

World Economic Parameters, Prospects and Fallout: Nigerian Perspective and Situation

Maiden Convocation Lecture of the Federal College of Dental Technology Therapy Enugu November 28th, 2018

By

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Appreciation

This is a historical moment and I consider it a great honour to be asked to give the maiden convocation lecture of this College. I heartily thank the Rector/CEO Dr. John Emaimo, and management of the Federal College of Dental Technology Therapy Enugu for this.

I congratulate the entire staff of this institution, for what you have collectively been able to achieve. Pioneering is not an easy responsibility. The road you have trod would certainly not have been paved with soft feathers. I know, because as the second Vice-Chancellor of the Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, this has also been my lot.

To the pioneer students, you are also appreciated and congratulated, for among other reasons, accepting to come to study here, and by so doing, justifying the establishment of this College.

The Idea of a convocation Lecture

Having a convocation lecture has become the convention for thoughtful education institutions, conscious of the fact that they exist to seek and extend knowledge. One sign of an educated person, is the awareness that no one knows it all, and the educated person, among other attributes, has to possess open-mindedness, and a disposition to listen to another person. It therefore has emerged the convention that the convocation lecturer would usually be invited from outside the particular institution.

I therefore commend you for thinking and acting along these lines. It is an indicator that knowledge is at the heart of this College. I am certain that if you maintain the attitude that has led to this event, this College will grow from strength to strength in the years ahead. Consistent with this, I make my first recommendation, that you not only sustain this, but that if you have not already started, to also get into other academic practices, including attending and hosting conferences. This also leads to a second recommendation, which is that you develop practical entrepreneurship practices. The main reason for delving more into entrepreneurship, is that the reality of the Nigerian economy and society, within the larger global order, is that the next generation of school leavers at every level should be people who

have skills to offer to society, in a manner that leads to their livelihood and sustenance. The era of graduating people who will have to apply for formal employment either in public or private sectors is over.

On the treatment of the topic of the lecture

“World Economic Parameters, Prospects and Fallout: Nigerian Perspective and Situation”, is what you communicated me to speak on. Though you also stated that I could modify the topic, I have decided not to. What may however be contentious would be my interpretation of the topic. This leads me to setting out a number of guiding principles and framework for my tackling this lecture, and this title. These include the following:

1. The lecture will be short.
2. It will seek to address a few challenges.
3. The lecture will seek to encourage change and action from us towards a better society.
4. It will try to address challenges relevant to our immediate environment and ourselves.
5. The lecture will not be academic, despite being given in an education institution.

The World and Nigeria

Following from the title, “World Economic Parameters, Prospects and Fallout: Nigerian Perspective and Situation”, I have only one message, and that is a warning. If you look closer and deeper into this topic, there is a tint of fallacy. That fallacy suggests that there is constancy. The parameters of the world economy, her prospects and fallouts, are fluid and in a constant state of flux. But I suspect that the topic suffers a peculiarly Nigeria illness, and that is that at the topmost levels of the Nigerian society, people seem not to realize that the world is changing rapidly. I will justify this by the following:

- ❖ Public discussion in Nigeria has not advanced beyond the discussions of the pre-independence era on the political economy of Nigeria, especially issues of structure (the skeleton of the country), and governance. The discussions/commentaries are still pre-1960 and immediate post-1960 topics, and if anything has changed, it is a decline in depth and quality of discussions, attributable to the decline in the intellectual quality of the political class, where in the immediate Pre/post-1960 era, parliamentarians and most public office holders were the intellectual elite of the era, typically school teachers and headmasters, invited to become councillors, etc.
- ❖ Economies in the world have come closer, especially due to Information and Communication technologies, such that nations have not much to hide, and changes in the economic and financial situations, and especially of markets, get known instantly, unlike in the past, when they could take weeks, and months, but it does seem that many Nigerians at all levels act as if these changes are unknown, and therefore do not quite understand what has befallen our times, and our society.

- ❖ If these were not so, would we in 2008 be engaged in discussions on whether cattle production should be by ranching or free roaming of cattle through cities, villages and farms; a mark of two countries in one, with one marching towards the concept of a modern state and all its implications, and another romanticising and marching back to the 18th century.

But the world is constantly changing with Impact at the most personal levels and areas of our country

I hope we can agree on this, but I will give one example that affects me and I hope affects most of us too. **My example:**

- ❖ My father, turned 87 years four days ago, November 24. He is a first generation educated person in my community, who by the 1950s, was a staff of SHELL Petroleum Company, and among other places studied in the United Kingdom. In his world, letter writing and the post office are modern matters. He has faithfully kept the family post office box and number since at least the 1970s. I believe that over the years I have been a prime beneficiary of that post office and box number which he has faithfully kept up paying the fees to the Nigeria Postal Services (NIPOST). Recently he asked me why I no longer receive mails through the post. He has also seen me come home, and while sitting with him in his sitting room brought out my laptop. He has asked me what I do with the laptop (which he never used being a modern person of the 1930s, through the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s), and I have told him I receive and reply mails. He asked me how these my mails get to me and I also reply, without using our beloved post office address and box.
 - A community owning a post office was a thing of pride. Communities went to great extent to have one, while neighbouring communities that did not have had to patronize their neighbours', sometimes feeling humiliated. Today looking at Post offices in cities and villages, the story is obvious. I suppose NIPOST must be seeking areas of relevance.

Change is happening in every aspect of life and living globally and in Nigeria. Examples are all around us by our food, clothing, shelter, transportation, health care, education, even the way people love, marry, family, child bearing and rearing, communication, religion/worship, and certainly every way. We can cite multiple examples in each of these categories. Some examples:

- ❖ We did not eat "Indomie Noodles" as children. Such food as pasta and noodles are Asia-influenced. A few years ago we did not know of Green Tea, today it has spread across Nigeria. A few years ago, Apples were exotic far-off things, today apples are hawked on the streets and commonly eaten, imported from South Africa/Europe. We learnt in schools with chalk and blackboards, today we have arrived at markers and white boards, and even beyond with ICT facilities in classrooms. The production and marketing of these products are from North America, Europe and Asia. You see many Nigerian ladies adopt Caucasian-looking hair, a definite

sign of inferiority complex. That was not the case a decade ago, but currently these are imported at a significant foreign exchange cost, going by the huge demand for them.

Why does it seem we do not understand nor correctly interpret these?

Very recently, I have had cause to worry about presiding at meetings and believing the issues being discussed were defined, and the agenda of the meeting understood. We get to some stage discussing a specific matter, and then someone starts talking about something unrelated to the matter at hand. Or still you spend some time discussing something and someone just says something that seems to suggest that all that were discussed never happened. This is a matter I am not sure what sensible explanation to give it. And these are all persons with higher education qualifications. Sometimes, I imagine it has to do with stopping school debates at the Secondary level, or the years of military incursion and the closure of the parliaments.

Recently also, I came across something which I am unable to recall the exact words in which I saw them, but what was communicated is close to:

- ❖ People may have eyes open, seeing, but do not observe
- ❖ People may be hearing words but are not listening
- ❖ People may have nose but do not smell

And one I have added:

- ❖ People **imagine** they think, but in reality they do no thinking.

My understanding of these is that for sundry reasons which may include distractions, obsessions with pursuit of what to eat, drink, or wear, most of what I will be saying are well known to most persons, but whether they understand what is happening, and what may happen to them, as Nigerians, within a world economic system, is not clear. In this category are people who have passed through very high education programmes, acquiring very high degrees, as well as those very highly placed. Despite these discouragements we shall try. Here, I will cite two things that may interest Nigerians. These are:

1. Global vehicle production and use of fossils as fuels.
2. Unemployment in Nigeria and Nigerians' penchant for consumption of imported goods.

Global Vehicle Production and use of Fossils as Fuels

Germany (Mercedes, BMW, Opel, Porsche, Volkswagen, Audi), France (Peugeot, Renault, Citroen), Japan (Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi), South Korea (Hyundai), United States (Ford, Chrysler, Chevrolet, GMC), Sweden (Volvo), India (TATA) are some of the commonest vehicles on the Nigerian roads. They are important for moving people and goods in Nigeria, as our railways are far below where the colonialist left them in 1960. Now these:

- ❖ Our recent second hand “Tokunbo” SUVs, which are always erroneously referred to as “Jeeps”, seem not built for our climes, considering that we rely on our local street corner mechanics to service/repair them. What we have now requires sophisticated facilities and persons in the realm of mechatronics (the integration of mechanical and electronic engineering). Do you see the number of abandoned vehicles all around us? They are not as easy as our “Beetle” and “404” which when we opened the bonnet, we could easily pick out the oil or fuel filter and wash them or simply blow, suck in fuel, and push to start when the batteries are down.
 - **Lesson:** An unthinking people aspire to consume at the global standards, but produce at the most pedestal standards, including agricultural technologies stuck with hoe and cutlass of the 18th century as described by Olaudah **Equiano** in his book – THE INTERESTING NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF OLAUDAH EQUIANO (1789).

- ❖ Going forward, all major vehicle producers have announced dates, some as recent as within the next decade, to completely phase-out the manufacturing of vehicles using petrol/Diesel. What is the implication for Nigeria and her economy? If world demand for crude petroleum falls how shall we pay our “minimum wage”, and what shall we share at our monthly Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) meeting?

Unemployment in Nigeria and Nigerian’s penchant for consumption of imported goods

For this I will simply present an anecdote that circulated in the social media some years ago. The anecdote is as follows:

“I was working on a national roundtable discussion document on rescuing Nigeria's economy, when I came across this script that tended to answer most of the questions as to how we got here and I thought I should share it with you.

Mr. David Ahmed Okoro started the day early, having set his alarm clock (**MADE IN FINLAND**) for 6am. While his teapot (**MADE IN CHINA**) was perking, he shaved with his clipper (**MADE IN HONG KONG**). He put on his shirt (**MADE IN THE UK**), and designer jeans (**MADE IN ITALY**) and shoes (**MADE IN THE USA**). After cooking his breakfast in his new electric cooker (**MADE IN INDIA**) he sat down with his calculator (**MADE IN MEXICO**) to see how much he could spend today. After setting his wristwatch (**MADE IN TAIWAN**) to his radio (**MADE IN VIETNAM**) he got in his car (**MADE IN GERMANY**) filled with petrol imported from (**SAUDI ARABIA**) and continued his search for a good paying NIGERIAN job... At the end of yet another discouraging and fruitless day checking his computer (**MADE IN MALAYSIA**), Mr. David Ahmed Okoro decided to relax for a while. He put on his slippers (**MADE IN BRAZIL**) poured himself a glass of wine (**MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA**), while fiddling with his mobile phone (**MADE IN SOUTH KOREA**), and then wondered why he can't find a good paying job in NIGERIA. He felt achy and sore in his left knee, he decided to take one tablet of his TRAMADOL TABLETS (**MADE IN BANGLADESH**) to relieve the pain. Lying down on his bed and wondering why NIGERIAN External Foreign Reserve has depleted to under \$28billion which has translated to free fall depreciation of Nigerian NAIRA to US DOLLAR at the PARALLEL MARKET

... Fellow Nigerians, let us start producing, let us start buying **MADE IN NIGERIA** goods. If our economy is to grow and create better jobs. How can a country like Nigeria be importing toothpick, cutting bud, cotton wool, matches, rubber band etc.? And we complain at the same time that there are no jobs for our teeming youths? ... Any nation that imports majorly foreign made goods/services rather than producing their own is hurting its people...When we keep importing foreign made products into Nigeria, we keep importing poverty into our country and exporting jobs abroad...Let's go back to the land to grow and patronize **MADE IN NIGERIA** product... PLEASE SHARE FREELY TO ENLIGHTEN ALL NIGERIANS.

Brief Message to the graduating class and other young Nigerians

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” – Joel 2:28.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” – ACTS 2:17

Every period of difficulty in human history inspires people to rise to the challenges. Very often, that will be the youth. I give a few examples.

- ❖ Colonialism and the struggle for independence. By 1940 when the struggle was well on, the prime personalities were aged as follows: Nnamdi Azikiwe (36 years), Obafemi Awolowo (31 years), Ahmadu Bello (31 years), Tafawa Balewa ((25 years).
- ❖ Decolonization of the African mind, African thought process, and African intellectualism had some key actors in the 1950s aged as follows: Nnamdi Azikiwe and the idea of a university founded by Africans (46 years in 1950), Mbonu Ojike – Boycott all Boycottables – on the advocacy for the consumption of domestic products (36 years in 1950), Chinua Achebe and the idea of telling our story ourselves as in THINGS FALL APART (28 years in 1958).
- ❖ The Biafran war and *Médecins Sans Frontières*, founded in 1971, in the aftermath of the Biafra secession, by a small group of thirteen (13) French doctors and journalists, who sought to expand accessibility to medical care across national boundaries irrespective of race, religion, creed or political affiliation. Among the founders and their ages by 1970 are Jacques Bérés (30), Bernard Kouchner (32), Vladan Radoman (35), *et al.*

The multi-dimensional challenges of our time, recommends youth visions and youth actions. In the realm of the provision of public goods and services, Nigerians now provide security for themselves whereas this should be the first duty of the state to her citizens. In all areas including

provision of water for household use, healthcare, education, transportation, building and maintenance of roads, communication, news media, to things that should be clearly privately provided such as music, and entertainment, Nigeria is brimming with opportunity, before us as has emerged a huge Nollywood Industry with virtually no role for the state.

Next, I shall venture into a terrain that has not been walked yet and that is because it clearly is in the realm of the public service – Economic Policy. I doubt if it has ever been imagined that we can ask youths, outside formal structures of government, to set policies and target for Nigeria's economic parameters such as vehicle imports, as well as imports and consumption of consumer products in Nigeria. Trade policies are public matter, but we may have to start encouraging Nigerian youths to take positions on that and mobilize society to abandon imported products and consume local products as a means of generating employment. That seemed to be Mbonu Ojike's vision in his time.

Clearly, we have a problem with public policy in Nigeria. Contrary to common commentary that Nigeria has many policies on virtually everything, that in reality can be disputed when what we describe as policies in Nigeria are subjected to classical examination. In the modern world, we cannot describe as policy, what lacks ownership, what is not knowledge-driven and evidence-based, what has no supporting strategy and plan of implementation, and what has no clearly defined measurable parameters, and no defined actors with defined responsibilities for implementation, and there is no committed action plan and committed agencies focused on driving, monitoring and evaluating such actions and deliverables, and are often forgotten and not regularly updated as the parameters change. We in fact, have examples of supposed policy documents which have been issued in the same era with conflicting positions on similar matters as exemplified by the National Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (NERGP) vis-a-viz the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to emission reduction, in the context of the Paris Climate Agreement of which Nigeria is signatory, on the issue of Nigeria's obligations and targets on reduction of emissions, and Gas flaring. This is what I have at a previous event described as **Policy Absentmindedness**.

That would be my main message to the youth of our land. Simply put, take over public "policy" and action on consuming locally produced goods as a deliberate way to generate increased local production, increase employment, and reduce poverty. Consume **made in Nigeria products**, even if of **poorer quality than their foreign equivalents**, because that is how every other successful country has risen above their economic challenges. Some years ago it was the Japanese being derided in Europe as hawkers of transistor radios. It was about made in Taiwan, or China made at some point in time. That is what we need to do now.

Winding Down

- ❖ Black People are natural, they possess the secret of joy
- Alice Walker (Possessing the Secret of Joy)

The book *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker, was a birthday gift given to me by a friend - **Lanier Anderson**- whom I met at the Goethe Institute School in Freiburg Germany in 1991, while we were

students at that German language school. Lanier is currently professor of Philosophy at the Stanford University in California. According to JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is about the "telling" of suffering and the breaking of taboos. And when taboos are broken, new forms and modes of discourse must evolve to contain that which has previously been unspeakable. Predictable outrage -- moral, political, cultural and esthetic -- ensues, and the breakers of taboos are both vilified and deified. (What They Did to Tashi; <http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/10/04/specials/walker-secret.html>). Asking Nigerian Youths to takeover public policies is certainly one such taboo.

There are a number of things I recall from reading that book in 1991, including a statement, I believe in the epigraph, that the African possesses the secret of joy, and that is what has seen him/her through several difficult phases in history, including slavery. I believe the slavery mentioned in that book, must be the common cases of slavery, one foisted on the African from whether within Africa or from outside Africa, but not one in which the victim has chosen to be enslaved.

Is it perhaps conceivable that one can chose to be enslaved? Yes, history tells of cases at the abolishment of slavery, when salves not knowing what to do with freedom, certainly confused at freedom thrust upon them, opted to remain with the master. Some contemporary examples of these include:

- ❖ You listen to Mr. Trump talk of America first, and he presides over an era of the lowest unemployment rate in the United states for several decades now, and it makes no meaning to you, but you want to ship jobs off to the United States by consuming goods from the United States which have local equivalents, and you cannot relate that to mass youth unemployment, and social crises in Nigeria.
- ❖ The Western world accords respect if not fear to China and North Korea, and you do not see that you must become internally stronger before opening up, and not becoming a dumping ground for all manner of goods and services from all over the world?
- ❖ You see Britain withdraw from the European Union (BREXIT), and you do not appreciate the core motive as preserving theirs, rather than be overrun in the long-run by Germany, as feared by Britain?

Conclusion

I have a rather unusual conclusion. Two or three decades ago, the black man and the African, of which Nigeria was supposedly expected to be the leader and show the way to get to take our place in the sun and amongst the stars, seemed more articulate and conscious of the situation and circumstance in the then world economic and social order. The generation of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mbonu Ojike, Kwame Nkrumah, Amílcar Cabral, Cheikh Anta Diop, Frantz Fanon, Ahmed Sékou Touré, Patrice Émery Lumumba, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Kenneth David Buchizya Kaunda, *et al.* were committed to the idea of **freedom and the dignity of the African** and the need for the restoration of the dignity of the black man. It was of such utmost importance to them.

Today, we have a generation of willing slaves. Can we go beyond the traditional talk, as persons associated with education and the school system beginning to take action in a small way, within our spaces, **the Power of personal example**, to pull-back from willing economic slavery to the major economies of the world? I dare ask: Can you just stop and retrace your steps from that, one way in which you may have been a willing accomplice in your own enslavement?

While doing that, do reflect on the lyrics of the Redemption Song by Bob Marley below.

Thank you.

Redemption Song by [Bob Marley](#)

Old pirates, yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look? Ooh
Some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfill the Book
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Wo! Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them-a can-a stop-a the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look?
Yes, some say it's just a part of it

We've got to fulfill the book
Won't you have to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever had
Redemption songs
All I ever had
Redemption songs
These songs of freedom
Songs of freedom