

Nigerians in Diaspora Hope for Biafra's Political Autonomy

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Several reports indicate that Nigeria has reached critical level in its development as there are numerous problems including frequent ethnic and religious attacks, deep-seated corruption, ineffective federal system of governance despite been referred to as the Giant of Africa. Nigeria is endowed with huge natural resources. By population, it has the highest and that signifies the extent of its human capital in the country. As already known, Nigeria has three ethnic groups namely the Hausa-Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the West and the Igbos in East. Ethnic conflict pulls down the expected high development, contributes to insecurity and youth unemployment.

Celine Akigwe, former General Secretary of the Nimo Brotherhood Society (NBS) UK & Ireland and now the Founder & CEO of Afristoricals and Creator of UmojApp, has given an interview in which she talks about some aspects of the existing problems and the need to drastically change the status quo in Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). Here are the interview excerpts.

Q: As an enterprising Nigerian woman, who previously served on the Executive Committee as General Secretary of the Nimo Brotherhood Society (NBS) UK & Ireland, what would you say are the main problems facing Nigeria?

A: During my tenure as General Secretary of NBS UK & Ireland, I observed many behavioral patterns that were reflective of the psychology of the people of Nigeria. Over the years, I have sat on many Executive Committees, including the Igbo Cultural & Social Network (ICSN), which is the most progressive Igbo meeting in Europe. ICSN continue to produce vibrant, positive thinking young adults who will shape the future of our homeland.

After observing the various issues facing Nigerians over the years, the main problem facing Nigerians is the country called Nigeria itself. Since my childhood, from over a period of 40 years, I have always known dysfunctionality and infrastructural chaos that dominate the daily lives of the majority of Nigerians.

Nigeria exposes the rich and poor divide in every aspect of society. There has never been good roads for the masses, but as soon as you turn the corner to Ikoyi or Abuja or Banana Republic you see good roads. These areas enjoy constant electricity supply and good telecommunications networks that are alien to the rest of the population. The masses continue to suffer more and more electricity outages than what is provided, yet they are still charged for a service that is not provided.

Access to clean drinking water is another example, where the masses suffer poor quality water. When you factor in the case that the average wage is N25,000 per month, you can see how Nigerian society can only suffer from numerous problems. These are just the basic services that is everyone's human right, yet in Nigeria, lack of constant electricity, good roads, hospitals and schools have become the norm. Nigeria has become renowned as a place of corruption, criminality, dysfunctionality and infrastructural chaos.

The security situation all over Nigeria has reached critical level. The numerous killings are tantamount to genocide and ethnic cleansing, which has been going on for decades. We have not seen any outcry from neither the Western nations nor the Eastern nations. In response to the killings, kidnappings, rapes and mutilation of innocent people, we see no reaction or response from our leaders. Nigerian leaders show absolutely no apathy to the plight of their citizens and subsequently the rest of the World duly ignore the ongoing genocide.

There are too many problems facing Nigerians today that nothing short of a total rethink, revamp and reworking of every denomination of our civilization is required to change the status quo. This broken society must be dismantled and rebuilt.

From its very inception, the concept of Nigeria was doomed. The land that is referred to or called Nigeria was created by the British to make colonizing Africans easier for them administer. In doing so, the rulers of Nigeria tend to be favored individuals of the former colonial powers who are presented to the people as a choice to vote for. Immediately after being elected, every president of Nigeria has obediently made their trip to the U.K. and then to America to seemingly meet with the leaders of those countries and receive their modus operandi for their forthcoming term in office.

I always queried why this was necessary and can only conclude that they are merely going to visit their puppet masters to ensure the colonial grip on Africa never fades. Until this day, the British use their favorites to keep Nigeria alive, as do other European nations like France. We have never seen a European elected official leave their country to visit any African leader the same they are elected.

To add insult to injury, we learn the name Nigeria was invented by Dame Flora Louise Shaw or Lady Lugard as she was later known with her then lover Lord Frederick Lugard, the British High Commissioner in Nigeria (1900-06) and Governor-General (1912-19) whom she later married. The end result was inevitable. There can be no peace in a nation that was created like that - ever!

As we have seen... most ethnic groups within the created administrative tool called Nigeria want to leave and form real nations by the people for the people. I think Africans deserve that right. It has taken over 60 years for Nigerians to reach this point of agitation and I think Nigerians have suffered enough. It is time to leave the past behind and cease the administration of the colony - not former colony - called Nigeria.

Q: Do you also think that women are particularly affected by all these challenges and problems that have engulfed the country?

A: It is overwhelmingly yes, women have been disproportionately affected by the challenges in many ways, especially during this pandemic. We have seen violence against women increase and incomes fall, not just in Nigeria, but globally. For over 100 years, patriarchy

was gradually imported into West African culture, first by the Fulani Moslems during the conquests of Othman Dan Fodio, and soon after by the British.

Traditional African society existed under a matriarchal system that recognized the African woman as the first to give birth to mankind and a return to matriarchal practices will go a long way to improving the condition of women in Nigeria. Discrimination against women does not occur in matriarchy, which in no way diminishes the man's role in society, rather, it enhances and empowers men to raise their standards and mindset.

In governance, no single leader should have the power to dictate laws that affect the wellbeing and progress of women directly or indirectly. This would require more women in senior positions in government, however, it would not be a case of appointing women into positions of power simply because they are women. It would be a case of allotting 50% of the senior cabinet positions to women who qualified for these positions. We will see different results when there is equal balance between men and women in the halls of power – and not just from the backbenches.

Q: And what do you say about the youth generally?

A: The youth are the source of all changes. However, our elders have been trained to thwart the development of our youth and prevent them from thinking or even speaking. The youth are the lifeblood of civilization, but they have been let down by the government that has failed to provide the youth of Nigeria with adequate education that would give them a competitive advantage similar to what exist in the rest of the world.

Schools have been neglected, teachers are not paid on time and history had been dropped, which has resulted in what I call illiterate graduates. It is only those who are able to afford the high school fees, stand a chance of achieving something in their lives. The rise of horrible bribes including sex for results has rendered the Nigerian education system entirely dysfunctional and a playground for sexual predators.

We have seen an increase in suicide and rape in Nigeria and we can only commend the students of ASONIS in their campaign to raise awareness and eradicate suicide and rape from Nigeria. The lack of discipline from the top has filtered down to every spectrum of Nigerian society. The youth must rise up in unity by employing group psychology, which would lead to the return of the spirit of Ubuntu from the grassroots up.

Q: What are your expectations from Nigerian women on the Diaspora? What are your suggestions and recommendations for women in other countries?

A: The role of women has been underestimated. It is the woman who raises the child, whether the child is male or female. But at times, Nigerian women are not empowered within the household to make the final decision about a child's education or hobby. At times, the man is better equipped to make the final decision. Nigerian women in the Diaspora have an advantage in that they enjoy some protection and so may feel empowered to speak or make decisions, although this still carries some risk for Nigerian women in the Diaspora.

We have seen how excellently our women organize religious and educational institutions that were brought in by colonization. On the other hand, when it comes to nation building many African women are unable to achieve this level of self-awareness and as a result raise children who are desperate to move away from their culture or who view their own people in

a negatively way. Those children will not think twice about investing in Nigeria.

The end result of all this is that we see many Nigerians in the Diaspora working hard to assimilate and invest in their host country's property, projects and schools. You have to have an acute love and desire to invest and build in Igboland over Abuja or Lagos for example. Without that investment in itself, there can be no sustainable development and the majority of people will continue to want to leave, as we have seen down the years. Once self-pride is established, the children cultivate love for the motherland and bless it with investment. This is, perhaps, one of the most important roles Nigerian women all over the world can play.

Q: Do all these you have discussed above offer a tangible basis for Nigerians on Diaspora, for instance, in the UK & Ireland, to consider playing significant roles in the development process in Nigeria?

A: The process for sustainable development in Nigeria has to begin with the desire to change society with our own hands and own feet. Consistently lobbying European institutions such as the Commonwealth to intervene and miraculously resolve all the problems facing Nigerians will not bring around the change that is required for Nigeria. To change this anomaly, Nigerians in the Diaspora can play a significant role in fostering change by following aggressive investment strategies that would involve various community and commercial infrastructure development projects in various sectors in Nigeria.

In order to understand this, for instance, I developed UmojApp and AfriZone shop to bridge the gap between Nigerian businesses and consumers in the Diaspora. UmojApp also educates people on the significant achievements and events from an African perspective, so the negative mindset of Africans, as a whole, view themselves as agents of change.

In practical situation, Nigerians in the Diaspora understand the high risks involved in undertaking development projects in Nigeria. It would be for those who have the strong stomach and correct vision that will drive a change through investment in Nigeria.

Q: As already known, Nigeria seems divided along ethnic and religious lines. What are your arguments about, say, integration or political autonomy for the Biafra State?

A: This really takes us full circle - back to my original answer. Nigeria is an administrative convenience to ease the complications for the British. If Africans are totally honest with themselves, all of the borders that were drawn as a result of the Scramble for Africa should be erased. Over a period of 38 years of war to claim African territory, one of the results was the country called Nigeria.

We must leave the past behind and draw our own map of Africa with our own boundaries to control our own future. Integration is to continue to live in a state of denial of the past. Independence is not a myth but a reality that will happen now or in the future. If this generation are not ready for true independence, then future generations will be, but only if we teach the children to love themselves and their African brothers and sisters.

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