

Public Policy and Sustainable Development in Africa: A Review of Nigeria's Foreign Policy from 1999-2007

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Abstract

Before the introduction of democracy on the 29th May, 1999, Nigeria witnessed economic and political instability arising from policy inconsistency and lack of sincerity and commitment on the part of political actors and elites in the country hence, this paper examines public policy and sustainable development in Africa with specific reference to Nigeria's foreign policy from 1999 to 2007. The study adopted the institutional approach in explaining the subject-matter while the sources of data were based on secondary sources (text books, published articles, journals and materials from the internet etc.). Data from these sources were analysed through qualitative and descriptive method based on content analysis. Findings in the study revealed that the introduction of democracy in May 1999 helped to restore peace, and sustainable development in Nigeria. Further findings revealed that Nigeria's foreign policy actions under former president Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 was based on: Re-integrating Nigeria into the world, management of Nigeria's external debts, renaissance Africa, and the recovery of looted monies/funds. Thus, the leader to leader approach adopted to drive its policy actions also yielded positive results through the signing of several multilateral and bilateral agreements which equally led to increased volume of trade and foreign direct investment inflow to the country coupled with the re-admission of Nigeria into the comity of nations at the international level. However, for African states and leaders to address the socio-economic and political problems confronting the African continent, policy actions and measures must be supported with appropriate implementation strategies and framework in other to avoid policy inconsistency, summersault and corrupt tendencies.

Keywords: *Democracy, Public policy, Economic stability and Sustainable development*

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Background to the Study

Previous military regimes, especially the Sani Abacha-led military regime created harsh domestic conditions that affected the image of Nigeria. Apart from gross violation of human rights, the unlawful arrest, trial and hanging of late Ken Saro-wiwa and others compelled the international community to declare Nigeria a Pariah nation in 1995. The death of Sani Abacha on the 8th of June, 1998 paved the way for Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar to emerge as Nigeria's Head of State. Within six months in office, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar took practical steps to address some of the contending issues facing the nation. Thus, history was made when on May 29th 1999, democracy returned to Nigeria with the swearing-in of President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo as the civilian President of Nigeria. Following the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria, sanctions earlier imposed on the nation were lifted while international organizations that suspended their operations in Nigeria also resumed. Furthermore, Nigeria started enjoying technical, financial and other forms of aid that were suspended as result of the absence of democracy. The lost pride and dignity of Nigerians at home and abroad was also restored; trade relations, treaties, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements were also restored.

Above all, Nigeria and its citizens under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo participated freely without constraints in international summits, conferences and other categories of meetings to contribute its opinion in international issues and activities. It is generally believed that Obasanjo brought his credibility, clout and international respectability to an otherwise discredited Nigerian presidency. According to Alade Fawole, "President Obasanjo has come into the job with impressive, if not intimidating credentials. This is as opposed to the limitations of the previous military leaders" (Abdulmumin Jibrin, 2004: p.134-139). To further corroborate the above position that the personality of a leader affects a nation's foreign policy, President Olusegun Obasanjo in his inaugural speech demonstrated his preparedness to pursue and articulate, proactive and productive foreign policy objective when he said, "we shall pursue a dynamic foreign policy to promote friendly relations with all nations and will continue to play a constructive role in the United Nations (UN), Organization of African Unity now African Union (AU) and other international bodies..." In view of the above, this paper examines the gains derived from the foreign trips under taken by former President Olusegun Obasanjo from 1999 to 2007.

Methodology and Scope

This aspect of the study provides a description of the sources of data used and the applicable methodology. Most of the data used for this study were curled from published scholarly works (textbooks, articles and journals) and descriptive qualitative analysis based on content analysis. Although the paper is centred on public policy, it was limited to the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007).

Theoretical Framework

It is argued that public policy formulation and implementation involves political actions and activities, the systems political theory was applied in order to explain the impact of Nigeria's foreign policy from 1999 to 2007. The systems political theory deals with interrelationship

and interdependence among groups, organizations and sub-systems operating within a particular system or environment. According to system scholars, the society is made up of several forces namely, input which refer to contributions and demands made by individuals, groups and organizations (formal and informal). On the other hand, output and feedback refer to responses and reactions from the political system through the conversion box (government). System scholars maintain that inputs could be peaceful or violent while output (government reaction) could equally be positive or negative depending on the circumstances. Rather than wait or generate inputs from the public, President Olusegun Obasanjo decided to make and create his own input by developing a dynamic and proactive foreign policy for Nigeria through his foreign trips and personal contact with world leaders. The feedback and output derived from this political diplomacy was the re-instatement of Nigeria into the Common Wealth of Nations and other international organizations. The cancellation of Nigeria's debt was also a major output that brought economic stability and peace to Nigeria's political system. Advocates of the systems political theory further argue that with good government policies and programmes in place through an effective input and output analysis, conflicts, political and economic crisis within any system will be checked, controlled and also minimized. The theory is relevant in this context because the pre- 1999 events which led to the isolation of Nigeria from the international stage could have constituted a threat to other parts of Africa and the world as a whole. Proponents of this theory include David Easton, John Locke, Almond and Verbal etc.

Obasanjo's Domestic (Internal) Restructuring Efforts

Realizing the fact that a nation's foreign policy is a product of its domestic environment, the Obasanjo led administration decided to tackle the monster called corruption headlong. This resolve gave impetus to the anti-corruption bill which led to the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). It is important to state that the EFCC earned the respect of Nigerians and the international community through its efficiency in identifying, arresting and the prosecution of money launderers, curbing bank funds and stopping dubious business men, women and organizations from defrauding the nation. Haven sanitized the domestic front, the Obasanjo led government decided to reshape Nigeria's foreign policy under what was known as political/Economic Diplomacy which was a major policy trust of the administration. The administration's pursuit of political/ economic diplomacy was multidimensional in approach. This include the pursuit of the recovery of funds looted and stashed abroad by the late general Sani Abacha, campaign for debt forgiveness, and the attraction of Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) into the country.

Public Policy as an Instrument of Sustainable Development and Integration in Africa

Before 1999, the border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon degenerated into a full scale war with both parties losing capital, human and material resources. Rather than maintain a hard-line military position, the Obasanjo- led administration adopted a civil approach (non-violence) by responding to Cameroon's application at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague. Although the ICJ judgment of October, 2002 was in favour of Cameroon, President Olusegun Obasanjo (former) embarked on several foreign trips to ensure that the

dispute was resolved peacefully. His administration also took several steps to ensure that the ICJ ruling was fully implemented thus, in a congratulatory message send to President Olusegun Obasanjo (former) which was published in This Day Newspaper of 2nd February 2004, captained “Nigeria, Cameroon Consider Non-Aggression Pact” Koffi Annan, the then united nations Secretary General commended Nigeria and Cameroon for using peaceful means to resolve differences and renewed his appeal to the international community to provided support within the context of preventive diplomacy. While stressing the need for a strong international regulatory mechanism through the United Nations Antonio Montiero, former Portuguese Ambassador to the United Nations stated that there was need to strengthen regional, global and specialized international organizations in order to authoritatively regulate the behaviour of often conflicting states (John Bouk and Boyer 2002 p 53). As part of Obasanjo's pan African ideals and vision, he had no problem consolidating on the technical Aid corps (TAC); a programme that was initiated by Nigeria to help capacity building in some deprived countries in African, Caribbean and the pacific. A demonstration of this kind gesture was the sending of over 200 volunteers to Ethiopia as part of the TAC 2002/2004 scheme. President Olusegun Obasanjo (former) actually translated public policy as a tool for national and regional integration in Africa when in 1999 he visited Brazil where the Nigeria-Brazil joint commission was established. It will be recalled that during the meeting in Br several bilateral agreements were fostered on cultural and educational cooperation, and restoration of air links between both countries. Consultations on matters of common interest were also discussed at the meeting.

However, a practical display of Nigeria's foreign policy objective took place in 2006 when President and leader of the National Patriotic Front (NPF) of Liberia who was charged for genocide and human rights abuses was granted asylum to stay in Nigeria. It is also important to state unequivocally that Obasanjo's internal restructuring efforts, economic and political diplomacy coupled with his foreign policy relations helped to promote integration and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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It will be recalled that on assumption of office in 1999, former President Olusegun Obasanjo appreciated early enough that to attract foreign investors; reschedule or cancel Nigeria's debt; stabilize our currency; attract foreign aid; compete in a global market; accept and effectively exercise our sovereignty; regain our prestige, position and status all over the world; contribute to global and regional peace and security and improve Nigeria's image among others, he would need to globe trot rather than sitting down at home. It will be recalled that in all his foreign trips, his mission and interest were basically economic, political, peace, security and socio-cultural integration. It is worthy to also note that during such foreign trips, emphasis is usually placed on personal Nigerians in Diaspora, the press and civil society groups and organizations. The desire of the president them was to market the new improved Nigeria to the world in order to attract foreign investors and also launder the already battered image of the country as a result of prolonged military rule. Furthermore, Nigeria's foreign policy under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo witnessed a radical change from the usual passive and dormant

approach. This manifested in several spheres, at the multilateral level, former president Olusegun Obasanjo made the presence of Nigeria felt by attending sessions of the United Nations (UN), G77, G, G, OPC, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Forum, UNESCO, Non-Aligned Movement, Commonwealth Organization, African Union (AU), ECOWAS and other organizations and specialized committees of the United Nations. The major policy thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy from 1999 to 2007 was the issue of debt cancellation owed by poor African countries through a fair and transparent process and the need for regional and global peace and security. It is on record that during this period (1999-2007) Nigeria championed the campaign for the democratization of the United Nations Security Council to reflect the universality of the organization. Nigeria's foreign policy under the Obasanjo-led administration also demonstrated a renewed commitment to African affairs hence, the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to African Union (AU) and the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) received a significant boost from Nigeria. Apart from the fact that a Nigerian diplomat, Ambassador Aluko, was appointed to head NEPAD's implementation committee, President Olusegun Obasanjo (former) joined forces with former South African President, Thabo Mbeki to provide the necessary leadership. The above analysis clearly indicates that the policy thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy (political/Economic diplomacy) under the Obasanjo-led administration prompted the international community to re-admit Nigeria among the family of nations by lifting all sanctions earlier imposed on Nigeria. The cancellation of Nigeria's foreign debt by the European Union coupled with the signing of several multilateral and bilateral trade and cultural agreements by the Obasanjo-led administration confirms that fact that public policies if well-articulated and implemented, can serve as a tool for national and regional integration in Africa.

The paper further reveals that Nigeria's foreign policy under former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) witnessed a dramatic change from a theoretically dormant foreign policy to a more proactive and dynamic one which is centred around the growth and sustainable development of the African Continent.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows that several issues including the annulment of the June 12th 1993 presidential elections by the Ibrahim Babangida-led regime coupled with the hanging of Ken Saro-wiwa in 1995 by the late Sani Abacha regime led to the suspension and exclusion of Nigeria from major international organizations. It is also on record that the above development no doubt, threatened economic growth, peace, security and political stability in the country. At the international level, the study showed that during the pre-1999 period, Nigeria was declared a Pariah nation by the international community, thus, the massive decline in the volume of trade and investment. This study also revealed that the situation changed when Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn-in and inaugurated as the President and Commander-in Chief of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the 29th of May, 1999. Lastly, Nigeria's foreign policy under former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) witnessed a theoretically dormant foreign policy to a more practical, proactive and dynamic foreign policy which was centred around the growth and development of the African

confinement. Thus, the re-admission of Nigeria into the comity of nations, the cancellation of Nigeria's foreign debt by the European Union coupled with the signing of several multilateral and bilateral agreements and treaties by the Obasanjo-led administration are clear facts that demonstrated that the Obasanjo-led administration actually did a lot to use public policy as an instrument to promote sustainable development and regional integration in Africa.

Recommendations

It is imperative to state unequivocally that the process of policy formulation, analysis and implementation is faced with problems and challenges in most third world countries hence, the gap between a given policy and its implementation has led to the abandonment of projects and other inconsistencies which has caused difficulties and economic stagnation in most African countries. The recommendations below will, no doubt, help to improve the policy formulation and implementation process in Nigeria and African.

1. Foreign policies that are detrimental to Africa's growth and development should be discarded by African states especially if such policies are related to financial issues and economic development. This is important because most neo-colonial policies and actions are aimed at promoting foreign interests in Africa.
2. It is also imperative for African states and parliaments to engage in periodic review and evaluation of existing policies and programmes in order to meet contemporary challenges and events. Such reviews and appraisals will help Nigeria and African leaders to meet the needs of their people. This will also promote indigenous African interest rather than giving preference to foreign policies and ideologies.
3. To ensure sustainable development as specified in the sustainable development goals document, there is need for partnership with development partners and stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels. Such partnership will help to exploit the cooperative advantage of other nations in terms of trade and defence related issues.
4. For policies to be realistic and effective there is need for constant periodic review and appraisal in order to make existing policies and programmes of government meet changing circumstances and events.
5. There is also need to domesticate Nigeria's foreign policy and make it more pragmatic and dynamic in line with present day realities. Emphasis on Africa as the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy has attracted huge material, human and financial cost to the nation.
6. Since public policies are formulated and implemented to political leaders in the executive, judiciary, and legislative arms of government, there is also need for the enthronement of democracy and good governance through the conduct of credible elections in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. The adaptation of democratic principles in governance will no doubt guarantee legitimacy, stability, transparency and consistency in the policy process.

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