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THE NIGERIAN DIASPORA, GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS.

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ABSTRACT: This paper argues that the Nigerian government's partnership with the Diaspora can advance the country's development. The Diaspora constitutes a viable pool of resource to assist in national development. Partnership between the Nigerian Diaspora and government before 1999 was limited to occasional contact and activities. This could be attributed to the decades of political instability, domestic maladjustment, economic downturns and increasing poverty within the country. Political instability gave way to democratic change and the need to source for development led the Nigerian government to officially recognize the Nigerian Diaspora as important stakeholders and potential partners in the country's development. President Obasanjo's administration in 1999 orchestrated the establishment of the Nigerian Diaspora association(NIDO, established in 2001)to mobilize, engage and involve the Diaspora in the nations development process. It is on record that despite challenges and setbacks, government effort yielded some tangible results in terms of solid personal and institutional linkages.It is important to note that expatriate Nigerians are actively involved in health insurance, mortgages, and registered pension and credit purchase schemes among other initiatives. This paper argues that government partnership in development intervention has laid a good foundation and should be further exploited to yield good results.

KEY WORDS: Nigerian Diaspora, Governmental Partnership, Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recognition of the importance of development to a nations survival and sustenance led the Nigerian government to outsource development through the intervention of the Nigerian Diaspora,amongst other initiatives. Partnership between the Diaspora and the Nigerian Government became established with the return to democracy in 1999.Mberu (2013) emphasized that since the return of democracy in 1999, the Nigerian government has changed its approach by officially recognizing Nigerians abroad as important stakeholders and potential partners in the country's development.

President Obasanjo's administration was focused on the Diaspora. In September 2000, he convened a meeting in Atlanta USA, of Nigerians in the Americas, and later a meeting in London for those in Europe to enable them create a mechanism through which they could be effectively mobilized and involved in Nigeria's development process (ibid). This resulted into a presidential consultative meeting in Abuja and later the formation of the Nigerians in the Diaspora organization (NIDO) in 2001. Mberu (ibid)noted that, NIDO was modelled on similar organizations in China and India. Also, the Nigerian National Volunteer Service was established (NNVS) a quasi-government organization to coordinate the government's engagement with its Diaspora.

In 2005, the president declared July 25th as Nigeria Diaspora Day to recognize and celebrate the individual and collective success of Nigerians abroad as well as their contribution to Nation building and development. Ambassador Joe Keshi, the National Coordinator of NNVS comments that the organization has created national awareness on the need to mobilize, engage and involve the Diaspora in Nigeria's development process. But this is not grass root true. The NNVS also initiated the science conference in 2005, bringing together Nigerian scientists abroad and their counterparts at home, initiating dialogue, interaction, collaboration and cooperation (ibid).

It is on record that despite challenges and setbacks, the government effort yielded some tangible results in terms of solid personal and institutional linkages. The science and technology Trust Fund are now accessible to overseas based scientists. And projects identified during past conferences are being carried out. It is important to note that expatriate Nigerians are actively involved in health insurance, mortgages, and registered pension and credit purchase schemes. These were ideas that the Diaspora suggested and all had been realized

since 2007 noted Mberu (ibid). Dual citizenship laws were inculcated in 2002. Also, the department of Diaspora was created and there was the upgrading of this to a Diaspora commission in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This new ministry, President Jonathan announced in April 2010 was to harmonise and document the contributions of Nigerians abroad, it would be given more powers and resources to run with board of directors (ibid).

The Musa Yar'adua/Goodluck Jonathan and Subsequent administrations have recognized and welcomed the potentials of Diaspora citizens through the private-public economic partnership but the Diaspora Nigerian citizens have argued that incentives for migrant Nigerians to participate in the political-socio economic development of the country needs to be addressed (Ogbebulu, 2013). Such political-socio economic development of the country needs to be created at the states and federal levels to allow Nigerians abroad to participate. (This point is corroborated in oral interview with Tunde Adeniran, 2014). The achievements of such partnership between the Nigerian Diaspora and government will be subsequently discussed in this paper. This paper is subsequently divided into government partnership and development interventions, Diaspora/governmental partnership for investment, Diaspora and homeland development, American Diasporic Experimentations: Emulation possibilities for Nigeria, On Globalisation and Relevance of Technology to Diaspora government partnership, Diaspora Criticism of Governance and the conclusion.

II. GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

According to Ogbebulu (2013), an important school of thought amongst the Diaspora Nigerians is the believe that participation in the political socio-economic reconstruction of Nigeria depends on the extent to which Nigerians abroad feel they have been encouraged and allowed to have stake in their home nation state, as well as in the countries that host them. It is recorded that the Nigerian investment promotion commission, has it on record that, each year, some 2000 Nigerians trained outside the country (UK), USA, Germany, France, Russia, Canada etc) return home to seek employment or business opportunities (ibid).

There is also the intervention through the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Networks (TOKTEN), a programme of the United Nations Development Programme. In addition, there are Diasporas political socio-economic groups that campaign and are still campaigning for democratic reforms, for example in 1990s, pro-democracy organizations in the UK contributed to the formation of the pro-democracy organization, the United Democratic Front for Nigeria Abroad (UDEN) also the National Democratic Coalition NADECO – Abroad) was set up as an external wing of NADECO Nigeria to coordinate the activities of pro-democracy movements in Nigeria and have been campaigning for Nigeria's constitutional amendment (cited in Ogbebulu, 2013).

There was the Yar'Adua/Jonathan Solidarity Forum home and away (YJSFHA) UK chapter with headquarters in Nigeria. YJSFHA has the objectives to galvanise and promote the seven point agenda of the administration which revolves round power and energy, food and security, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, security, qualitative and functional education amongst others (ibid).

Further, new developments include government's establishment of an 80 billion naira (about US 500 million dollars) investment fund, so that the Diaspora can invest in the Nigerian economy. Interested industrialists without capital can draw from the fund, which is part of the larger national resource fund meant for local capacity building, technology transfer, and product standardization to boost the country's export for manufactured goods (ibid).

These initiatives Mberu (2013) comments are at early stages and their full impacts remain to be seen. The impacts of recent government policy interventions are still in their infancy he reiterated. Most of my interview respondents agree with the idea that the government need to invest in basic infrastructure and reduce corruption to see the Diaspora's contribution and commitment return levels increase. A more dynamic economy would also reduce the tendency for the youths to migrate.

The House of Representatives Committee on Diaspora was working on citizens' diplomacy by creating Diaspora desks in all Nigerian missions abroad. This is to further build confidence back home as well as among Nigerians in Diaspora to make them contribute their quota to the development of the Nation (Prince Dickson, 2008, NUC Conference LEAD). A Diaspora desk was a proposition by Hon. Abike Dabiri. In a reaction to the Dabiri position, some Diasporas are of the opinion that such an effort would be a duplication of the duties and services of Nigerian missions abroad. They insisted that citizenship Diplomacy cannot be achieved by conferencing and words of mouth, additional civil servants they insist is money wastage. The Diasporas believe the missions are on slow improvement course and should be encouraged and motivated (ibid).

The house committees suggestion on how to give the diasporas a sense of belonging and protection is fashioned after the Chinese model, where they have a parliamentary committee on Chinese in Diaspora which gives their citizens state legislative backing in all their endeavours abroad (*Tribune*, 30-01-2008). Soludo (2013) insists that Nigeria needs a new template for Diaspora engagement. He noted that so far, the response is best adhoc and pedestrian.

III. DIASPORA/GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIP FOR INVESTMENT

Partnership between the Nigerian Diaspora and the Nigerian government predated the third republic when president Obasanjo actively engaged the Diaspora through the creation of the Nigeria Diaspora Organisation. JideAkintunde (cited by our Reporter May 1, 2013) commented that, our government has done enough in its effort to attract investors from the Diaspora to invest in the local economy (JideAkintunde, Director, Nigeria Development and Finance Forum (NDFF). He spoke ahead of the 2013 NDFF conference in Washington DC, United States from June 4-5. In his address, he noted that there is no policy known to exist to encourage Nigerians living abroad to invest in the country, except “wooing” them through road shows.

He further explained that high level corruption of government officials involved in the process is a major barrier to participation of Nigerians living abroad (this is compared to emerging market investors). Akintunde (2013) opined that the programme of privatization of the State Owned Enterprises (SOES) could have been used to stimulate Diaspora investment. This he insisted requires more transparency in the programme, innovative policies, and planned floatation of Diaspora bonds by Nigeria and a few other African governments can help to address the barrier of high purchase power of government assets. This will increase the purchase power of individual investors as against multinationals and foreign governments who hitherto have dominated the business climate of Nigeria (ibid).

The bonds will opportune Nigerians abroad to invest in the Nigerian infrastructure sector with their pooled financial resources. This will mitigate the risk of an individual or few individuals taking on both management responsibilities and operating risks of investing in Nigeria. Akintunde (2013) reminiscence the idea, muted by the federal government, years back to create a “technology park” with the involvement of Nigerians abroad, to incubate IT business in the country. He however bemoaned the fact that the government lacked the commitment to push the policy to fruition and the fact that one of the proposed locations for the project, the former secretariat complex in Ikoyi, Lagos, has remained unoccupied for years. Interestingly, technology transfer can only be realized through a policy that will facilitate transfer by creating opportunities for Diaspora Nigerians to come and invest in the country. Along this line, the then Vice President SamboNamadi enjoined Nigerians in the Diaspora to return home to be part of the new horizon, Sambo lauded the Jonathan administration’s commitment to the provision of necessary infrastructure, in the areas of power supply, transportation, aviation, ICT, agriculture, provision of affordable health care services, addressing the educational advancement issues and the provision of good governance (ibid).

Conventional wisdom suggests that remittances are spent on subsistence consumption. However, the opportunity to turn Diaspora remittances into long term investment flow is being tapped by the creation of the Diaspora bond; the success of which cannot be measured yet. Guichard (undated) attributed and categorized motivation for Diaspora investment into 4 points (1) Financial (2) Emotional (3) Social status, (4) political. He (Guichard, undated: 20) further insists there is a need to facilitate access to impactful opportunities and through this to provide reasonable prospects for returns from investments. In addition to which the investment process must be transparent and reliable. Guichard (ibid) referred to investment opportunities as Homestrings. The main focus of homestrings are to attract Diaspora and other interested investors by providing a growing book of investment opportunities in a variety of sectors. Such are private Equity Funds, Diaspora bonds (Central Banks) and housing (investment, lending, buying). Homestrings are said to function as a repository of investment opportunities for Diaspora and other investors, including in the healthcare sector (ibid).

With the new wave of terrorism, abductions and religious cleansing, Tunde Ali (Ali, 1999).advocated the rescue agenda of the Diaspora Nigerians. He suggested that an organization that will advance a new Nigeria with people centered government that will serve and not rule be established. This organization he opined will lobby the host government intervention (through influence and policies) to discourage corruption through savings and investments that has no direct and positive impact on Nigerian economy. Such an organization will be open to all but lead by patriots. This would extend to discourage partnership of Diaspora conspiracy in corruption (ibid).

IV. DIASPORA, GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIP AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Former Ambassador to Atlanta, Ambassador Steven Keshi acknowledged that Nigerians in the Diaspora have for sometimes now been making “significant contributions” in various ways to Nigeria’s national development, “some have engaged in some intellectual exercise to strategise on how to contribute to moving Nigeria forward” (Cited in Contributions of Nigerians in the Diaspora, 2013). He (ibid) lamented that such contributions have not been in anyway reflected in the calculations of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and consequently their effect on national economy cannot be assessed. He further stated that proper record through the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) is now imperative and will enable Nigerians at home and

government appreciates “the quality and quantum of these efforts and the impact Nigerians abroad are making in our national development endeavour (ibid).

These contributions are not limited to organizations, associations and individuals (including faith-based organizations). (Contributions of Nigerians in the Diaspora, 2013). The Nigerian Leadership Initiative (NLI) in a 2012 report was identified as an organization that supports the growth and development of Nigeria. It is believed that real change can be brought to specific areas and communities if organizations such as NLI are supported to link up with effective partners (ibid).

IdrisAbubakarNasir, Secretary of the UK chapter of the PDP as well as the Chairman of Northern zones of the PDP in the UK in an interview with *Inside Politics* (2010) said his union wanted to pick up the dying industries in Kaduna by bringing ideas and investors who could revamp them.

The collection of one million signatures for the Nigerian diaspora voting Rights Petition was pursued with vigour by the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organisation (NIDO). A memorandum to both the Senate and House of Representatives Committee on constitutional amendment on the right to vote in elections was submitted by the *Concerned Citizens* in the United States of America and elsewhere (ibid). These were targeted towards a legislation to give voting rights to diasporans to enable citizens of their states act as watchdogs for good governance and transparent democracy.

Areas of diaspora achievement include scholarship awards, boreholes, medical missions/humanitarian assistance, relief materials, cash donations, community development projects, and conference seminar Advocacy efforts like HIV/AIDS campaigns, investment, projects like refineries and electricity, social endeavours (ibid). These Diaspora achievements are laudable but with unnoticeable impacts at the national levels. It is notably important that, Diaspora contributions be targeted at infrastructural developments in which whole projects could be evolved over a period of time. For example, building of Estates, particular road constructions to international standards, facilities that are community-friendly, such as dams for hydro electricity or water project, international standard structured hospitals, sponsoring of upgrading of selected universities to a world standard position, and monitoring of our fledglingdemocracy (ibid).

V. AMERICAN DIASPORIC EXPERIMENTATION: EMULATION POSSIBILITIES FOR NIGERIA

The incredibly important role of Diaspora communities in America’s success is a well-recognised fact. The Diasporas are grass root ambassadors with unique expertise, insight, and personal commitment. They diffuse language and cultural familiarity and provide unique understanding of business opportunities and risks in their home countries. They provide large linkages and personal and professional networks with people of similar background across continents. And they often also return to homeland countries with stories of American uniqueness and success as credible and enthusiastic ambassadors (The global Diaspora Forum: The State Department Document, 2011).

Without compromising this role to countries of residence, they are just as importantly uniquely motivated to assist in diplomacy and development in their countries of origin. This to them is intrinsic and personal (ibid). They support higher living standards, economic growth, and are politically stable in their countries of origin or heritage. This they see as contribution to helping friends and families. Most importantly Diaspora communities also provide critical business linkages to global markets for countries that may be struggling to capture the benefits of globalization (The global Diaspora Forum: The State Department Document). It is noted that almost half of US born Nobel laureates in science fields were immigrants (ibid).

A new initiative called Networks of Diasporas for Engineers and Scientists or NODES – a partnership between the Department of State, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the National Academy of Science – to connect Diaspora scientists across boundaries by fostering knowledge networks, the sharing of best practices, the identification of capacity building tools, and the creation of link between professionals, societies, Universities, NGOs and government forum, USA (ibid).

The American State Department and USAID are involved in facilitating connections between Diaspora groups to increase their impact on American development (ibid). If America, with a first world development status is still exploiting such options then Nigeria has a lot of work to do in exploiting Diaspora advantages. Diaspora intervention is more relevant for investment capital and business skills to tap into the path of sustainable development.

The United States Secretary of State’s *Office of Global Diaspora Forum*, is established with the aim of recognizing and celebrating the contributions of Diaspora communities to America’s relationship with their countries of origin or ancestry, it is also to foster Diaspora-centric partnership models and encourage intra-Diaspora collaboration and learning (USAID, 2011). USAID in partnership with western union has *the African Diaspora Market place* (ADM) a business plan competition that supports the entrepreneurial spirit and resources of the US-based African Diaspora (USAID, 2011).

This African Diaspora market promotes economic development in sub-Saharan Africa by facilitating Diaspora Direct Investment in viable small and medium enterprises. Final choices of winners are based on their business ideas and proposals, without regard to the sub-Saharan African country of implementation, a project contract with details of milestone and disbursement schedule for the award grant are signed between ADM and choice candidates (ibid).

Grants and technical assistance are provided and monitoring is for a period of up to 18 months. The performance and lessons learned are then disseminated to the broader Diaspora business and development communities (USAID, 2011:1). In line with this trend, Congressman, Bobby L. Rush, a Democrat from Illinois, introduced "The African Investment and Diaspora Act of 2011" (AIDA), a bill designed to further strengthen the trade relationship between the United States and Africa through the exploitation and intervention of the African Diaspora community. This bill embraces the idea of helping US based-Africans to actively participate in economic development of their countries (Ekanem,2011) This issue will be currently debatable, especially in the era of President Trump's anti migration laws..

VI. ON GLOBALISATION AND RELEVANCE OF TECHNOLOGY TO DIASPORA GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP.

The impact of globalization is now more about movements of goods and services; it is also about migrations and relevance of technology to emigration and facilitated contacts. Information technology and improved transportation systems are being exploited to advantage by world Diaspora to benefit and take advantage of the improved world economic climate. Nigerians in the Diaspora should plan and actively create employment, new vistas for international economic linkages, and also educational linkages with professional colleagues (Udeh, 2011). This should be encouraged and facilitated by government through the creation of investment protective policies that particularly favour Diasporas. Bilateral linkages Udeh (2011) believe (could be in commercial, economic financial or scientific areas and) tend to become self-reinforcing (Udeh, 2011, Hart, 2006). On individual contacts and in financial remittances globalisation has impacted positively, it is important to further exploit the government Diasporapartnership through the advantages of the use of technology.

VII. DIASPORA CRITICISMS OF GOVERNANCE

Bureaucrats, politicians, and diplomats perceive Diaspora internet criticisms as unfounded and based on ignorance. In an address at the Diaspora conference of 2005, Obasanjo bemoaned this criticism thus: Some of the writings on and about Nigerians on the internet leave much to be desired. They often display crass ignorance, limited or no familiarity with public policy or undiluted commitment to the long abandoned past and a belief that locations abroad means superiority to those at home. (Obasanjo, cited in Hagher, 2009: 9).

Falls out of such criticisms have reduced the interest of Diasporas to contribute to the nation's development. Hagher (2009) suggested solutions to these criticisms to include diplomat's constructive engagement with the politically active Diasporas in order to provide enough relevant information to them so that they do not injure the nation's interest out of spite or ignorance. They can be used for positive influence of host governments and populations when given proper orientation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Government and Diaspora have established a degree of partnership since 1999, but the dividend of such partnership has remained highly elusive. This majorly could be attributed to lack of trust on the part of the diasporas, high governmental corruption, lopsided or inconsistent and insincere policies, unfavourable immigration policies that are particularly hostile to returnee diasporas, inconsistency in foreign exchange value, hash Nigerian business climate with negative competitive edge, infrastructural decay and unavailability, little support from both government and citizenry. Also important is the self-seeking profit aggrandisement of the Diasporas, exploitative business ideas and international networking disadvantages accrued from negative Euro-American immigration policies. It is importantly relevant to note also the resent xenophobia in South Africa. It is relevant to note however, that discouraging factors will forever exist to distract the less determined. The Nigerian Diasporacitizens must cross the hurdles of these negative factors and the Nigerian government must take corrective strides to create the right and conducive climate in assisting the Nigerian Diaspora to contribute and achieve this important task of development.

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