

2023 elections: Hitting rock bottom, finding a way up

By ATEDO PETERSIDE

THE subject of this article was imposed on me by TASCK Creative Company Limited, who were the organisers of the Ignite Conference 2021 which took place in Lagos on November 17, 2021. Led by MI Abaga, the musician/rapper/entertainer, TASCK has, over the past few years, actively tried to mobilise influential voices in the creative sector to drive activities to promote civic engagement, including campaigns and music tours to encourage the youth to vote and actively use their voices and platforms for change.

According to TASCK, they took the learnings from previous conferences, other interactions and the EndSARS protests in October, 2020 and deployed all these to create the IGNITE platform. I do not know what informed TASCK to invite me to be the keynote speaker at their 2021 IGNITE Conference. However, I accepted the invitation because I admired what they were trying to do, which was to be a “force for good”.

In any case, it dovetailed nicely with the work of Anap Foundation, which I founded in 2003, and which has only one declared objective/mission as shown on our website (www.anapfoundation.com): **to promote good governance.**

I am an economist and an investment banker by training and an entrepreneur by choice and so I understand that it is impossible to separate economics from politics. Indeed, in most countries where the economy is under-performing substantially (including Nigeria), nothing might change significantly for as long as politics continues to be allowed to trump economics. To move the needle significantly in Nigeria, you need more knowledgeable leaders as well as a more discerning electorate.

An ignorant and hungry electorate can give politicians a licence to do whatever they want with the economy, provided they pay each voter a little amount of money to secure their votes once in four years. Such an arrangement can go on in perpetuity, if the more educated voters get disillusioned and opt out of the electoral process.

Demography is important and in Nigeria's case, 53.9 per cent of our population are aged 19 and below, whilst 95.2 per cent of the population are aged 59 and below. A corollary of this proposition is that 4.8 per cent of the population is aged 60 and above. When youths complain that old politicians continue to dominate top political appointments, I remind them that it is for the 95.2 per cent to rise up, organise themselves and kick out the oppressive 4.8 per cent. The good news is that there are even some converts within the

4.8 per cent, who will gladly work with the 95.2 per cent to kick out the old “failed” politicians.

Nobody is going to come from Mars, Jupiter,



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Australia, the UK, USA or France to improve Nigeria. That said, I sympathise with our citizens who are seeking greener pastures in Canada and a few other rich countries that will take in a smattering of Nigerians on selective criteria; usually to accelerate the brain drain from Nigeria. The fact, however, is that, with a population of 200 million (of which at least 100 million are below the poverty line), Nigerians are far too many to be absorbed by the rest of the world.

Whether we like it or not, it will remain the responsibility of knowledgeable, skilled and patriotic Nigerians (at home and abroad) to improve the country and the plight of our impoverished citizenry. Shirking that responsibility does not come so easily to some of us who have had Nigeria embedded in our DNA from childhood. I have personally not found that country that I would like to emigrate to - and I

have travelled through all of the five major continents as well as Australia.

A very worrying trend in Nigeria is the falling voter turnout which invariably is a measure of voter apathy. Voter turnout as a percentage of total registered voters, climbed from 52.26 per cent in 1999 to 69.08 per cent in 2003, but then it has been dropping ever since; 57.49 per cent in 2007, 53.68 per cent in 2011, 43.65 per cent in 2015 and 34.75 per cent in 2019. Even if we accept that some of the earlier percentages were heavily inflated, the downward trend is real.

Anap Foundation has commissioned opinion polls several times across the country since 2010 and those polls also confirm increased voter apathy.

We hit **rock bottom** (so far) in the Anambra governorship elections of November 2021, where total number of valid votes cast was marginally below 10 per cent of registered voters. Indeed, Professor Charles Soludo won that election by securing only 112,229 votes out of 2,466,638 registered voters i.e. 4.5 per cent of the registered electorate only. Do not misinterpret this to mean that I am unhappy for him. I heartily congratulate him on his important victory, but I am simply stating the facts as regards the very low voter turnout.

All over the country, it has almost become fashionable for the educated young voter (18+ and above) to brag that he or she has no intention of registering to vote or vot-

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ing or both. This was my definition of **rock bottom** at the Ignite Conference.

The most popular reasons which educated youths give for opting out are: 1) the votes will not count anyway; and 2) the candidates are uninspiring. I would like to remind these youths that, over 2,000 years ago, Socrates famously said: “One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors”.

Three very important and significant things happened this month: 1) The Federal Executive Council approved the National Development Plan 2021-25, in respect of which I was the Private Sector Co-Chair of the National Steering Committee for the Plan (alongside the Finance Minister who was the Public Sector Co-Chair); 2) Anambra Governorship Election results confirmed a new low in terms of voter apathy (actual turnout of registered voters was only 10 per cent approx); and 3) The Judicial Panel for the EndSARS Protests/Lekki Tollgate Shooting completed its report and some of its key findings became public knowledge.

On the face of it, 1), 2) and 3) above are totally unconnected, but in reality they are interwoven. I pointed out during an Arise TV interview last week that the findings of the Judicial Panel and the ensuing White Paper are important because they tell the world whether we are building a society on **justice** and the **truth** or whether we have chosen a path of **injustice** and **lies**. I also pointed out on an NTA TV panel last week that the National Development Plan 2021-25 will only succeed if there is a dose of political activism that will hold the “feet of politicians to the fire” and “force” them to implement the right policies plus uphold truth and justice.

If we do not do this, the projected N348 trillion private sector financing (86 per cent of the projected financing need for the Plan) may not materialise. Private capital will seek a home where it feels more comfortable or where the risk/reward equation

is more interesting. The three tiers of government between them are expected to contribute less than 15 per cent of the projected financing for the Plan - achieving that might sound like a stretch because total Nigerian Government revenue as a share of GDP is currently only seven per cent approx (among the lowest in the world).

In truth that seven per cent figure can rise to 15 per cent, but only if we significantly eliminate wastage and revenue leakages as well as force many government agencies to limit their costs/overheads to no more than 50 per cent of the revenue that they receive or raise, as recommended by the Plan.

The political will to do all this might only be found, in part, through the injection of a right dose of political activism. Meanwhile, the Anambra election result tells us that, instead of increased political activism, we have entered a new era of heightened voter apathy and mass disillusionment amongst educated youths.

To find a way back up, after hitting rock bottom, we must reinvigorate our educated youths. We must bring back a large volume of discerning young educated voters into the political equation because it is their active presence and participation that will inject the required dose of political activism that will force politicians to get serious and also bring out a new type of politician that can win an election on the back of harnessing the votes of educated youths.

The structure of the Nigerian economy is changing. By far the fastest growing sector of our economy in 2020 was the ICT sector which grew at 12.6 per cent. Nigeria is also fast becoming a global “soft power” on account of the successes of our Creatives who excel in Music, Film, Art, Fashion, etc. These are all newer activities that grew immensely in the 21st Century and they are sectors that are not well understood by old fuddy duddies. For these new sectors to thrive (and they are driven largely by the youth) it will be a big mistake for the youths to leave the economic management and political space to ancient mariners who still think that the economy is only about agriculture, manufacturing and fossil fuels.

For those who continue to argue that the 2023 elections are not the priority, because you favour a new Constitution and/or restructuring or indeed you favour a separatist agenda, my advice is that, whilst agitating for those things, you should also go ahead and elect, in 2023, persons who share your agenda to represent you in your local government, State House of Assembly, House of Representatives, Senate, etc.

I still do not understand how surrendering all of those positions, plus Governor and President, to your opponents constitutes your best option. How does empowering your “enemy” to represent you improve your position? Is that mindset not akin to deliberately scoring an own goal against yourself in a soccer match, whilst still hoping to beat your opponent?

Anap Foundation is now working hard with selected influencers from across the country and the diaspora to try and bring back or bring in many more young voters. This is the *raison d'être* for our decision to launch the #GoNigeria Initiative last week which aims to encourage youths aged 18+ to register en-masse now and collect their voters cards well **before** the 30 June, 2022 deadline for registration so that even the angry youths can properly channel their anger towards the 2023 elections.

Our challenge to the youths who have already registered is that they should undertake to convince a minimum of four other youths to do the same because $1 + 4 = 5$. If our youths respond positively and engage politically instead of withdrawing, we can very quickly turn this ship around and create the Nigeria that they desire and deserve.

•Atedo Peterside, CON, is the President & Founder of Anap Foundation and the Founder of Stanbic IBTC Bank PLC

Delta 2023: We're not in support of any guber aspirant —UYLA

By Ochuko Akuopha

UGHELLI—URHOB0 Youth Leaders' Association, UYLA, yesterday, said it was neither in support of any particular 2023 governorship aspirant in Delta state, nor interested in the screening process of the gubernatorial hopefuls in the state.

Interacting with newsmen at Oguname-Olomu community, Ughelli South Local Government Area, President of UYLA, Olorogun Onoriode Ofon, flanked by his Vice, Olorogun Samuel Oghotomo; Secretary, Olorogun Augustine Atiti and other members of his executive, said the association was only interested in the candidate to be presented by the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP and the leader of the party, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa.

He however, noted that “the immediate mission of UYLA is to lobby leaders and stakeholders for the actualisation of the unwritten gentleman's agreement of the Delta State Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP concerning the rotation of the Governorship position among the three Senatorial districts of the state.

“In 2023, it will be the turn of Delta Central Senatorial district to produce the next Governor, given that Delta South and Delta North districts have enjoyed the rotational arrangement respectively. Only the PDP has this lofty window of rotational policy in the State and as such, our loyalty is to this party.”

While condemning the assassination attempt on the National Coordinator of the Ijaw Mandate Group, IMG, Dagidi Andaye “for standing for the truth, fairness, peace and justice”, he said “We call on the security agents to protect Hon Andaye, fish out the perpetrators and bring them to book.”

Benin Club clocks 90, honours Ikpea, Gregory, others

By Ozioruva Aliu

BENIN CITY—AS part of activities to mark its 90th Anniversary, the famous Benin Club would today honour the Chief Executive Officer of Lee Engineering and Construction Company, Dr Leemon Ikpea, Greg Ero, its former Chairman, Pa Jaiye Ojeikere by investing them as patron and trustees of the club respectively.

President, Benin Club, Pharm. Fred. E. Iboi disclosed this in Benin City yesterday, while outlining the activities to mark the 90th anniversary of the club.

He said the club, founded in 1931, is now 90 years old and that they considered it their responsibility to celebrate its milestone.

Iboi said “As you can see, we have left no stone unturned to deliver on our campaign promises in taking this club to the next level.

“In particular, the complete renovation of the wood bricks and marble upper lounge and bar which is our legacy project is now completed.

“What you can see in the on-going transformation of the club, leaves no one in doubt of this management's commitment to the well-being of our noble club.

“Since the commencement of my administration in January this year 2021, there has been a relentless pace of construction activities targeted at taking our club to another level”, he said.

Iboi said that the club under his watch has been transformed into a sporting club due to the new facilities put in place just as he said that it also serves as a place where members meet to socialize, discuss businesses.

Unique brothers donates bags, writing materials to Delta schools

By Festus Ahon

A SABA—UNIQUE Brothers, a social organization, has donated school bags, sandals, note books and other writing materials to pupils and students of Edjeba Primary and Secondary Schools, Edjeba, Warri South Local Government Area, Delta State.

The note books were presented to all pupils and students of the schools while the school bags and sandals were given to those who came out first and indigent students respectively.

Presenting the items, Chairman of the body, Engr David Kiyaye said “during the covid-19 pandemic, we realized that parents were finding it difficult to provide some of these basic necessities for their wards; that is why we came up with this initiative.”

Saying that the child support gesture was going to be continuous, he said: “It is going to be yearly. We intend to choose another school from another part of the state next year.

On his part, Public Relations Officer, Mr. Oshohore Oghenero said the child support initiative started in 2020 at Owvian Primary School, Udu Local Government Area.

He said: “We are happy to put smile on the faces of these children. We also promote excellence by providing some items to students that came first in each of the various classes.