



NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

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COMMUNIQUE OF THE INITIATIVES' FIFTH NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE, OCTOBER 13, 2008.

PREAMBLE

The fifth National Roundtable for Proactive Laws and Good Governance organized by THE INITIATIVES held on October 13, 2008 at the Executive Hall of the International Conference Centre, Abuja with the theme “Millennium Development Goals and the Challenges of Anti-Corruption”.

The session commenced at 11.15am and was chaired by His Excellency Dr. Aliyu Mu'azu Babangida, OON; Chief Servant of Niger State, ably represented by the Deputy Governor of Niger State. Mr. Peter Obi, the Executive Governor of Anambra State was the Special Guest of Honour at the event. Among the dignitaries present were the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole, CFR; Mrs. Buthelezi of the South African Economic Commission, and the Norwegian Ambassador to Nigeria among others.

Like the previous editions, the forum also had in attendance members of the National and State Assemblies, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Federal and State government officials, the academia, captains of industry, members of the Press, civil society groups and stakeholders in the Nigerian Project

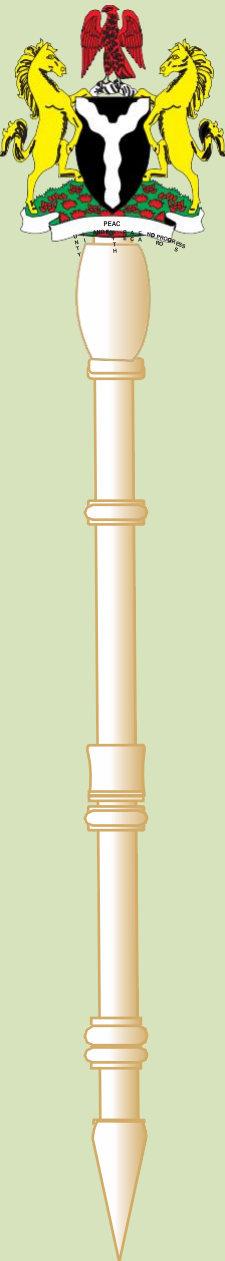
For the Faculty Board of THE INITIATIVES, as the Global Millennium Goal (MDGS) approaches its target year in 2005, the need to assess its progress in Nigeria becomes imperative. With the expected goals focused primarily on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger across the world, establishment of international partnership among countries, the report remains uncheering as the anticipated conventional economic growth on which the goals are premised is being hampered by extreme national disparities, inadequate spending on health, agriculture and education.

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This is in spite of the country's earnings as the 8th largest producer of oil in the world. The country is still languishing at the base of human development index with over 70 percent of the populace living on or less than \$1 per day. It is in view of this that the fifth National Roundtable brought to the focus, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and the Challenges of Anti-Corruption. This is in continuation of THE INITIATIVES' Public Consultation and Mobilization Strategy (PCMS), as a key component of enshrining the new national ethos; rule of law, accountability, corruption control/prevention measures, strengthening and building capacity of anti-graft agencies, and most importantly, to provide modalities from promoting leadership/followership ethic among the citizenry.

This fifth National Roundtable received presentations from Hajia Amina Ibrahim, Senior Special Assistant to the President on Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and Mrs. Farida Waziri, Chairman Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

OBSERVATIONS

The following observations were made during the session:

1. There is the absence of culture of public disdain to ill gotten wealth among the Nigerian populace. Nigerians still glorify wealth irrespective of how it is acquired. This has made it possible for corrupt public office holders to loot the national treasury with impunity.
2. The sycophancy disposition of Nigerians has made it difficult to question the source of wealth of their leaders while serving the public. Nigerians glorify wealth and this has become the needed stimulus for public office holders to loot, thus making the fight against corruption difficult.
3. There is absence of institutional framework or existence of bodies that would have provided for effective monitoring of public office holders, as seen in other countries of the world.
4. There is slow pace of trial due to deliberate stalling of trial procedures by prosecuting and defence counsels, which makes it difficult for speedy trial of corrupt officials.
5. Often the anti-graft agencies are more concerned with organizing workshops and seminars, which creates distractions from their primary functions.
6. There is absence of special courts for corrupt practices that would have minimized the encumbrances of conventional courts in corruption and related offences cases.
7. Often the attention of the EFCC is focused primarily on public office holders, while neglecting their collaborators, the bureaucrats, thus making the fight against corruption difficult to realize. As evidence have shown that most of the corrupt tendencies of the public office holders are actually stimulated by the top civil service hierarchy, who indoctrinate the political neo-phytes on ways of siphoning the common treasury.

8. The relationship between weak government, weak laws and weak governance as typified of Nigeria's political environment makes corruption thrive and the inability of the anti-graft agencies to track the culprits.
9. That due to the emphasis on the rule of law, the agencies 'hands are tied' and cannot detain a corrupt official for more than 48 hours, which is not enough to gather all the needed evidence for conviction beyond reasonable doubt.

On the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), participants made the following observations:

1. There exist a disconnection between the people and government on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) Project. There is equally lack of proper channel of communication between the government and the populace on the need to meet the Millennium Development Goal target.
2. There is the natural tendency of apathy by the populace towards the activities of the government. The disposition of 'we' and 'them', or that government is a faceless entity explains the general lack of interest in the Millennium Development Goals project by civil societies. And this has resulted to indifference on how public resources are managed, and creates a lop-hole for massive laundering of funds that would have been used to carry out development projects.
3. The seven point agenda of the government on which the Millennium Development Goals are anchored, seem to focus more at the Federal Government level, thus neglecting the States and the Local Government that would have created direct impact on the life of average citizenry.
4. People do not ask questions on how their resources are being utilized or managed. They do not question public office holders of projects that will directly impact on their well-being. This has made it difficult for the goals to be met.
5. There has been utter neglect of the public service over the years, and this has made it difficult for the nation to maximally utilize its abundance human capital for the overall development of the country.
6. Participants also observed that the government structure is weak and this has made it difficult for capacity building which would have been the bedrock of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. Nigerians must think first about their country and must see themselves in the mode of being deprived of their common wealth by a few privileged individuals and through this ways fight against the scourge.

2. The EFCC and other anti-graft agencies cannot win the war alone without the collaboration of civil society. That Nigerians must furnish the agencies with information on these corrupt practices to aid them carry out their work, if the nation must win the war against corruption.
3. There must be the establishment of special courts through legislative act that will not be encumbered by the delays in the conventional courts that continue to hamper the prosecution of corrupt officials.
4. The anti-graft agencies must be given more powers that will enable it detain a corrupt suspect beyond what the law provides, to enable them conduct full investigation without interference from the suspects. The situation whereby a suspect regains freedom within 48 hours does not augur well for good work.
5. There must be in-built mechanism that will make it easy for the anti-graft agencies to monitor public office holders, to nip any corrupt act in the bud.
6. To enhance the execution of the MDGS project, there is need for the executive arm of government to engage seasoned professionals to properly plan and do an effective costing to guard against failure or misappropriation of funds meant for people oriented projects.
7. That there is need for people to ask question on what those they elected in government are doing to better the lot of the people. They should at all times call attention of the government to their needs, and help scrutinize how the government is implementing the various development projects around their communities.
8. There is the need for proactive actions on the part of anti-corruption agencies that will checkmate the movement of funds out of the country.
9. That the leaders must have the political will to carry out projects that will impact positively on the life of their people, and must be willing to leave office whenever their services are no longer required by the people and not the sit-tight syndrome that is being unleashed on the political psyche of the people.
10. That all hands must be on deck, both the leaders and the governed if we are to free the country from the stranglehold of corruption which remains one of the hindrances of the country's quest in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS).