

Chapter One

WHY NIGERIA NEEDS FIXING

*It takes courage to solve a problem and
cowardice to bestride it*

Nigeria needs fixing because it is not working for all Nigerians; it is working for only a handful of Nigerians.

Despite the social, economic and political gains many believe the country has made in the last decade or so, Nigeria is a broken system that is built on false premises of democratic sustainability, economic viability and ethnic unity.

Nigeria needs fixing because it is not working for an overwhelming majority of its citizens who have been left out of the thievery and profligacy that have plagued the country since its independence fifty years ago.

Nigeria needs fixing because it has only worked out well for a tiny handful of well-connected and privileged people as well as their fortunate cronies, relatives and friends who have at various times managed to install themselves in the corridors of power and have corralled the proceeds from our collective resources for their personal purposes.

Nigeria needs urgent fixing because going by the way things have gone in the last decade, the country remains a fragile and delicate patchwork of sundry ethnic parts that have increasingly shown disinterestedness in coexisting

with one another in order to forge a common front for collective sustainability.

Nigeria needs fixing because despite the billions of dollars it has earned from oil resources over the last fifty years, the country has very little to show for it and has not produced the kinds of results that are commensurate with its massive earnings especially in the areas of infrastructure, basic amenities and technology as well as human development and improvement.

Whether Nigeria has serious, wide-ranging problems that require urgent, drastic, and lasting solutions and how serious these problems are depends on the status perch of the Nigerian proffering an answer.

For the politician who has succeeded in planting one foot or two feet in the corridors of political power in the country and considers himself or herself privileged and positioned to share in the spoils of political office, Nigeria's problems may not be as bad as people make them out to be.

For many higher-ups in the political scale who line their pockets with the country's wealth at the expense of ordinary folks, things in Nigeria may not even be bad at all.

For a plenitude of political stalwarts and party officials and their top-echelon supporters who have benefited tremendously just because things are the way they are, Nigeria may not even have problems to begin with.

For the party insider or power broker who dictates the way things are in Nigeria, the situation in Nigeria is not much different from the situation in the so-called first-world countries where democracy has been practiced for generations.

For the corrupt officials who pervade every sector of Nigeria and whose bread and butter depend entirely on a perverse status quo, any implying of problems within the system is deemed outrageous and any suggestion of change stands to be vehemently opposed.

For those who profit directly and indirectly from the spoils of a corrupt and inefficient system, the country has never been better than it presently is.

For the ex-military brass who enjoyed decades of plunder and pillage while in power and who has continued to maintain a stranglehold on the reins of power, Nigeria's milk of opportunity is ceaseless in its flow even if it flows for the benefit of a few.

For the ordinary Nigerian in the street who has toiled all his life to make the proverbial ends meet and has watched the wealth of his country squandered by a few well-placed people, Nigeria stinks to high heavens of every kind of problem.

For many Nigerians, especially those who have been victimized, the problem with Nigeria is crime.

For many more, it is economic and political corruption.

For most, it is lack of every thing from forthright leadership to even the most basic of amenities.

And for a great majority, it is moral and social decay.

For an overwhelming proportion of Nigerians who feel the pinch and pain of survival daily and who have been deprived and denied basic privileges and have endured severe hardship while their erstwhile neighbor who has made it into political office lavishes and splurges on the nation's wealth, it is hunger and starvation and the kind of poverty that makes them question the essence of their own existence.

For many Nigerians who have been tortured by the painful quagmires of a once-promising homeland and have labored in vain to salvage it from the doldrums, the problem is all of the above.

Nigeria needs fixing because the path it is threading is a one-directional track that would lead it to self-destruction.

There is no justifiable excuse why politics in Nigeria should be based on a winner-take-all mentality where people who find themselves in power freely flaunt their position and authority without any check or restraint whatsoever.

There is no justifiable excuse why the president should have such enormous and obscene powers as to be the sole controller of the nation's vast oil resources.

There is no justifiable excuse why a state governor in Nigeria could wield such enormous powers as to be beyond reproach by the other arms of government.

There is no justifiable excuse why the president is out of commission and there is an argument as to whether the vice president should fill in for him.

There is no justifiable excuse why the people cannot have faith in their power to vote when their votes will not count.

There is no justifiable excuse why Nigerians should tolerate a situation where politicians who live in their midst brazenly steal from public coffers and people just sit there and rue about it.

There is no justifiable excuse why ordinary Nigerians permit politicians who are supposed to serve them to behave like overlords and tin gods without raising uproars and hell for them.

To be sure, the problem is not that Nigerians do not know what the troubles with their country are; the problem is that they have become too accepting of and complacent about the country's problems.

The problem with fixing Nigeria is that those who have at various times attempted to solve its problems have not taken the crucial step to understand the nature and enormity and character of these problems.

Indeed, there have been many efforts and many attempts at tackling the many malaises that dog Nigeria but each has tended to bestride the real solutions that would bring real and lasting change.

For instance, most Nigerians believe that the best way to deal with the problem of corruption in Nigeria is to hound corrupt people into prison and to recapture stolen treasures from them.

Most Nigerians believe that the problem of crime in Nigeria can be addressed with simply equipping the Nigerian police with modern gadgets and super hi-tech paraphernalia and many actually have the improvident belief that if they prayed hard and steadfast to God, God would make the country better.

As an example, because of the lack-luster performance of the national team at the 2010 soccer World Cup in South Africa, the government decided that the best way to make the team better was to ban it from international competitions for two years.

Would it not have been more expedient to find ways to better prepare next time and to actually do the things that would make the team better. Maybe building a more vibrant local league system as a means of developing and enhancing talents would have been a far more sensible approach.

Another significant example is in the area of border disputes. Why should one community be at loggerheads with another about the demarcation lines between them when there should have been actual, documented and recorded demarcation lines when they were created that can be called up to resolve the dispute?

In one instance in the south-east of Nigeria, specifically the neighboring states of Abia and Akwa-Ibom, the federal government intervened in the boundary line dispute between two communities by erecting a military facility in the disputed area.

Would it not have been more expedient to pull up the original boundary lines that were drawn when the two states were created? Or were there no surveys or territorial boundaries maps made when the states were created? Were the original boundary lines artificial? Or did no one think it fit to have them documented on paper at least?

These kinds of knee-jerk, hastily-contrived, and irascible problem solving techniques are emblematic of the many efforts to solve Nigeria's problems.

To be sure, many of the problems that exist in Nigeria such as pervasive corruption and high rates of crime are not peculiar to Nigeria. They exist elsewhere, even in developed countries as many Nigerian politicians would quickly point out.

However, there is uniqueness in the character and style and existential modes of these problems in Nigeria and that is what makes the huge difference.

The point here is not to treat the problems of corruption and crime and all the other problems that Nigeria is ridden with as strictly a Nigerian thing but to focus on how they have evolved and how they can be effectively curbed within the Nigerian context.

The task of fixing Nigeria is an onerous task that will require great courage and unwavering persistence. It is a task that must be pursued with resolve and will amount to hitting the reset button and starting all over with a clear and distinct idea of exactly what the country would be like at the end of the day.

The problems that dog Nigeria cannot be confronted and corrected with a patient, slow, ineffective, one-step-forward, three-steps-backward, leave-it-to-politicians, piecemeal approach which is very popular with the country's political elite.

The solutions must be wide reaching and wide ranging, comprehensive and sweeping and would touch on every aspect of Nigeria because every aspect is interconnected and every aspect is in decay.

For any meaningful change to happen in Nigeria, it has to be revolutionary, well articulated, and brought about by the action of ordinary people who have been denied the benefits of nationhood for far too long and have suffered the brutal consequences of a dysfunctional system.

Change in Nigeria must therefore be, as they say, from the bottom up and not from the top down.

History has shown that the people at the top have no incentives to bring about any meaningful change because one way or another, they benefit from the status quo and from systemic rot.

Because the ordinary people in Nigeria have been shortchanged for far too long, they must propel the engine of the kind of change Nigeria needs in order to achieve a sustainable and truly dynamic and progressive nation.

The challenge of people-driven reforms in Nigeria is enormous because majority of Nigerians are bereft of any

kind of energy or incentive to resist the temptations of a corrupt system.

Most Nigerians have so much come to terms with the status quo and have settled comfortably into the notion that there is a Nigerian way of doing things that is entirely Nigerian, that they would have to be coaxed into a new way of thinking in order for them to adapt to change.

The ordinary man in Nigeria sees himself as part and parcel of a corrupt system from which he stands to gain when his own time comes even when he is not certain that that time will ever come.

Most Nigerians have become reticent and accepting of corruption in their country and are willing participants in the decay because it has become the only way to get things done.

However, many Nigerians agree that there is something inherently wrong with the system and have only embraced the status quo because there are no other options available. In Nigeria, to not benefit from corruption is to be scorned and scoffed at.

The process of people-driven reforms in Nigeria therefore will have to be heralded by a massive reorientation and reeducation process that would center on proper messaging and commonsensical solutions that can easily be understood by the ordinary person in the street.

Ultimately, there is comfort and encouragement in the fact that most Nigerians are open-minded about change and will readily embrace one that makes sense and is realistic to them.

There is ample evidence suggesting that if the Nigerian is prodded, he is willing to do the right thing. Because of this, there is hope for change in Nigeria.

For any meaningful change to happen in Nigeria, it must be sensible, sustainable, realistic, realizable and practical and must take into consideration a multitude of factors.

The most crucial of these factors is the fact that Nigeria is a nation of 250 or more ethnic sub-nationalities each with its succinct and distinct ethnocentrism and unique socio-cultural and political perceptions.

Nigeria's body polity has so far ignored the fact that Nigeria is only not a homogeneous society but that our joining together as a nation was not voluntary and agreeable.

The idea is not to overemphasize Nigeria's ethnic differences and to trump up the fact that it is a country of unwilling and self-promoting and self-indulging ethnocenters, it is to understand that these factors have enduring implications for the country's continued existence and progress.

There have been many suggested ways to deal with the Nigeria's problems and each reflects a myriad of sentiments that are out there.

Many are extreme and unpropitious. Many are based on principles of fairness and justness which arguably can only be possible if every other factor is present and the world is perfect place. Some are simply outrageous and overly radical.

There is only one true path to the solution to Nigeria's problems. It is neither one that seeks to give advantage to one group over the other nor demean one and elevate the other, but one that takes into consideration and recognizes the practical realities and the peculiarities of each component ethnic nationality.

In fashioning a solution, we have to be sure that it is one that is practical and realizable. It does not have to be perfect but it has to be one that will work. Core emphasis should be on realistic, realizable, sustainable and practical.