to the emergence of the National Policy on Diaspora Matters developed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in November 2016. The document on "National Policy on Diaspora Matters" in a very fundamental way recognizes Diaspora as a fundamental element in the development process of the Nigerian Nation. The policy lays down the parameters for Nigeria's engagement with its Diaspora, taking into account the internal dynamics of the country as well as the external dynamics of its far-flung Diaspora. This paper, using the critical method of inquiry has evaluated this document with the purpose of advancing a better relationship between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Diaspora.

Keywords: Diaspora, Development, National Policy, Economic, Political, Social, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with her citizens in virtually every part of the world, especially in advanced countries. These Nigerians are professionals with specialization in all fields of human endeavor including medicine, education, research, ICT, law, real estate, banking, oil sector, nursing, administration, business, engineering, etc. This document on "National Policy on Diaspora Matters" was written for the purpose of managing or harnessing the Nigerian human capital resources that are outside the country. This has become necessary to a developing country such as Nigeria because of the link between human capital resources and the creation of national wealth and development, a nexus which the Nigerian government has realized: "Nigeria has recognized the Diaspora as a veritable tool for the socio-economic development of the country

leading to the desire to draw a national policy that guarantees their right of participation in the socio-economic development of their home land”¹. Thus, in this document, the Nigerian government attempts at establishing the parameters of its relationship with its Diaspora for the purpose of enhancing development.

Participation in the political, social and economic reconstruction of Nigeria depends on the extent to which Nigerians abroad feel they have been encouraged or allowed to have a stake in their home country². It is therefore, the level of the participation of the Diaspora that this policy document addresses. Thus the document has as its goal to “Effectively promote and harness the capacity of Nigerians at home and abroad for the socio-political and economic development of the nation”³, its mission “To empower Nigerians in the Diaspora as change agents for the development of Nigeria through promoting a framework for the Diaspora to maximize their potentials in capital, knowledge and networks”⁴, and its goal as “Constructive engagement of the Diaspora for sustainable national development”⁵. The document under review was written by the Federal Republic of Nigeria on November 2016. It is a document of five chapters, with each chapter administering to fundamental dimensions of the relationship between Nigeria and its Diaspora; the first chapter introduces the document, makes conceptual clarifications and specifies the mission, vision and goal of the document. The second chapter addresses the challenges to effective Diaspora contribution to Nigerian development; the third chapter focuses on the objectives and strategies of the policy; the fourth chapter deals with the strategic approaches mobilization and engagement, in view of the document, while the fifth chapter looks into the institutional arrangement for policy implementation. These notwithstanding, the burden of this piece is, first, to give an understanding of this document, second, to criticize the document in

¹ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. ii

² Ogbebulu, B. *The contribution of Diaspora (UK) to poverty reduction, development in Nigeria and agitation for voting rites*. March 2009, <http://www.gamji.com/articles6000/news7909.htm>

³ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 12

⁴ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 12

⁵ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 12

relation to its mission, goals and vision.

The Document's Concept of Diaspora

Acknowledging the definitions of Diaspora by the International Organization for Migration and the African Union which understands Diaspora simply as persons who live and work outside their home country and people of African origin living outside the continent and willing to contribute to the development of the continent respectively, the document went ahead to define Diaspora putting into consideration the Nigerian context and the purpose for writing the policy. Unlike the above definitions, two definitions are hereby put forward. First, Diaspora "has to do with people of Nigerian descent who live and work abroad and have interest in contributing to the socio-economic, political, technological and industrial development of Nigeria"⁶, second, Diaspora "designates members of Historic African Diaspora. These are people of African descent living in other continents in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia and whose history of migration antedates colonization"⁷. This specification of the Diaspora referred to is for the purpose of avoiding any form of misunderstanding as this document sets out to achieve its aim.

Contribution of Diaspora to National Development: Challenges

The document pointed out several hitches to the contribution of Diaspora to national development, this is in spite of the promises it holds for Nigeria's development. The challenges include⁸:

- i. lack of accurate enumeration of the actual number of this all-important category of Nigerians, as a reliable database is yet to be generated
- ii. Most Diaspora are discouraged by the lack of the enabling environment for the sustenance of an operational infrastructural system in the Nigerian homeland to drive their investment
- iii. The insecurity in the country scares them from returning home
- iv. The formal channels of transferring funds back to Nigeria are mostly expensive
- v. Lack of Bilateral Agreements on Avoidance of Double Taxation with Some Countries with Significant Diaspora Population

⁶ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 8

⁷ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 9

⁸ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 13-18

- vi. The conducive environment for the transfer of Diaspora skill and technology in the Nigeria continues to be a challenge
- vii. An integration framework for returning Diasporas is a mechanism has not been addressed
- viii. Inability to Exercise Their Right as Nigerian Citizens to Vote and Participate in the Electoral Process
- ix. Inadequate Response to Emergency and Distress Situations of Nigerians in Diaspora

Diaspora Policy Objectives and Strategies

Having discussed the challenges faced by the Diaspora, this National Policy on Diaspora, therefore, is the Nigerian government's direct response to these problems or challenges, and thus, the need for an institutional framework for the mobilization and involvement of Nigerian Diaspora in the national development process. As a response to the above challenges, the objectives of this policy include⁹:

- i. to harness Diaspora resources towards national development;
- ii. to attend to the challenges and needs of the Diaspora in their efforts to participate in national development;
- iii. to improve and sustain strong relations with the Diaspora for national development;
- iv. to strengthen relevant institutions, both at home and abroad, for the coordination and proper administration of Diaspora Issues;
- v. to create a conducive atmosphere for members of Historic African Diaspora wishing to collaborate and identify with Nigeria for development purposes;
- vi. to develop programmes that will contribute to the wellbeing of those in Diaspora.

To achieve this, the Nigerian government, as indicate din this policy, is committed to the following strategies:

- i. Government shall provide incentives such as tax rebates and waivers on duties of certain goods and services to encourage trade and investment
- ii. Government shall create incentives and educate the Diaspora community on policies that have been put in place to facilitate

⁹ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, pp. 18-37

- cheaper, efficient and secure channels of remittance flow
- iii. 25th of July shall be regarded as Diaspora day during which those in Diaspora would be celebrated at home and abroad
 - iv. Consular and immigration services in host countries would be improved
 - v. Government shall develop a reliable database of those in Diaspora and also work with Diaspora organizations
 - vi. Government shall create a conducive environment for the transfer of resources in the areas of health, science technology, education, etc., back home
 - vii. Awards shall be given to Diaspora associations that promote Nigeria as a tourist destination
 - viii. Government would encourage the Diaspora to participate in the following economies of the nation: Agriculture, Solid minerals, manufacturing Science, Technology and innovation and ICT
 - ix. Government would encourage host countries of the Diaspora to provide them social security facilities
 - x. Government would provide security at home
 - xi. Government would provide infrastructure for the effective participation of the Diaspora in National development
 - xii. Government would provide framework for the Diaspora to exercise their franchise to vote through the use of technology
 - xiii. Government would develop a Framework for Pre-departure Training
 - xiv. Government would put in place institution of an Integration Framework for Returning Nigerians from Diaspora
 - xv. Measures would be put in place for effective Response to Emergency and Distress Situation of Nigerians in Diaspora
 - xvi. Government would put in place an institution of Collaboration Framework with Members of Historic African Diaspora
 - xvii. Government would establish a World Class Diaspora Resource and Research Centre (DRRC) to Aid Research and Development
 - xviii. Facilitation of a National Diaspora Village (NDV)
 - xix. Government shall facilitate platforms for people in different countries, through Nigerian Consulates to consult and receive feedbacks on how Diaspora people's lives may be enhanced for meaningful contribution towards homeland development
 - xx. The creation of a global Nigerian network comprising a large pool

- of outstanding Nigerian business men and women who are disposed to contributing to the nation's economic growth
- xxi. Institutionalization of Diaspora Communities and Associations
 - xxii. development of a central online hub that connects all the Diaspora Associations with government online platform
 - xxiii. Creation of comprehensive database of professional, skilled Diaspora and Business Associations to facilitate development of partnerships between local professionals and those abroad
 - xxiv. Representation of the Diaspora Network in the design and implementation of Nigeria's development strategies
 - xxv. Development of initiatives that promote sense of togetherness among the various Diaspora groups
 - xxvi. Promotion of Diaspora Investments and Savings in Nigeria
 - xxvii. Establishment and Regulation of Diaspora Bonds for financing development projects
 - xxviii. Government liberalizes the market for cross-border money transfer operators so as to reduce transaction costs
 - xxix. Build data on remittances
 - xxx. Promote the formation and linking of professional associations, including scientific knowledge networks for domestic and Diaspora communities
 - xxxi. Promote volunteerism through development of internship and volunteer programs in various sectors at home for the young and upcoming Diaspora professionals
 - xxxii. Develop and strengthen existing initiatives to encourage, attract, retain and support home-based migration of high-level expertise on permanent or temporary basis
 - xxxiii. Promote Diaspora philanthropy through acknowledging their support, giving award to Diaspora philanthropists, and letting them know the needs at home that require their attention
 - xxxiv. Supporting the Diaspora through providing information on consular services, identifying the needs of the Diaspora and ways to intervene, develop facilities to help the Diaspora who are returning, facilitating a vibrant sense of community and Nigerian identity abroad and Financial laws in the country shall be reformed to encourage Diaspora investors to access financial facilities as well as protect investors

Strategic Approach to Mobilization and Engagement

In this section, the document focuses on the needs of the nation and the steps towards redeeming the situation on the basis of the principles of engagement, enablement and mutual empowerment. The steps are based on the mapping of Diaspora expertise for national development. The major areas of concern include education, health, wavers, trade and investment, science and technology, politics and governance, agriculture and housing and urban development.

In the area of education, the government is determined to continue to encourage teachers and lecturers in Diaspora, through logistic support, whose services would enhance national development to volunteer to serve in areas of concern at their convenience. Student exchanges and internship would also be encouraged and necessary support provided for the purpose of exposure. Research would also be enhanced since it is at the heart of any country's economic, political, industrial and technological development¹⁰.

Health care in the country has been an area of concern, and thus the government looks forward to creating an enabling environment for Nigerians in Diaspora to return and practice at home and institutions for the re-orientation of health care workers in Diaspora for their integration. More so, provide training and specialization in critical areas of the health care sector, and wavers for medical personnel importing medic equipment into Nigeria for intervention¹¹.

To facilitate trade and investment, the government is poised to provide a conducive environment for Diaspora to participate in trade and investment in Nigeria, and more so to provide security of investors and investments. The provision of an enabling environment for investors include provision of power, boosting of infrastructure needs and encouraging of financial institutions to properly manage the disbursement of Diaspora financial inflows and outflows, among others¹².

In the area of science, technology and innovation, the government would

¹⁰ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, pp.38-39

¹¹ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, pp. 39-40

¹² National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, pp. 40-41

inspire growth by identifying critical areas of concern and encouraging lecturers and teachers in Diaspora with critical skills to return home for volunteer services¹³. In relation to politics and governance, the government would encourage the realization of Diaspora's rights to vote¹⁴. In the area of agriculture, the government is determined to encourage commercial agriculture, extension services, food storage and preservation, improved seed varieties and food processing¹⁵. Regarding housing and urban development, the government shall encourage Diaspora to invest in housing and urban development¹⁶.

Institutional Arrangements for Policy Implementation

The success of the policy on Diaspora matters cannot be possible without establishing and making arrangements for policy implementation. The entire policy shall first be coordinated by the offices of the special assistant to the President on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora and the Secretary to the Federation, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The document called for the formation of a Presidential advisory committee on Diaspora matters, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, implementing agencies like the Independent Electoral Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Diaspora and Transnational Studies Programme at the University of Ibadan, National Population Commission, National Universities Commission, Nigerian National Volunteer Services, Ministry of Budget and National Planning, Federal Ministry of Labor and Employment, National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, Federal Ministry of Information, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Health, Nigerian Immigration Services, Central Bank of Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, National Assembly Committee on Diaspora Affairs, National Emergency Management Agency, Federal Ministry of Justice, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Corporate Affairs Commission, Nigerian Investment Promotion Council, Federal Inland Revenue Services, Ministry of Women Affairs, Civil Society

¹³ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, pp. 41-42

¹⁴ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 43

¹⁵ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, pp. 42-43

¹⁶ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 43

Organizations, Diaspora and Resource and Research Centre, etc. The involvement of recognized Diaspora Organizations, Private Sector, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), various Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and the Diaspora Resource and Research Centre (DRRC), etc., are indispensable for the realization of the objectives of this document.

Evaluation

Literatures on Diaspora-Development nexus have grown significantly in the past decades, as several governments have made several efforts at identifying ways of engaging their nationals abroad for positive economic impact¹⁷. However, in Nigeria, until 1999, not much attention has been given to the potential role of the Diaspora as change agents in the different dimensions of the development of Nigeria or the potential role a well organized Diaspora could play as development partners with Nigeria¹⁸. The document on “National Policy on Diaspora Matters” published in 2016, therefore, in a very fundamental way recognizes Diaspora as a fundamental element in the development process of the Nigerian Nation. The policy lays down the parameters for Nigeria's engagement with its Diaspora, taking into account the internal dynamics of the country as well as the external dynamics of its far-flung Diaspora. It is a well-thought out policy geared towards economic, political, social and cultural development in Nigeria. This is so as the nation strives to consolidate its reputation in the comity of nations and achieve development on all positive fronts.¹⁹ The accommodation of Historic African Diaspora (HAD) is a major step in the right direction in view of Nigeria's development. The policy recognizes, among others, that development between a homeland state and its Diaspora is not one dimensional²⁰. Thus, Nigerian Government facilitates a collaboration framework that would translate into simultaneous benefits for its Diaspora.

¹⁷ Minto, I. D. *Diaspora and development: An assessment of the Irish experience for the Caribbean*. The Centre for International Governance Initiative, 2009, p. 21.

¹⁸ Joseph G., *Diaspora-Development nexus: The role of ICT*. United States Agency for International Development, 2008, p.23.

¹⁹ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. ii

²⁰ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. ii

Very laudable in the policy document is the recognition that during emergencies, Diaspora women and children are peculiarly vulnerable. Thus, the policy acknowledges the need to develop a framework to cater to such peculiar needs during moments of emergencies and distress. The policy also endorses a practical step towards the recognition of Diaspora through the establishment of a National Diaspora Village as well as the creation of a Diaspora category in the National Award Programme²¹. These recognition and establishments would not only create a sense of belongingness but create the room for the effectiveness of the policy document.

This notwithstanding, the concept of Diaspora in the document is very limited. Historically, Diaspora is from the Greek word 'diaspeirien' which means to sow or scatter seeds. It was originally used to refer to the Jews who were scattered beyond Israel in the 5th century BC after the Babylonian exile²². The African Diaspora falls into this kind of category²³, which has been defined as populations of migrant origins scattered among two or more destinations²⁴. Although there is no unified definition of Diaspora, the documents understanding of Diaspora as Nigerians who live and work abroad and has interest in contributing to the socio-economic, political, technological and industrial development is limited. This raises question as to those Nigerians who live and work outside of Nigeria and are not interested in contributing to national development or do not have the wherewithal to contribute to national development, do they cease to be Nigeria's Diaspora?

The emphasis on the Diaspora as those who are interested in contributing

²¹ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. ii

²² Johnson, P. D. *Diaspora philanthropy: Influences, initiatives and issues*. The Philanthropic Initiative Inc., and The Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University, 2007, p. 10.

²³ Lahnenman, W. J. *Impact of Diaspora communities on National and global politics*. Maryland, Center for International and Security Studies, 2005.

²⁴ Agagu, A. A. *The Nigerian state and development: A theoretical and empirical exploration*. In A. A. Agagu and Ola, R. F. (Eds.). *Development agenda of the Nigerian State*. Ibadan, Fiag Publishers, 2004 p. 33; Chander, A. Diaspora Bonds. *New York University Review*. , 76. 1, 2001, pp. 95-99; Robin, C. *The politics of high-tech growth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 56.

to national development, does not only point to the limitedness of the document's concept of Diaspora but points to how weak the reciprocity or mutuality of the relationship between the Nigerian government and the Diaspora. It places the Nigerian nation in the shoes of a utilitarian seeking to maximize interest from the Diaspora without giving enough.

Citing from the document, "At the moment, there is no reliable information regarding the number of Nigerians living abroad"²⁵, a situation that has not improved considerably even after three years of writing the document. What we have on ground are estimates of the Diaspora. This raises the question of the capacity and preparedness of the Nigerian government to enter into a mutual relationship as the document suggests. It is very difficult to relate with another in a sincere manner without knowing exactly who the other is.

If the document makes reference to the contributions of the Diaspora from other countries like India, Mexico, China, Philippines and Pakistan, the question that follows is if Nigeria is able to do for the Diaspora what those countries did for their Diasporas. At a time when we are still struggling with high cost remittances, insecurity, poor infrastructure, poor power, inability of the Diaspora to vote from wherever they are, increase on taxation, poor response to emergency situations of Nigerians in Diaspora, poor services at Nigerian embassies abroad, etc., these difficulties makes it difficult to translate the experience other Diasporas to the Nigerian context.

However, the mentioned shortcomings of the policy document do not in any way detract from its greatness. The document on "National Policy on Diaspora Matters" remains a major step in Nigeria's effort towards development. Through this document, the contributions of the Diaspora have been increasingly acknowledged, and the word 'Diaspora' has taken a center stage in today's political economy discourses in Nigeria. There is now a visible shift from what used to be understood as 'brain drain' to what we may call 'brain gain'²⁶. The document has also brought about new developments and sensibility towards the relationship of the nation with

²⁵ National Draft Policy on Diaspora Matters. Federal Republic of Nigeria, November 2016, p. 9

²⁶ Fatile, J. O. and Adejuwon, K. D. *The roles of Diaspora in National development in Nigeria*. Nigerian Journal for Strategic Research and Developemnt. 1. 2. 2011, p. 171.

the Diaspora, the needs of the Diaspora and the relevance of the Diaspora in national development. It has created in the Diaspora that feeling of 'Your country needs you',

Recommendations

1. The federal government needs to be more responsible to her citizens both within and outside Nigeria. The feeling of a sense of pride for one's nation has a consequence on contribution towards national development.
2. There is the need to work on the absence of data. The absence of data raises questions as to the commitment of the government towards the Diaspora.
3. The document needs to move beyond the realm of policy, which many Nigerians have not and are not read, to concrete commitments that are visible to everyone.
4. Since the document requires obligations from various quarters, it is necessary that the document be publicized as many Nigerians are not aware of its existence.

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