

## Political Economy and the Challenge of Human Capital Development in Nigeria

Journal of Management and  
Social Sciences  
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### Introduction

I begin this article by quoting rather copiously from the introduction to my book, *Daybreak Nigeria: This Nation Must Rise!* (2014, Prestige Publishing), which provides an appropriate framework for the angle from which I would like to consider the present topic:

*“What do so many countries, mostly in the West, do right – or, at least, what were they able to do so well in the past to so significantly improve the living standards of their populations? How come several Asian countries are also succeeding in turning around their lot and bringing their populations into an era of prosperity? And why have we, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, been unable to do the same? What do we do wrong, or what critical notions have we failed to comprehend, imbibe and successfully apply, thereby ensuring that we remain the poorest, most underdeveloped, most disorganised, most unstable, most disease-ridden region of the world, with unacceptably low – and, arguably, the most deplorable – standards of living on the globe? These are the issues this book seeks to grapple with.*

*How, and maybe ultimately, why have others been able to build lasting structures, institutions and systems that work fairly well basically, almost regardless of the political leaning of their leaders at any given time, or even of allegations of corruption that might be levelled against them? The facts are clear: in these countries the streets are kept relatively clean, water flows through the taps, electricity supply is certain, except in unusual cases (for example, during maintenance or in times of bad weather), and more than a few aspects of life are, to a large extent, quite predictable.”*

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Given that I am neither a political scientist nor an expert in economics, what kind of “expertise” may I present as qualification for the exercise I am about to embark upon? The answer: a passion for development issues, especially as they relate to Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular. The concerns expressed in the quotation from my book, given above, are those which have gnawed upon my mind for decades, ever from the moment I began to travel outside Nigeria and have the opportunity of observing how other countries function and conduct their affairs. Anyone who engages in such activity and contemplation inevitably is confronted ultimately with the question: So, what is wrong with us? How come we seem helpless, unable to harness the resources, both human and natural, available in our environment and make them work for us? My efforts in seeking answers to these troubling questions, over which I have pondered hard and long, are reflected in the titles of the chapters in *Daybreak Nigeria*, formulated as five crucial questions. Here they are: Chapter 1: *What did the slave trade do to Africa and what can Africa do with it?* Chapter 2: *How on earth did others do it?* Chapter 3: *What must we do with ethnicity, religion and culture?* Chapter 4: *How will we redeem our political culture?* Chapter 5: *Where do we go from here?* This, therefore, is my ongoing preoccupation: a desire to see our circumstances transformed and dignity of life restored to the millions of ordinary men, women, young people and children who make up this country. It is that desire which has led me to venture into the murky waters of Nigerian politics.

The issues relating to political economy and human capital development plunge us directly into the centre of these concerns, for it is human beings, through their creative intellectual and physical output, who bring about the development of their societies and changes in their own conditions of living, steering themselves, as it were, along whatever path they see as desirable. My husband never tires of repeating one of his mother’s favourite sayings: *Owó ló n tún nkan se* – It is (our) hands that bring about positive change or improvement. Evidently, a certain quality of human beings is required for that to happen. Given that every society possesses human beings, but not all of them manage to attain the standard of living which they themselves desire, one is then led to wonder what constitutes the differentiating elements either in the human beings that make up a given society, or in the prevailing geographical specifications of their society. Put crudely: Are differences in standards of living a result of differences between the peoples themselves (that is, genetic) or imposed by their natural physical conditions (that is, their geography)?

These are not idle questions. Indeed, there have been several theories propounded to account for why certain nations or peoples have been able to achieve significant progress and overall development for themselves, becoming prosperous and influential in the world. Some others, in contrast, appear to be condemned to occupying the very last rungs of the global ladder in respect of practically every index of development. According to Francis Fukuyama, one of the most influential political and economic theorists of modern times, there

are three major components of a modern political order: a strong and capable state; the subordination of the state itself to the rule of law; and the accountability of government to all citizens (*The Origins of Political Order, from Pre-human Times to the French Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011). Fukuyama argues that the states that have been able to combine these three elements are precisely those that dominate the world's affairs, calling the shots, so to speak.

Another equally influential scientist, Ian Morris, has argued instead that geographical factors were mostly responsible for the West's dominance on the global stage. In a delightfully written book titled, aptly, *Why the West Rules – for Now* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010), he maintains that there is no proof of biological differences between human beings wherever they are found upon the face of the earth. He concludes, therefore, that we must look to geography to explain the regional differences we observe. The development of a society would then depend on the ability of the humans present in it to shape the geographical conditions imposed upon them by nature. Unfortunately, the issue is still not resolved: why do some achieve that domestication of their environment to their advantage while others fail to do so? Ultimately, the way in which social and political institutions are allowed to function has a direct impact upon the socio-economic development of a nation, and determines whether the majority of its people will enjoy what we might term “the good life”, or whether, as has been the case in our country for several decades, most of them will live in penury.

In the discussion that follows my focus of attention will be primarily on the aspect of human capital development, rather than seek to theorize on political economy and its different dimensions or colorations. Apart from the fact of not being an expert in economic theories and practices, as I have already made clear, I also believe that a “good” political economy would almost automatically result from the availability of “good” human capital. That is, good quality human beings will produce good societies for themselves. Our preoccupation, therefore, will be to determine what “good” would signify in this context, and identify the avenues to pursue in bringing it about. To my mind, the critical questions, ultimately, could be reduced to the following: What kind of people are we? What kind of people is our society producing? And, maybe most importantly, what kind of people do we need to be or produce in order to create for ourselves the kind of society that we all long for, one in which we all can live the good life?

### ***A certain way of being in the world...***

These lines were written during a stay in the United States of America. I had the privilege of being invited by the US State Department, through their embassy in Nigeria, to participate in a ten-day program during which a group

of five Nigerian women from different political parties would be given the opportunity to witness the 2016 American elections first-hand. Of course, the utility of inviting female politicians to witness an election during which Americans would be voting, hopefully, to elect their first ever female president appeared to be self-evident – what better inspiration for the Nigerian women? And indeed, inspired we all were, through the thoughtfully conceived program which included visits to important institutions in four different towns (Concord and Manchester, New Hampshire; Rochester, New York and Washington, DC) as well as discussions with legislators, mayors and officials of various government agencies.

One of the more interesting points of our stay was participating in volunteer work at the Democratic Committee's office in Rochester. This involved calling up voters on telephones which were supplied, reminding them of the upcoming election, asking if they had made plans to vote and were sure of where their polling centres were located and how to get there. If any needed a ride to their polling centre this would be arranged for them. This was a novel experience for all five of us (despite being individuals who had all run for elections), and we felt enriched by it. I thereafter posted on Twitter a photograph of myself and added in text that I had volunteered at the Democratic Committee's office in Rochester. I got some very interesting responses to my tweet. Most of them were positive and several even retweeted my original post; however, there were a few people who took me up on what I had done, implying that it was an improper activity for me, "as a former presidential candidate", to have gotten involved in. I had apparently belittled myself by stooping, in their thinking, to the level of doing that kind of volunteer work.

Should a former presidential candidate get on the phone to call up voters and remind them of their civic duty or not? This account I am giving of my recent experience in the United States of America brings me to a series of points I wish to make regarding a fundamental challenge we have in Nigeria about developing our human capital: there is a frame of mind, a certain way of being in the world and engaging with it which I am convinced is required for good quality human capital development and which leads to a better society. It constitutes the context, the framework within which all other efforts could only be successful. I will briefly discuss three aspects which I consider to be of critical importance: the lack of an overarching consciousness of social class or standing, that is, a conviction that all lives matter equally, a preparedness for risk-taking and a willingness to trust. Let us remind ourselves that among the issues we are exploring here is that of seeking to understand why we remain in poverty while some other societies have been able to attain higher standards of living for their own citizens – issues that are smack in the middle of any serious discourse on political economy.

**A conviction that “all lives matter”:** While I consider myself generally to be a rather proud Nigerian, I hold the firm conviction, nevertheless, that there are certain aspects of our culture and traditions which we must engage with very critically if we truly desire to build a just, secure and prosperous society. Those among my Twitter followers who felt that I had degraded myself, being a former presidential candidate, by engaging in the kind of volunteer activity I did, demonstrate the point I seek to make in this section. Many of us believe that certain actions are inappropriate to be engaged in by individuals who occupy or are seen to occupy certain positions in society; such actions are considered to be “beneath” them, so to speak. For example, could the child of a president in our country go and work as a steward in a restaurant as President Obama’s daughter did in the summer of 2016?

Generally, our society does not hold “all men to be equal”, and in no other area of our lives is this more visible than in our kingship system. Our traditional rulers are accorded levels of respect that, to my mind, do not make for development, ultimately. We think nothing of shutting down markets and inhibiting movement in our towns and villages for seven full days in order to celebrate the demise of a king or the coronation of a new one, bringing all economic activities to a halt while we satiate our senses with dancing and the performance of all manner of traditional rites. These traditional rulers exercise over us almost god-like powers – do we not refer to them in Yoruba as *Kabiyesi*, the one who cannot be questioned? Part of our reverence for them requires that there be ever present in their cortège a retinue of serfs and praise-singers grovelling on the ground and apparently finding in that undignified activity the true meaning for their existence. It is even rumoured that up till now, in some places, several people have to die along with a king who “goes into the ceiling” (as you know, Yoruba people never admit that their kings have died).

We have to ask ourselves: Are those serfs and praise-singers human beings too, just like any other? Human capital, after all, refers to the “capital” which a nation possesses in terms of human beings, just like the “capital”, the amount of money, which an individual possesses in order to conduct a business. The success of whatever enterprise one wishes to embark upon will be determined by how that capital is utilised. So, are we putting all of our human capital to good use? We have only given the case of the serfs as an example; what about the army of able-bodied young men and women who we allow to spend the prime of their lives on our roads, weaving in and out among moving vehicles, selling pure water and plantain chips? Is this the best way for a nation to utilise or develop its human capital?

Any nation that acts as if any segment of its society is dispensable shoots itself in the leg; it is going nowhere. Society is advanced when every single citizen is given the opportunity to develop their abilities and realize their full potential. I do not believe that any human society has ever realised this,

unfortunately. Human nature is such that those who have power will exploit it to their own advantage, and that inevitably leads to some members of society paying for it by various kinds of discrimination and much lower standards of living. The glaring reality, however, is that some societies do much better than others in working towards providing a fairly egalitarian environment for their citizens.

I cannot end this subsection without mentioning the treatment of girls and women in connection with the point under discussion. It is to our shame as a nation that we continue to waste much of this particular sector of our human capital through the practice of retrogressive and sometimes outrightly inhuman cultural and traditional practices: child marriage and its attendant problems, keeping girls out of school, abduction and rape of young women and girls, evil widowhood practices, battering and various acts of violence against women etc. We cannot continue to treat half of our population as inconsequential and expect to prosper as a nation; we must come to realise that we short-change ourselves very badly when we believe that the only spheres of relevant activity for our females are in “the kitchen, the living room and the other room”!

**A preparedness for risk-taking:** This is probably the most important element which accounts for why societies make advances. A people must be able to imagine a better state of affairs, a different world, and then commit themselves to doing whatever it would take to bring it about. Very often, that involves taking some risks, which might at times be significant. Imagination and curiosity constitute the driving forces behind innovation and discoveries – and discoveries lead to improvement in quality of life. If only we knew how to instil that quality into ourselves and, most importantly, our children! If they could grow up asking “What if?” – What if I could get to the other side of that great river, or see what lies beyond that mountain? Or just simply, what if I could do this particular job faster or more easily? To achieve any of these things would definitely task the brain, lead to the invention of gadgets which would facilitate the venture, and possibly involve some degree of risk-taking. How do you contemplate getting to the other side of a river – not to talk of traveling to the moon! – without the thought of the possibility of dying in the process crossing your mind?

And this is where many of us stop, unfortunately. We do not normally take dangerous risks, except if we see substantial immediate profit. It is risky being an armed robber or a drug carrier, for you could get caught and face a lifetime of imprisonment or even the death sentence; it is the immediate reward of the expected loot that makes the risk worth taking for the many who engage in it. When such a reward is not seen, then the situation is different. To most of us, therefore, preserving ourselves alive is the most sacred assignment we believe that we have here on earth. Above everything else, we must not die. And so we stay glued to the ground, engaging in centuries-old ways of thinking and living, not daring to venture into the unknown. As such, we do not contribute in any significant way to the global pool of knowledge or to technological

advancement; instead, we are content to be mere consumers of the products of other people's innovative and risky undertakings – those who dare to reach for the stars and, while at it, make discoveries that impact upon and frequently improve the quality of life here on earth.

Universities are generally recognised as the *de facto* home of innovation; however, how are the students in our own institutions of higher learning being trained? What innovations are coming out of these environments that are supposed to be the powerhouses of the nation's intellectual capital? Unfortunately, what we see, even among our intellectual elite, is almost a denigration of the intellect in many aspects of our lives. We do not encourage critical thinking; indeed, we cannot bear criticism. We are more concerned with personalities than with ideas. Thus, a student is not at liberty to criticise an idea expressed by his or her lecturer; senior colleagues cannot bear the independent-minded young lecturer who dares to challenge their rusty analyses and ideas.

Even more troubling than what has been stated above is the preponderance of superstitious beliefs and attitudes to life, even on our campuses. The contest for the appointment of the vice-chancellor of any of our universities is often accompanied by the placement of sacrifices at junctions on our campuses. Students consult traditional medicine-men who give them special pens with which to write their examinations. Indeed, a student of mine once brought some anointing oil into the examination room, duly pouring it on her booklet as soon as it was received by her. What was that action supposed to produce? Blind the eyes of the lecturer to the poor quality of work contained in the script?

I am saying that we do not take risks basically because we do not believe or live in a scientific world which operates on cause and effect. We believe in enemies who have the power to thwart and overturn all our good plans and bring calamity upon us. Somebody does not just die from a particular disease; there must be an evil person who brought that disease upon them in the first place! Thus, instead of exerting our minds and bodies to work hard and find solutions to the diseases which continue to ravage our bodies, and bring about the conditions which would improve our quality of life, we spend most of our time cowed in fear, seeking ways of shielding ourselves from attacks by our enemies. Just think of the frenzied prayers that are said in most of our churches these days – fear-driven and fear-infested prayers, in no way resembling the peaceful, confident prayer which Jesus taught His disciples when they asked Him to teach them how to pray. Until we get rid of our demons of fear, we will not be able to fulfil our God-given mandate of exercising dominion over and subduing to our benefit this patch of earth where we have been placed. Sadly, we are still impotent vis-à-vis our environment; we have not yet learned how to conquer the darkness and give ourselves light, nor our erosion-producing

rainfall, nor the mosquitoes which claim millions of deaths annually from us through malaria.

**A willingness to trust:** In his book, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (Free Press, 1995), Francis Fukuyama examines why some societies do better than others in creating wealth. He argues that prosperous countries usually are those ones where business relations are conducted informally and flexibly on the basis of trust. The lack of trust, according to him (which would be based on the fact that primary loyalty is to family, kinship, ethnic or religious ties) tend to create rigid business practices and dampen economic growth. If you can only do business with your brother, how far can you go? However, it has been over twenty years since Fukuyama's book was published, and the world has changed dramatically since then; thus, some of his analyses might not bear up like they did when the book first appeared. Very importantly, China and the Asian Tigers have come on the global scene bold and strong, causing a rethinking of longstanding global economic theories and configurations.

The point made by Fukuyama is significant, nonetheless: trust is an important ingredient in wealth creation. In Nigeria, unfortunately, most of us are brought up to trust no one – which is, obviously, in tandem with our fear of enemies who are on the prowl all around us. Thus, not only are our interpersonal and official financial transactions not built on trust; indeed, our entire system of government has the absence of trust as the pillar upon which it is erected. We cannot be trusted to obtain all the necessary documents for our vehicles, so we all must be subjected to constant control on our roads by the police, the customs, vehicle inspection officers, local government officials, Federal Road Safety Corps officials etc. Since we cannot trust the people working in offices where different forms of payment are made into government coffers, all of us have to first travel to a bank to deposit the money to be paid, and then bring the bank teller to the government's cash office, after which another document is issued to be taken to the particular office in charge of the service required. We duplicate services and keep an army of human beings engaged in degrading activity – sitting all day at a table, only stamping papers.

Thus, our lack of trust makes us less productive, forcing us to spend needless hours running around making payments and collecting documents. And yet, the societies that trust do not just trust blindly; they are able to trust because they have tasked their minds and put in place controls which ensure or at least encourage compliance. They work to set up functional systems, so they can expect people to comply. For example, if technology has been deployed to ensure that every sum of money given to a cashier is electronically recorded centrally, then if any amount goes missing from the total expected on any given day, there is somebody who will be held accountable for it. But that is also one of our major shortcomings – not holding people accountable for the consequences of their actions. Students who have failed courses go around begging to be passed “on compassionate grounds” and an employee who has

committed an offence is transferred to another office instead of being given the appropriate punishment that the offence demands.

We have argued in this section that there is a certain way of being in the world, of conducting one's affairs, which indicates that a society is mindful of the link between the quality of the people and the kind of environment they end up creating for themselves to live in. Since ours is obviously not yet that kind of society (although we did manage to conduct our affairs much better immediately after our independence), we must now ask what specific steps need to be taken to steer us toward that desirable goal? How can we improve the quality of our human capital, so that we will be able to significantly transform our political economy and make it one that brings us the good life – peace, prosperity and stability?

### ***Challenges of Human Capital Development***

Human capital, we have already established, has to do with the quality of the human beings which make up an organisation. Our thesis in this presentation is that good quality people will inevitably result in the creation of good quality organisations, institutions and societies. Our task, we recall, is how to determine that good quality and work towards its attainment. For that, it is important to consider some of the underlying constructs regarding the concept of human capital itself.

First and foremost, people are regarded as valuable; they are an important and essential asset to any organisation or society. Indeed, people are the most important asset possessed; without people, those bodies fail to exist. In essence, this means that every single person is (or should be regarded as being) of equal value, regardless of what position that person occupies within the organisation: the managers are not more valuable than the employees; the leaders of a country are not more valuable than the ordinary citizens. Each person is valuable because each represents a vital link within the chain of activities conducted by a particular organisation. Any weak or missing link compromises the smooth running of the entire organisation.

This brings us to the second point: Everything must be done to ensure that no link is weak. It is generally known that any chain is only as strong as its weakest link; every link must be strengthened so that it will function optimally. Thus, good organisations invest in their employees through training and retraining in order to sharpen and update their skills and to maintain their productivity at an optimal level. Investment in the workforce is therefore not regarded as mere expense, for it is recognised that the output of the organisation depends on it. Without this, the organisation loses competitiveness and may soon find itself out of business. Another important aspect of removing all forms of weakness along the chain, that is, ensuring that every single link is strong, is the provision of a working environment in which employees feel

happy and satisfied. Thus, apart from appropriate remuneration for work done, investment in support programs which cater to employees' health and general well-being are equally important.

It is also usually pointed out in the relevant literature that people need to feel contentment in order for them to contribute well to an organisation, and an important element which helps to achieve this is for the organisation to be run in a transparent manner. People value truth and transparency, and where this exists there is a stronger sense of belonging which creates a better working environment and improves productivity.

A final fundamental construct regarding how human capital affects organisations is the following: diversity is an advantage. Research has shown that ethnically diverse organisations outperform their peers by up to 35%, while gender-diverse ones do so by up to 15%. Organisations that have more female board members do better, generally.

Now, what must we do with these fundamental notions? How do we apply them in order to develop good quality human capital which will lead to a better society for us to live in? The answer, I believe, is primarily to be found in what we do with education. As I have already mentioned, the issues we are discussing have preoccupied me for long and I have written on them severally. I will, therefore, quote from work I have already published, starting with my book, *Igniting Consciousness: Nigeria and Other Riddles* (2013, Prestige Publishing). Just after his election in 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan set up a task force on education whose members requested submissions from the public, limiting such to a maximum of 250 words. Here is the piece that I sent:

There is an urgent need to transform Nigeria into an enlightened or, at least, a learning society. The formal education sector can only thrive when it is supported and reinforced by an environment that appreciates the importance of information and knowledge, and actively promotes their application in order to improve the quality of life. Attention must be paid, therefore, to both formal and informal education.

Formal education requires:

- A general re-orientation: The purpose of education as a means of developing society and giving the population a better life, rather than merely as a meal ticket.
- Primary education: Emphasise acquisition of cognitive skills (logical thinking, recognition of patterns and systems) rather than bare facts. Teacher retraining needed.
- Secondary education: Should be mostly about knowledge of the world, i.e. how things work and their underlying principles. (This should be appropriate for a good technical workforce).

- Tertiary education: Engagement with the world through an analytical and problem-solving approach. Research is crucial.

Informal education to be promoted through:

- Information on official transactions (steps for obtaining a passport, driver's licence, and so on).
- Publication of pamphlets on citizens' rights and responsibilities, in various languages (as a taxpayer, a property owner, a road user, and so on).
- More participatory governance (direct engagement with the people).
- Appropriate legislation promoting a more orderly society (for example, forbidding any private appropriation of public property).

***Education requires massive funding. The government should commit the appropriate funds to the sector and set Nigeria on the path of becoming a truly developed nation***

One of the major challenges we have is that we ignore the connection between our actions and inactions on the one hand and our reality on the other. It is through education, in the broad sense in which it has been stated in the foregoing quotation, that human beings acquire the skills needed for them to become productive members of the society who will contribute to its development. That education must be systematic and goal-oriented, not haphazard and flip-flopping. It must influence the recruitment of manpower, ensuring that the best people are engaged for the specific duty they are to perform; it must determine what remuneration is given, so that there is motivation and reward for hard work and it must be devoid of any form of discrimination, for we have seen that diversity enriches organisations.

All of this requires that the country's leadership be educated as well, conscious of the roles that different segments of the society play in ensuring the smooth functioning of the society, just as was shown in the case of organisations. Leaders must know that the citizens are their nation's greatest assets, and make it their duty to provide all that is necessary for them to develop the skills needed for the nation's development. Education for the leaders themselves involves competence in at least six important areas of administration: (1) having clear goals and objectives for the nation, (2) recognising what elements are needed for optimal productivity and working to put such in place, (3) having a clear strategy to make the country the best in whatever area of specialisation has been identified as the goal to be pursued, (4) putting in place a system of assessing the individual competence of the workers and determining their productivity, (5) having a just and fair reward and retention system and (6) ensuring that there is a strategy for smooth succession so that there is continuity in the running of their affairs (See Jeannette Feldman's "Six Steps to Developing Human Capital", 2013).

In order to further illustrate some of these competence points required of leaders, let us consider the first one listed – having clear goals and objectives for the nation. Who is able to tell what specific objective is being pursued by the current administration, or indeed, by any of the administrations we have had in the last three decades or so? An advert for the country of Mauritius was aired recently on television, and it stated clearly that the country was setting itself up as a financial hub in that region of the globe. I am also aware that one of the current goals being pursued by Togo is to become a central hub for air travel into and from West Africa. In pursuing that goal it is building a huge airport which one hopes will be truly world-class (not in the bastardised manner in which Nigerians now use that expression).

It could have been possible to identify diversification of the Nigerian economy away from oil as a major goal of the current administration, what with the apparent emphasis being placed on the development of other sectors like agriculture, mining etc. However, is that truly the objective being pursued? If we are convinced that there is the need to diversify away from oil, given the crash in oil prices worldwide, why is the NNPC busy searching for oil in the northern part of Nigeria? *The Sunday Punch* of November 13, 2016, had a caption on page 3 stating: “NNPC intensifies oil search in North-East, mounts GPS”. Leadership that is not honest and transparent, as we saw with organisations, cannot be trusted and does not encourage people to give their best. This search for oil in the northern part of the country is a political issue, obviously. Since we are big on federal character and geographical spread (principles which, by the way, discountenance merit and competence, and consequently, do not promote development), one can strongly suspect that the primary motivation is to ensure that the North too becomes an oil-producing region, probably in order to enable it to share in the derivation funds.

We need an educated leadership. How much of the nation’s resources are being expended on this current oil-prospecting enterprise which may end up merely as a wild-goose chase? Did it matter that we were wasting huge sums of money at a time when the country was in recession? Who are those taking decisions for the country, and do they do so in the interest of the generality of the people or of a minority? That has mostly been our pattern, unfortunately – putting extraneous considerations above common sense and utility, pandering to base ethnic and religious instincts of a few rather than following the dictates of reason for the benefit of the many. We constantly sacrifice the common good on the altar of individual or parochial interests. Leaders who take us along such paths are not educated.

Education, in my opinion, involves developing the mind to such a level that it brings about a transformation in the way that one lives life. Education exposes the individual to different ideas and options which have to be considered and judged according to their objective merits and demerits; it is a deliberate, rigorous discipline of the mind in the pursuit of Truth, and it leads to enlightenment. Thus, for example, an individual who fails to understand or

accept that every other human being has fundamental and inalienable rights that are equal to his or her own, cannot be said to be truly educated. He or she may have earned several doctoral degrees; but as long as such fundamental concepts like the worth and dignity of each human being, as well as the equality of all before the law have not been imbibed, that person is not educated. As an aside, it is for that reason that one should not consider as truly educated a man, be he a professor, who beats his wife or people who prey on the vulnerable and exploit them in any way.

Any society which succeeds in instilling these ideas into its citizens will develop. Like we have mentioned before, no society known to man has ever recorded a hundred percent success in this regard. However, what many have succeeded in doing is to set up these fundamental notions as the ideals towards which their societies must aspire, and to discourage the exploitation of the poor and weak by the rich and powerful by enacting laws which protect the former group. That is the reason that a former head of the International Monetary Fund could have his career terminated by an ordinary hotel maid who alleged sexual assault.

The question then is: What standards are we setting up as the ideals according to which our society will be governed, such that every single individual is afforded the opportunity of attaining whatever potential nature has endowed them with, or even the personal goals which they have set themselves? How can we develop if young girls, twelve, thirteen years old, can still be married off to men old enough to be their grandfathers? Is that an educated way for a nation to treat her children? What of the many young people roaming our streets in search of employment? How come we send people to school but fail to put structures in place to assure them of gainful employment upon completion of their training? What are we going to do about leadership in this country so that we can really develop our human capital?

### ***Corruption and Its Effect on Our Political Economy – Is There A Way Out?***

There was no way to avoid bringing in the issue of corruption, for corruption makes complete nonsense of everything. All our various efforts – but in reality, mere pretences – at solving our apparently intractable problems have all amounted to nothing, ever since the passing away of what one could refer to as the “Generation of the Greats” – Awolowo, Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa and their cohorts. Since then, leaders of the nation, both military and civilian, have deceived us into thinking that they were genuinely seeking answers to our development challenges by inventing an array of programs, initiatives and agenda – Structural Adjustment Program, Operation Feed the Nation, War Against Indiscipline, Transformation Agenda, Change Begins With Me etc. All the while, most of them were busy siphoning away our wealth into private

accounts both within and outside the nation, of course, with varying degrees of greed and impunity. The Abacha and Jonathan administrations now appear to have been the most profligate in this respect, based on the revelations which have so far been made. But we cannot forget the matter of the missing Gulf Oil windfall under the Babangida administration either. Such reckless behaviour among those who either seized control of our affairs or were actually elected into those positions! They distributed oil blocks among themselves and their friends and families, and gave themselves free access to our treasury – leaving our roads, schools, hospitals, refineries and other infrastructure to fall into a shameful state of disrepair. While our income from oil sales continued to soar, so did the percentage of our population living in penury. We were among the world's biggest riddles – an insight into the reason for the title of my book, *Igniting Consciousness: Nigeria and Other Riddles* (2013, Prestige Publishing).

A corrupt, thieving and insensitive leadership has dealt a death blow to our political economy. The State, among whose primary responsibilities should be the alleviation of poverty has, in our own case, become the primary contributor to the impoverishment of the people. The pillaging of our resources has led to our country becoming a failed state – which has ended up failing its people. The untold economic hardship currently being suffered by the Nigerian people must make the heart of God bleed. We all recognise that we are a richly blessed nation, both in human and natural resources. Indeed, we tell denigrating jokes about ourselves in which, for example, the citizens of other countries complain to God, accusing Him of partiality in respect of the rich natural resources He deposited in Nigeria. God, in response, tells the complainants: “You just wait and see the kind of people I will put on that land.” And truly, we have turned out to be a people who have so far been unable to turn all that natural wealth into prosperity for themselves.

So, where do we go from here? I definitely choose not to end this presentation on a negative note. In conclusion, let me share some thoughts from a couple of the individuals who have inspired me over the years and who continue to do so, for I love to draw inspiration from the lives of human beings with whom I can equally identify. These are individuals who faced trying times but who decided not to be overwhelmed by the circumstances around them, choosing instead to work hard and rise up to stand for truth, justice and compassion. Some of my favourite examples are Obafemi Awolowo, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jnr and Susan B. Anthony.

Let me give the first place to Awolowo, allowing charity to begin at home: *“Those who desire to reach, and keep their places at the top in any calling must be prepared to do so the hard way.”* The road along which we must now travel as a nation is anything but easy. So help us God!

On this last trip to the United States I had the opportunity of visiting the Martin Luther King Jnr Memorial in Washington, DC. It consists of a long,

curved mural on which are inscribed sixteen of MLK's famous quotes, with a huge statue of him rising out of the ground in front of the dark, stone wall. I wish to share three of those quotes with you, in the hope that they might inspire you too and spur you to action:

*We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience.*

*We are determined here in Montgomery (replace that with Nigeria) to work and fight until justice runs "down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."*

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

We must therefore ask ourselves: Where are we standing now, individually and collectively? If ever there was a moment of challenge and controversy, we definitely are living through it now, as our country finds itself in the throes of social, political, religious and economic upheavals. What are we going to do about it? Continue to watch self-seeking, incompetent leaders waste our human capital and destroy our political economy? Or is it time to say "Enough!" and begin to dream of imaginative and innovative ways to combat this terrible scourge and rescue ourselves from its strangulating grip? Nobody is going to come and bring about change in our circumstances. We have to fight for it and win it for ourselves, especially the youth who have a much greater stake in how the country is run, since it will determine their future. I am convinced that we must begin by choosing for ourselves a new breed of political leaders. We should have had enough by now of recycling the same old brigade. They have proven, beyond any doubt, their capability for governance, or rather, lack of it; and where they have brought us is not a good place. This is not where we desire to be. As Mr. Bill Gates told Nigerian leaders during a visit to the country in March 2018, there is an urgent need to invest in Nigeria's human capital. One only hopes that they have listened.