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## FG's economic reforms: So far, how well?

LUKA BINIYAT, CHRIS OCHAYI & AYODELE ADEGBUYI  
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THE Obasanjo economic reforms are positioning Nigeria for genuine economic growth—Hon. Asake.

Hon. Jonathan Asake is the Special Assistant to the President on National Assembly Matters. I was privileged to study the President Obasanjo economic reform package and was convinced that he meant well for Nigeria. So what our group did was to caution our colleagues against undue belligerence to the executive in view of the patriotic agenda he has for the Nigerian people. Look at the economic reforms that the president has embarked upon. Look at the calibre of technocrats that he called to join him. And I need not tell you how, Dr. Ngozi Iwaela, the former minister of foreign affairs did to reposition Nigeria in terms of fiscal discipline when she was minister of finance and head of the economic team.

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Not to talk of the consolidation of the banking sector by Prof. Charles Soludo. Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili instituted checks in the dubious awards of contracts, saving Nigeria not less than N300 billion in what would have been bloated contracts through the Due Process. She is still championing what Nigerians unfortunately do not fully appreciate – NEITI (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative). To me NEITI, which is the idea of Mr. President, is the most single important development in the oil sector. Because it has forced open the doors of the secrecy in the transaction going on in the oil industry. Nigeria can now track down every kobo made from oil, and very soon, the solid mineral is earned and used.

That would make the citizens to police the use of their wealth for the well being of all.

The NEITI Bill is before the National Assembly and would soon be passed to law. That, I can assure you. You would never be able to calculate what the NAFDAC boss has done for Nigeria in naira and

kobo. She has not led to the resurrection of all the major, genuine drug manufacturing companies killed by the importation of fake killer drugs, she has saved the lives of thousands by her no nonsense approach to duty. Mallam Nasir El-Rufai is looked upon as a role model by the youths, because of his resuscitation of the Abuja master plan. So, Nigerians should understand that this could have only taken place if the three arms of government co-exist peacefully.

No bases for comparing the nation's economy today to the days of late Gen Abacha. I don't think that anyone can substantiate that when you speak of this government comparatively to past regimes it has not done well. There is still much to be done, agreed, but much has been done by this government already. Paltry \$3 billion dollars! Today, it is over ten times that amount. Well, we have over \$32 billion in our foreign reserve now, and that's among the highest in Africa.

That is not all, in the solid mineral sector, investors are rushing in. I understand that not less than \$12 billion worth of investment will enter that sector in the next five years. All because of reforms and I am sure you know that we now have a local content policy where foreign companies are mandated to engage a fix percentage of Nigerians in their jobs and to patronise ancillary services to their business in Nigeria. Do you know how many would pick jobs from there?

The gains of these reforms will be best enjoyed in the future. There is \$12 billion railway rejuvenation project, and we have already started committing money for that. When it would have been completed, towns which "died" because of the death of the rail system will rise again. Will job not be created?

I have not even talked about the telecommunication sector, because that is too obvious to mention. About \$12 billion worth of investment already on the ground. And you can speak to anyone in any part of the world on your bed from every major Nigerian city and village.

Nigeria Energy Sector Will Change for the Better in the Next Six Months  
—Prof. Sambo.

Between 1999 to date, the ECN has come out with a powerful document to guide the development of the energy sector. I am talking about the National Energy Policy. And we have equally done in the same period, Energy Demand and Supply projection for the country. It is with this you will need to say what plant you need to build and where. And it is also within this same period that we started other documents to even guide us further. I am talking about the National Energy Master Plan. Apart from all the other pilot projects all over the land proving to everybody that these things work. Tremendous changes are in the offing.

When the government of the day implements this plan documents the way this government is correcting the ills of this country, if it is the same government, your answer will be "the next three to five years". You will see a tremendous change. And I want to say this: in the electricity sector, already, we are seeing changes. In the next six months, load shedding will almost go. Already, changes have started. But significant changes will be in the next two – three years.

Only 10 per cent Nigerians are benefiting from Obasanjo's privatisation  
—Pascal Bafyau

What is permanent is change. Every government must make changes. The current reforms have their positive and negative effects. The truth is

that, we are not as developed or advanced as the United States of America (USA). We seem to be copying what is happening in those advanced countries of the world. We forget the basic issues, and this is poverty. 90 percent of Nigerians are poor and that's why people who are buying properties that have been privatised are just 10 percent of Nigerians. It is not spreading across the country. And these properties would have been spread to all Nigerians. And that's why inevitably you are seeing that the sale of this property is going to be lopsided. We forget the people who are building this wealth, in Abuja for instance, people who are building Abuja, people who are contributing to the day-to-day running of this society, even the slums where they are staying, have been snatched, all in the name of making Abuja beautiful city.

At which cost, at what expense? Is it for the government to beautify a place or it is for the government to take care of people? Are we running the government of the people for the people? That you have legislative quarters, which are being sold, what happens to the next set when they come? Are we considering the problem? We are copying what is happening in the United States, what is happening in France, what is happening in Germany?

Have we reached that stage of advancement there? You have a rural man who will be elected into the House of Representatives; he has never come to Abuja before, and you are saying he will stay in a hotel for one month or more. We need to stabilise these industries.

Government should provide the needed infrastructure for economic growth.

Senator Abiola Ajumobi, the Deputy Minority whip in the Senate and a senator representing Oyo South senatorial district  
Privatization as I see it is a good concept, it has worked very well in other countries. It has been demonstrated all over the world that government has not been successful at running businesses. In Nigeria, I think it has been a mixed blessing. Privatization in telecom industries has helped the people tremendously. It has created more jobs. It has helped in crime fighting, in businesses and other ramifications. Also in banking sector, the consolidation there has helped the economy tremendously. There have been also some issues bordering on corruption. The question has been raised whether the government was just handing over the companies to selected people.

I think whatever anybody may say on the fight against corruption, at least we started facing corruption frontally. If nothing else, Obasanjo has put fear in the minds of Nigerians that whatever they are doing now can be detected and they can be punished for it. That fear is in the minds of the people now. Before, people have always felt that they can get away with murder. If nothing, this regime has instilled fear in the mind of people who are corrupt. The second thing is that for the first time, we are seeing governors and ministers being removed and being prosecuted for corruption. The third is that people are becoming more careful. Before, it was a brazen corruption. Now I think corruption has become a covert one. However, notwithstanding the progress we have made, there are still questions about sincerity or the selectivity of fighting corruption.

What the government is expected to do is to provide the private sector the enabling infrastructures so that the cost of doing business will be reduced. Look at electricity, there is nowhere in the world that business can be done successfully if you don't have electricity. Fifty per cent of

cost of production today is on electricity, that is, on generating set and diesel. The road network is not good; there is no security and safety, no water. I think the government must provide all the needed infrastructure and encourage manufacturers by banning some of the products that can be produced locally.

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