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*Inaugural Lecture Series III*

**BUREAUCRACY AND  
THE PEOPLE: THE  
NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

By C.A.B. Olowu

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# BUREAUCRACY AND THE PEOPLE: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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## Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with gratitude to "God and to the authorities of this great University that I accept the special honour and privilege of giving this year's first inaugural lecture. It is a leap year and since in Greek and Yorubā mythologies, leap years are regarded as periods of extraordinary productivity, one is particularly glad to be selected to set the tone for the rest of a year which we all hope and pray will be most productive for all and sundry.

A little over twenty years ago today, a young man entered this University, a graduate of Geography from Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan. As a Graduate Assistant at the Institute of administration in which most of the faculty were expatriates, the primary intellectual challenge he faced was how to make the connection between the preoccupation with space (which is the central concern in Geography) with that of managing public resources (which constitutes the focus of public administration). Through the help of a number of these teachers and that of the Holy Spirit, this young man became the first person to be awarded a doctorate degree in the faculty of Administration that emerged from the erstwhile Institute of Administration. That young man is none other than the inaugurator that is standing before you. Today, as the head of the Department of Local Government Studies (carved out of the Department of Public Administration in 1984) but still in the same faculty, space and the administration of scarce resources have not only been successfully married, the concern has shifted to how to ensure that public administration institutions in our country and in other African countries actually serve the public rather than *vice versa*.

In choosing the topic, 'Bureaucracy and the People: The Nigerian Experience', the concern, therefore, is to examine what progress we have made in transforming institutional structures inherited at independence as colonial inventions for extracting surplus from the people of Nigeria to institutions which enhance public welfare. It is distressing to state at the outset that after almost forty years of political independence we have not, as a nation, recorded much success in this endeavour. This then leads us to identify the major obstacles to the realisation of this primary objective and suggest ways by which these obstacles might either be overcome or made irrelevant to our pursuit of the good life.

Before its proscription by the present administration, the *Guardian* newspaper in a remarkable editorial opinion titled, 'A State in Gradual Collapse' chronicled the deplorable and declining conditions of the nation's public services: public utilities that have virtually collapsed, an educational system that had become epileptic, state hospitals, which had 'first degenerated into consulting clinics' but had now become 'places to die' and 'the quality of services rendered by NEPA, NITEL, NIPOST, etc. being the subject of 'continuous lamentation by the citizens' The *Guardian* concluded its opinion:

*The Nigerian state has become a predatory institution through which people in places of trust and responsibility recklessly and remorselessly loot the nation's resources and extort tribute while the ordinary citizen starves . . . what we see is an advanced state of social anomie, a near collapse of the Nigerian state as a social organism . . .* (Editorial of *Guardian* March 1, 1994 emphasis added).

Almost two full years after this publication, the situation seems to have grown from bad to worse. The questions that this development begs include the following: **why are our public institutions perpetually afflicted with systemic failure?** This is an important question that is relevant not only to Nigeria but to most of the 54 odd African countries most of which emerged from Western colonialism as nation-states within the last three-and-half decades. There is a growing consensus that the failure of public institutions is at the heart of the crisis with which Africa (of which Nigeria is an important part) is currently confronted. At a time when many developing countries of Asia and Latin America are recovering and experiencing phenomenal economic growth, Africa's economic and social crises seem to be worsening. The view now prevalent among most development scholars and multilateral development institutions is that while the external economic environment poses tough challenges, the manner in which Africa is governed is at the heart of this problem (Ake 1987, Ostrom 1995, Olowu & Wunsch 1990, Bayart 1993, Jaycox 1993, E. Ostrom 1995). It is surprising that it took three decades (1950-1980) of development work in Africa to come to this conclusion.

When the original draft of this address was written almost two years

ago, there were very few success stories that one could point to on the continent. However, since this time, a number of African countries have responded to this analysis of the crisis and effected fundamental changes in their governance modes that have led to extraordinary revival of their socio-political institutions as well as of their economies. One of such countries is the country in which I have lived and worked in the last three months, Ethiopia. Others include South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Malagasy, the Congo and Mozambique which have opted to join democratic models of governance. In one sense, these positive developments demonstrate that the African is not destined to poverty and institutional paralysis. In each of these countries the role of the ordinary citizens have been crucial - from mounting pressures on the ruling cliques to armed warfare. On the other hand, from the point of view of our dear country, which is known to be blessed by God with immeasurable natural, material and human resources, these African success stories pose serious intellectual and pragmatic challenges which compel us to explain why is it that we, as a nation, seem to be drifting further from the rest of the world into economic and political decline.

This address will try to tackle the following questions which I believe help to provide some answers to the above poser and which have been a major concern of some of my colleagues and myself in the Departments of Public Administration and Local Government Studies since I came to this University in 1975:

- \* What roles do people have in creating and sustaining public institutions which will serve their interests?
- \* Why does the Nigerian bureaucracy operate to the detriment of the people it is expected to serve? Why have efforts to reform the Nigerian bureaucracy failed so woefully?
- \* What are the critical elements that will be required in order to have credible, patriotic and effective public institutions?

I have chosen in this address to adopt an historical analytical approach for the simple reason that this provides the easiest means of demonstrating the historical roots of the failure of Nigerian public institutions. However, before going on to the historical-analytical

sections, I shall provide in an opening conceptual section, the definitions of the central concepts which will be used in this lecture and the underlying competing theories of the state which help us to think clearly of the linkages between the people and their own institutions. I shall argue that institutions are human artifacts, that is, creations of human beings to tackle the problems of daily existence. In the final section of the address, I shall try to point the way forward. This address will thus have five sections as follows:

- (a) People and Institutions: Democratic and Non-Democratic Options for Constituting Social Order;
- (b) The Pre-Colonial Foundations;
- (c) The Balance Sheet of Colonial Bureaucratic State.
- (d) The Post-Colonial Developments and Efforts to Revitalise the Nigerian State and Its Bureaucracy
- (e) The Way Forward.

The sum-total of my argument is that the quality of public institutions is the product of the quality of interaction between the people and public institutions that are created and nurtured to serve human needs. In other words, public institutions - of which the bureaucracy is one, albeit a critical one - have as much impact on the people as the people have on them. Where the people abandon or for one reason or the other, cannot impact positively on public institutions, failure is assured and no amount of resources that are made available to these institutions will avail except the fundamental causes of institutional failure are addressed.

### **People and Institutions: Democratic and Non-Democratic Options for Constituting Social Order**

By 'people', I refer to the human beings or citizens of a country who live in the different communities comprising that country. They are assumed to possess certain essential attributes - sense of worth/self-consciousness, a sense of community and ability to act as rational human beings - to act in their perceived self-interest. Central to all forms of organizational theory is the idea that human beings create institutions to attain goals which they cannot on their own attain - the idea of rational cooperative action. The result of such rational

cooperative action or cooperation is the creation of institutions whose distinguishing characteristics are that they are social artifacts or creations with specific predetermined objectives.

There are two broad types of institutions in every society: the ones that are created by members of the society on a voluntary basis - and those that are created on behalf of the whole society with powers for exacting compulsion and making authoritative decisions on behalf of the society. The former are referred to as **society-based institutions** whereas the latter are referred to as **state institutions**. The manner in which these two sets of institutions interact with one another is one of the most profound issues of discourse in political science and its subdisciplines - including public administration and local government studies. It is also critical in determining the character of the state - whether democratic or non-democratic.

The state expresses its will through a number of institutions, the most important of which is the executive branch of the government. Executive branch responsibilities are carried out by the 'bureaucracy'. Bureaucracy has two forms - the *armed* and the *civil* bureaucracies. As Max Weber and other scholars of the bureaucracy have pointed out every society, however, primitive or modernised has its own 'bureaucratic' or administrative organs. What distinguishes the modern bureaucracy from all of its pedigrees are its structural and operational characteristics - division of labour, unity of command, separation between private and public domains, meritocracy etc. - all of which ensure that the bureaucracy operates like a highly efficient machine: impersonal, objective and anonymous.

However, in order to ensure that the executive branch is subject to the will of the people, in democratically governed countries, legislative and judicial institutions are created as autonomous and separate branches of the government to carry out specified functions of governance and at the same time serve as a check on those who wield or exercise executive powers. These two sets of institutions are further reinforced by society-based institutions - which include the media, corporate bodies, political parties, community organs, philanthropic and voluntary organizations, non-governmental agencies etc. Each of these institutions are allowed broad autonomy and protected by groundnorms of law in the state - the constitution. Power is not only divided horizontally, it is also divided vertically to regions and localities to

reflect the character of civil society. The overriding character of a democratic polity is thus the emergence of a polycentric political order.

The features of this political system include: the recognition of variety and nested multi-layers of institutions which interact through competitive, cooperative or conflictual relationships, a deliberate division of the powers between these centres of authority and the existence of institutions for resolving conflicts between these organs (Ostrom 1990, 1995; E. Ostrom 1995, Wunsch & Olowu 1990, Olowu 1995a). Within this system, state and society institutions inter-penetrate one another and are in some form of balance with one another. Most importantly, local governing institutions are given wide latitudes to exercise discretionary authority, a broad range of responsibilities and resources because it is felt that it is at this level that democratic governance has the most direct capacity and also forms the basis of all modern levels of governance. According to Alexis de Tocqueville local community institutions constitute the most effective schools for training leaders as well as the citizens in governance.

The point must, however, be made that democratic states took a long time to evolve even in the western countries of the world. Various forms of non-democratic systems of governance constituted the basis of organising societal order - monarchy, aristocracy, theocracy, fascism, socialism and communism. The common denominator in all of these is monocracy for which Thomas Hobbes provided a theoretical construct in his theory of Sovereignty. According to one western scholar who has spent his entire scholarly lifetime studying this subject (and with whom I had the good fortune to work), the most important elements of a monocracy are: unity of command, asymmetry in the distribution of authority, monopoly of the exercise of sanctions, and an exercise of power that is *indivisible*, *unlimited* and *unaccountable*. The experience in Europe as elsewhere, however, was one in which:

those who are sovereign have access to extraordinary opportunities to use the instrumentalities of governance to dominate the allocation of values in society and exploit others. Sovereigns and those who act on their behalf, are free to become predators and prey upon others, who are reduced to a position of being relatively defenceless subjects. (Ostrom 1988: 59).

This realisation led to the long struggle towards democratic or polycentric political structures in Western Europe, North America, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia. These struggles have not ceased and in recent years have been renewed in the countries in the former Soviet Union and the Third World countries including Africa. The peoples of these states have been crucial to these struggles and the struggle has been the cause of several wars and even revolutions. In all of these situations, sovereign rulers relied heavily on their two critical institutions - the armed and the civil bureaucracy - to tyrannize and repress their own people. Over time, these institutions, became very powerful but at the sametime corrupt and inefficient, thus weakening the hands of the state vis-a-vis those of the people which paved the way for the triumph of the commoners over the state. Recent examples include the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, several Latin American states and Uganda and Ethiopia on the African continent.

As will be shown below, many African precolonial societies, most probably as a result of their long evolution, demonstrated remarkable sophistication in their political and administrative institutions, in terms of creating structures of governance which placed effective checks on the powers of their rulers and also in locating the locus of power much closer to the community. Unfortunately, colonialism destroyed the character of these institutions by imposing monocracy and tyranny of bureaucrats everywhere. This explains why in many African states today, authoritarian structures are dominant and the asymmetry of power in favour of the state is predominant. And even within the state itself, the executive branch not only dominates all other institutions, if they are allowed to exist at all, it denies any effective authority to regional or local community structures. African states are thus highly centralized and yet soft or weak because they are not effectively connected to their societal structures. Societal structures are effectively denuded of all power or influence, making it easy for the African state to become a prey of its rulers on their own people. As a result African states by close observers are described as patrimonial, prebendal and indeed one recent popular book took a very suggestive title: *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* in which the author tried to show that the state in Africa since the colonial times has been a ready prey for those who ruled it. (Bayart 1993; see also Sellasie 1975, Hyden 1983, Joseph 1987, Balogun 1995, Diamond 1995, Lewis 1995).

Some analysts believe this to be the case because the African state, entrapped in its colonial legacy has remained largely a bureaucratic state dominated by military, administrative and political party officials rather than responsible and being responsive to the people (Midgal 1988:16). Bureaucracies are effective instruments in implementing already determined policies but extremely weak in aggregating and building consensus. To borrow from popular parlance, **bureaucracies are good servants but terrible masters**. This then provides us with a critical insight into the essential difference between democratic and non-democratic political systems. In the latter, a group of people arrogates to itself superior attributes, based either on age, gender, class, religion, wealth, knowledge or military strength etc. which enable the group to take major societal decisions on behalf of the people whereas in the former, no one is regarded as capable of substituting for the people in reaching these decisions in arenas of human activity that are regarded political or 'non-contingent'. (Saward 1994).

We shall attempt to review the evidence of the Nigerian experience through the different epochs below-pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.

### **The Pre-colonial Foundations**

Even though there are wide variations in African pre-colonial governmental institutions, they also manifest remarkable structural similarities. Two basic forms have been identified: the stateless societies in which each community existed as a separate political entity and governed itself independently of others; and the societies with some form of centralized authority, administrative machinery and judicial institutions (chiefdoms or states). Examples of the former include the Igbo of Nigeria, the Kim of Liberia, the Tallensi of Ghana, the Fulani of Nigeria, the Somalis and the Mbeere of Kenya. Examples of the latter form of political authority include the Yorubas of Nigeria, the Mossi of Burkina Faso, the Swazis and Zulu of South Africa. The hall mark of a stateless society was that there was no centralized authority. The extended family obligations and the invocation of kinship behaviour were used to maintain justice and the cultural and territorial integrity of the society. Some of these societies had leaders - who existed principally to execute the will of the people. However, where a leader could not fulfil this primary function, his people turned informally to

others to provide such leadership as they needed.

In the chiefdoms, some were able to conquer other chiefdoms leading to the formation of kingdoms and empires. George Ayittey (1991:258-259) has summarized the essential qualities of pre-colonial authority systems in Africa. Four of these deserve emphasis here.

First, the structure of governance involved three levels of authority starting with the chief who is chosen from the founding lineage through a competition among rival claimants. This choice would be approved by the next layer of authority, the Council of Elders who also served as the privy council of advisers, a function which required them to gauge public opinion and reprimand the chief when necessary. As heads of the various lineages they also served as representatives of the commoners, the majority of the people. But there was a third level, the "Village Assembly" - the public assembly of all citizens at which individuals exercised their freedom of expression without fear of harassment. Every effort was made at these meetings to reach a consensus.

Second, the primary responsibility of a chief was to ensure the survival of his tribe, serve as an arbiter of disputes, act as caretaker of ancestral land and govern by consensus. He had to be impartial and be willing to listen to and encourage alternative viewpoints.

Thirdly, the military played a minor and subdued role in day-to-day government administration. In fact, most African states did not even have standing armies. The people were the army. Only in a few African kingdoms, such as the Asante, Dahomey and Zulu, were the military officers given a prominent role in governance. In the Islamic empires, military officers were appointed as nominal provincial heads. But other than that, the role of the military was to defend the tribe or empire against external threats, not to rule. And the military fully subscribed to civilian leadership.

Finally and, perhaps most important of all, the system avoided a centralized system of governance even within the framework of empires. The *raison detre* for stateless societies was the passionate desire to avoid tyranny. However, according to Ayittey, even the imperial administrative system was highly *decentralized* and the political configuration was of the *confederate/federal variety* (1991:247, emphasis in the original).

A number of factors checked against African indigenous imperialism and a highly centralised rule. These included (a) language barrier in the face of poor levels of formal education and little written literature; (b) the role played by kinship and ancestral connections in indigenous government systems; (c) sparse population which made it difficult for central governments to maintain their authority but easy for smaller groups to assert and protect their independence by moving away (exit) to form new settlements; (d) absence of instruments for controlling a large population: the underdeveloped technology of transportation, communication networks and of weapons of warfare (bows and arrows, dane guns etc.) were available to all, hence making a standing army unnecessary, (e) indigenous governmental systems were based on properly articulated and respected system of ethics: family and community values were paramount but so was the right of the individual to achieve, prosper, accumulate wealth and avert the tyranny of despotic rulers.

In other words, pre-colonial states were held in proper balance with the wishes of the ruled through appropriate mechanisms and through the limitations of technology available to the rulers and the ruled.

But these societies also confronted serious problems which made it impossible for them to withstand the colonial onslaught. First, the societies remained technologically underdeveloped - thus limiting their capacity to satisfy the needs of their people. This probably led to the second problem: the need for each community to organize periodic raids on other communities, leading to internecine wars and ultimately to the taking of human beings captured in wars as slaves who, with time became part of the commercial exchange in the trade with the new corners from Europe.

Ultimately, the combination of these factors provided the moral and economic justification for the colonial enterprise with disastrous results for the continent. With the advent of colonialism, this superb governmental structure which had stood the test of time was repressed and efforts were made to either bastardise it or exterminate it. In its place the colonial administrative machinery was imposed which operated by completely different rules, one of the most important being the relative unimportance or irrelevance of the colonised peoples themselves.

## Balance Sheet of The Colonial Bureaucratic State

Between 1900 and 1914, the territory called Nigeria was conquered and brought under one form or the other by British agents. The Oil Rivers area was under the Niger Coast Protectorate with its headquarters at Calabar, the colony of Lagos was administered by the British Colonial Office while the Royal Niger Company with its offices at Asaba and Lokoja, administered the Northern parts of the country. The latter became a British Protectorate in 1903 (Konjo 1974: 4).

In 1914, this mosaic of an administrative system was brought under a single governmental system through the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates. One scholar who has studied the subject closely identifies the two defining features of colonial administration in Nigeria:

One is that it was an alien rule imposed on the people of Nigeria following military conquest. The second feature was the concentration of all powers (executive, legislative and judicial) in the hands of appointed officials who, being responsible only to the government of the imperial country, were under no obligation to govern with the consent of the colonized peoples. (Adamolekun 1986:33).

Another scholar wrote of the colonial administrative system:

On philosophical grounds, in organizational constitution and in policy-making, colonial regimes were essentially elitist, centrist and absolutist . . . . Policy was made either in the metropole or by the governor and implemented by his administrative cadres, and with little or no participation by the governed (Wunsch 1990:23-24).

These two characteristics of the colonial administration: its bureaucratic nature and lack of participation and accountability to the governed are the most serious problems the Nigerian state confronts today.

These problems should however not blind us to some of the positive aspects of colonial administration. First, it provided a system of administration that at least assured law and order throughout the

territory called Nigeria. This led to the development of transportation and communication networks between the various parts of this territory possible, even though the primary objective was to facilitate the movement of cash crops to the ports for export to the colonial metropole. It also initiated the long process of permanently connecting the various parts of the territory to one another for the purposes of governance. In later years, colonial administration developed interest in social and economic development as well as the development of institutions of governance at national and local levels.

Secondly, the colonial era was wholly responsible for the introduction of a modern bureaucratic machinery with all the structural and operational attributes identified earlier. At the top of that administrative system were senior professionals and generalist administrators who were exclusively at first and later predominantly, Britons. Even when Africans were finally admitted into the senior civil service positions they had to think and operate as *White Men in Black Skins* (Adebayo 1981). The majority of Nigerians who were recruited into the civil service were admitted into the junior administrative cadres - clerical and executive grades.

The administrative elite were referred to as 'political' officials to distinguish them from 'non political' or junior officials (Nicolson 1969, Adamolekun 1986). The former constituted the higher civil servants on whom rested the executive, legislative and judicial powers of the emergent state. They made and implemented policy and as independence approached they were expected to be the confidential advisers of Nigerian political executives. Below them in the various professional departments that were created was an extensive field administration divided into provinces, divisions and districts. At the provincial level was the Resident, at the divisions and districts were the District Officers and the Assistant District Officers respectively.

It is important to note that this elaborate structure of field administration, which was linked to native authorities, ensured that the administrative system penetrated the daily lives of ordinary people in the remotest parts of the colonial empire. Colonial administrations were outstanding in their capacity to achieve their often limited goals of law, order, minimal social and economic services and the extraction of surplus through taxation - attributes that are sorely lacking in the governmental arrangements of today.

The central government's civil service was regionalized in 1948. But the key elements of the emerging civil service remained - a replica of British civil services in Nigeria: reserved, assertive and prestigious. Of course, they were generously rewarded: civil service pay in Nigeria was higher than it was in other parts of Africa besides the generous allowances. Side-by-side, a system of parastatals was created outside of the mainline civil service organs. These parastatals had their own boards and hence theoretical autonomy but they operated under the general oversight of civil service departments.

Finally, a local government system which used the indirect rule approach whereby local chieftains bore responsibilities for governing their people on behalf of the colonial government was first tried. They however gave way to more democratic forms as the years went by. By the 1950s, each of the regional governments had introduced reforms at the local government level aimed at substituting democratically elected local governments as obtained in Britain with the indirect rule system. The fact that this new elective system introduced a lot of corrupt practices into governance at the local level was unfortunate in that from the early days, grassroots democratization came to be closely associated with corrupt practices in government. It also paved the way for a swift return to indirect rule via administrators rather than democratically appointed local governments.

These positive aspects of the colonial administration must be taken together with its negative aspects. Two of these have been mentioned earlier - the bureaucratic nature of the administration and the lack of the participation of citizens and accountability. A third negative point is that efforts at linking colonial administration with pre-colonial formations tended to bastardise the precolonial structures - as is evidenced by the introduction of indirect rule. The latter removed all the traditional institutions of checks and balances on local chiefs in administering their territories. This bastardized the system but the most misguided thing about indirect rule was the creation of 'warrant chiefs' (especially in the Eastern parts of the country) where no chieftaincy traditions existed. On the other hand, genuine efforts to build modern legislative and judicial structures around traditional authority structures in Abeokuta and Lagos were forcibly suppressed by the colonial administration in the Lugard years. The important fact, however is that governance under colonial rule was essentially rule by bureaucrats a

bureaucratic state par excellence.

As more Nigerians became educated, most of them in Britain or under British education curricula, they became more critical of the colonial administrative system. They yearned for greater involvement of ordinary Nigerians in the administration of the country. This heroic struggle - involving the nascent news media organisations, the cultural grounds, which later metamorphosed into the first set of political parties, and the trade unions - led ultimately to self-governance and political independence in 1960.

### **The Post-Colonial Developments and Efforts at Reforming the Bureaucracy**

Political independence ought to have provided the much-desired opportunity to tackle the worst aspects of colonial state. With Nigerian politicians at the helm of affairs and having been very critical of the colonial administration up to independence, one would have expected the overhauling of British administration in Nigeria to top the agenda of the nationalists. Unfortunately, this was not to be so. Most students of African public administration systems agree that there has been more continuity than change in the post-independence period (Adamolekun 1986, Wunsch 1990).

Several reasons can be advanced for this paradoxical behaviour. First, political independence was attained in Nigeria as in many other parts of Africa without any serious revolutionary struggle or conflict. Hence, no attempt was made to change the colonial structure of governance. Second, the new post-independence political masters, even though quite critical of the paternalistic and autocratic aspects of colonial rule, found it convenient to sustain the colonial model in relating to the opposition. A third point was that for very many African leaders, independence actually meant the acquisition of the spoils of colonial office left by the departing expatriates. Hence, more attention was focused on Africanisation than on changing the structure of governance.

It is possible to sum developments in the post-colonial period as follows. First, the system of governance inherited at independence suffered from structural and operational weaknesses. Structurally, the creation of three large federal regions in which one of the units was larger both in population and territory than the other two combined

with an electoral system of winner-takes-all made competition for political power in each region and at the federal level very intense and occasionally turned violent.

Second, the lack of experience of the political class made them conceive power in personal rather than insitutional terms. This led to a disdain for, and the persecution of the opposition at regional and federal levels. Regional governments for instance turned local governments into extensions of the party political machine and traditional rulers who did not associate themselves closely with the ruling party got dethroned or sent to exile, their salaries were either withdrawn or reduced to ridiculous levels. At the federal level, the federal government engineered a split in the political party of the leader of the opposition in his home region and subsequently declared a state of emergency in that region. The man, who was immortalised at his death several years later by federal authorities and whose name this University presently bears, was arrested and jailed on charges of treason. Political intolerance among political actors were also extended to minority activists and to liberal news media organs which led to imprisonments and death for dissidents. Regional and local government powers, which were considerable, were used to tyrannize the opposition. In one region, members of the opposition could not even campaign without being arrested. In essence, there was no commitment either to democratic governance or public service by members of the political class.

The primary objective of every incumbent government was to continue in office at all costs and each political party made efforts to perfect its plans to rig elections in case it failed to win at the polls. Political power was perceived in personal rather than in civic terms as a means to improve the welfare of the governed. Up unto this time, the bureaucratic officials remained loyal to their ethical norms of political neutrality, objectivity and anonymity - even though there were stresses emanating from the political environment. They assisted but never subordinated the political executives to themselves.

One reaction to political intolerance and abuse of office by the political class, particularly from civil society organs and several intellectuals was the pressure to centralise political power in the belief that the dispersed structures of governance fuelled divisiveness and competition for political power among the various units. The belief was

that regional and local autonomy were contrary to the two critical yearnings of the people - the desire for unity and for economic development. Indeed, federalism by many socialist scholars was regarded as one of the obstacles to national greatness - a device of the colonial masters to divide and continue to rule through the backdoor. This pressure for a more centralized system of governance played into the hands of young 'turks' in the military bureaucracy. And when a segment of them struck in the first coup in January 1966, one of their immediate goals was the abolition of federalism and of traditional rulers etc. (Ademoyega 1970).

Military rule, thus became the third major feature of this period. The military have ruled the country for twenty six out of the thirty-six years during this period. Originally conceived as a corrective regime - to tackle what were perceived as structural and operational problems of Nigeria's greatness - rule by the military bureaucracy with the assistance of a few civilians was idealistic in the early period: in particular it was developmental, fiercely nationalistic and patriotic. This was evidenced in the important decisions it was able to enforce in areas where a national consensus was already reached - the need to resolve the structural imbalances in the federal system through the creation of new states, relocate the national capital and sanitize political institutions and processes. Coinciding with the discovery and marketing of oil in commercial quantities and the Arab oil embargo, a number of ambitious national projects were embarked upon - the construction of super high ways, new universities, polytechnics, extensive irrigation projects, the launching of primary education and basic health care schemes and many other expensive projects in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors.

To accomplish their ambitions of transforming Nigeria into a modern nation-state, the early military rulers sought an alliance with the civil bureaucracy and a few political elites. This brought an end to the supremacy of the political class in governance. Yet, the state was managed by a triumvirate comprising the military bureaucracy, the civilian bureaucracy and selected members of the political class as junior partners. But perhaps, the crowning glory of these early military administrations (1966-1983) was the seriousness with which they took the disengagement of the military from politics. In fact, the Gowon administration was removed by his colleagues because he was seen to

be staying too long in power, with negative effects for the image of the military establishment. His successors planned and executed a disengagement plan that led to civil rule within five years.

Even then, however, military rule centralized political and administrative power beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Starting with the local governments in the late 1960s, several of their responsibilities were transferred to the state and indeed the national government - the management of community forest resources, police, prisons, water supply, primary education and health services. In fact by 1975, a number of states decided to abolish local authorities altogether and turned them into field administrations, although they had management committees of lay people who were appointed by the state governments to advise the sole administrators who were civil servants. In states which did not come out with a *de jure* abolition of local authorities, the actual practice was no different: state governments had taken over their finances and personnel and not even the budget of a local government could be approved or implemented without reference to the state government.

At the level of state governments, Decree No. 34 of 1967 abolished the Nigerian federal system altogether. As this led to serious riots especially in the northern parts of the country, a mutiny in the army and the assassination of the then Head of State, this decree was reversed, although subsequent military authorities have continued to govern the country as a unitary rather than a federal country. State officials and policies received federal approval and not even the budgets of state governments could be announced without clearance from the federal government. Ditto for the appointment of senior government officials - at the political and administrative levels. Most importantly, several state government responsibilities, including the universities were all taken over in 1975 and resources which used to accrue to the state governments exclusively or in which they got a half share with the federal government were all taken over by the federal government which were then shared as grants to these governments.

Even the civil society organs were not left alone. Voluntary agencies were driven out of the provision of public education and health services in the early 1970s. Trade Unions were brought under state surveillance and indeed some military regimes proscribed ethnic and cultural associations. Media organisations came under the heavy

hammer of the state - but never witnessed the draconian treatment meted to them by later phases of military rule throughout this period.

With time, the military bureaucracy, having tasted power became increasingly political. From being a *corrective institution*, it became an *umpire* in the political process, ready to blow the whistle anytime it felt so on the fumbling politicians. It did this in December 1983 after barely four years of civil government and again in November 1993 less than three months after the last military President stepped aside. *What many people fear now is that the military has further metamorphosed from an umpire to an active contestor for political power.* According to this view, disengagement merely becomes a form of legitimization for the military's continued stay in power (Jega 1995, Ibrahim 1995, Diamond 1995, Olowu 1995b).

Overall, one of the most pernicious effects of military rule has been to raise the centralization of the political institutions and processes to an incredibly high level. For a federal society, this has led to a heavy toll: religious and ethnic violence, massive and institutionalised corruption, economic decline, the systematic destruction of physical, social and institutional infrastructures and a rapidly increasing notoriety as a pariah in the comity of nations.

A few illustrations of the above statement will suffice. The quality of consociational forces which military governments were able to bring into government constituted one of the critical strengths of the military establishment - in its earlier phase. They were able to pull together the best materials in the public services with members of the political class and indeed the various interest groups. However, as the military became more confident of itself it did not need many of these collaborators again. It increasingly distanced itself from these groups and with time systematically undermined the institutions and followed a more praetorian and personalised rulership style (Diamond 1991, 1995; Balogun 1995).

Take the civil service. As the civil branch of the bureaucracy, civil servants participated in articulating policies of the military establishment at times over and above civilian participants. In 1975, a reform of the public service was undertaken by the Udoji commission which was meant to modernise the nation's public services and their capacity to respond to the development challenge. However, the powerful position held by civil servants in government at this time was

such that they could ignore most of its prescriptions which would have brought about the desired changes in preference for those aspects that enhanced their own positions in the society - the integration of grades and salaries with the civil service on top and large salary increases. Later in that year and again in 1984/5, military rulers subjected the public services to humiliating mass dismissals for various offenses.

In 1988, when another civil service reform was announced, instead of pursuing those desirable features of the public service which were ignored by senior civil servants and genuinely prepare the bureaucratic institutions for civil rule, the military rulers went ahead to dismantle the civil service altogether by politicising the top hierarchies of the service and concentrating political and administrative power in the hands of its own appointees, the political chief executives of the various ministries - a development which has raised corruption to new heights in the nation's public services. One aspect of the reform - professionalisation - which would have been a shot in the arm for the public services was unfortunately conceived solely as localisation of public service personnel and was not programmatically tied to a training and retraining regime. All opposition to this reform was brutally crushed - including the sacking of the then Head of the Federal Civil Service. Only recently, are the military authorities grudgingly accepting that the reforms have a potential for destabilising the civil services (NAPAM 1991).

Similarly, institutions conceived as critical to making public sector bureaucracies responsive, accountable and sensitive to the Nigerian peoples needs were created and then destroyed. This was the fate of the legislative structures in 1993, even though they had been created at a lot of expense, estimated at over ₦12.8 billion (at a time when the total federal budget was only ₦30 billion). Others - such as the judiciary, the public complaints commissions and code of conduct bureau - were allowed to exist with little or no resources or autonomy.

Unfortunately, even the military establishment has also suffered. As an institution, its professionalism, discipline, cohesion and unity of purpose have been battered by its prolonged stay in power and the incessant dismissals of senior military officers. Its image has also suffered as some of its leading members are accused of corruption and widespread bribery. There is also the increasing scepticism about the capability of the military to bring about genuine democracy especially

after the failed ten-year transition programme of the Babangida administration. The claims by the Babangida administration that it would be the last military administration while in actual fact taking steps to ensure that it would be succeeded by another military government is a painful lesson which has made every other military disengagement plan suspect. The credibility of the military as an institution has suffered not only nationally but internationally. The perception is growing that the military has become one of the interest groups in the society and can no longer perceive or defend the national interest.

The reform of the local governments, once regarded as one of the most important legacies of military rule, has also been largely reversed. Today, local governments operate more like the field administrations of an increasingly centralized federal government rather than self-governing structures in the various communities in which they are located. (Gboyega 1983, 1993, Adamolekun 1984, Olowu 1990, 1995b). Their political leadership and the largest proportion of their revenue sources come from the federal government. These institutions are not directly accountable to the people but to those who appoint them. Even their staff perceive their allegiance to the state government which appoints and manages the Local Government Service Commission which are responsible for handling senior level personnel matters in the local governments. Most of the gains of the previous years - elections in 1977, 1988 and 1990; increase of revenue allocation from 3% in 1976 to 20% in 1992; relative independence from the state governments; training of personnel etc. have been wiped off by this excessive dependency of the local authorities for ideas, and personnel on the higher governments. Most of the local governments have been incapacitated by having more responsibilities thrust on them than their finances can cope with and high level of official corruption which have been aggravated by the ceaseless and misdirected institutional reforms at that level in the last decade. What is most important, however, is that the local governments are not in anyway qualitatively different than any of the other levels of government in terms of accessibility, accountability or responsiveness. (Ayo et. al 1991, Gboyega 1993, Olowu 1995b). (See Table 1).

But the economy has been particularly badly hit. The Nigerian economy has suffered terribly under military rule. It is ironical that one

of the major reasons adduced for the takeover of power from civilians by the military was usually the mismanagement of the economy. Yet, all economic and social indicators show a dismal performance of the military establishment in power. A recent World Bank evaluation of the performance of the Nigerian economy notes that in spite of the country's natural and human resources endowments for growth and development, the deterioration of economic management especially since 1990 makes Nigeria's medium term prospects 'bleak'. The report noted that the decline of the GNP per capita from \$1,160 in 1980 to \$300 in 1993 has led to a significant increase in poverty levels with about one-third of Nigerians considered poor and about 10% or 10 million people classified as extremely poor. It observed that the country's basic social indicators place her among the 20 poorest countries in the world. And as if this was not enough, the report also noted that by mid-1994 inflation had reached an unprecedented triple-digit level - a disaster for a people whose income levels are regarded as less than what they were in the early 1970s. Moreover, the stock of public and publicly guaranteed external debt increased from US\$19.5 billion at the end of 1985 to about US\$30.5 billion at the end of 1994, with the country's debt service level estimated to go above 31% during the 1995/96 period. Other studies show Nigeria as one of the few countries on the continent suffering from stagnation or decline in terms of primary school education and measles eradication on the continent.

The principle cause of all these problems in the view of this international development institution is that:

Nigeria's public sector lacks transparency and accountability. Pervasive mismanagement robs the economy of resources that otherwise might be used for growth and poverty reduction, adds to the cost of doing business, and undermines confidence in the public sector (World Bank 1995: 150).

The characteristics of public sector operations - absence of full accounting of oil sales, perpetual extrabudgetary expenditures, preference for large-scale capital intensive expenditures plagued by high costs induced by rent-seeking and deteriorating infrastructures in health, education and public utilities are all evidence

that the cure has failed to secure the observed symptoms (World Bank 1995:150).

The argument here is not that the civilian politicians could have done better but it is simply to underscore the failure of the military to deliver on its own promise. Military rule has thus immiserated the Nigerian people economically and has not performed better than its civilian predecessors.

The response of the Nigerian people to all of these developments has been to fall back on the logic of the two publics. In the formal public of the modern state system, they have been content to utilise short-run maximisation strategies - aiding and abetting corrupt activities, and efforts designed to extract as much as they can from the 'national cake' - through frivolous demands for more states and local government units even when the existing ones can hardly pay staff salaries or allowing themselves to be bribed to support unpopular government policies. On the other hand, in the informal public arena where primary loyalty is based on region, religion, sub-nationalities and other primordial loyalties, citizens have invested resources in building veritable levels of infrastructures to improve their life chances. They have done this in collaboration with citizens of the towns and villages in 'diaspora' as well as with those who are not indigenes of these communities but who simply live and work in these towns and villages. (See Barkan et al. 1992, Olowu et al, 1991, Olowu & Erero 1995). Here citizenship is forged and all speak a common grammar of politics. (Ekeh 1975, Ake 1990, 1993).

A full understanding of a Nigerian conception of public administration must incorporate both the formal and informal elements. More importantly, it must raise the issue of how to make public institutions accountable and responsive to the people. An effective public administration system must have three important attributes. First, it must provide opportunity for the mass of the people to exercise loyalty, voice and if possible exit (Hirschman 1970, Paul 1991). Second, it must be closely linked to their past. Thirdly, it must be original and peculiar to their experience. They may borrow from other nations' experiences but such borrowing must be both selective and strategic.

Convinced of this position, my colleagues and myself in the Departments of Public Administration and Local Government Studies

together with our collaborators within and outside Nigeria have forged ahead to pursue efforts to expand the purview of a genuinely Nigerian administration, starting with local-level institutions and universities. We have been very fortunate that a number of (national and international) agencies have been willing to support these initiatives. For instance, the Research Group on Local Institutions and Socio-Economic Development which was established in 1988 has been carrying out research studies and conducting training on indigenous local institutions - community development associations, informal credit and saving associations - in tandem with their formal counterparts. This enterprise has been supported by the Ford Foundation since 1988 to the present time.

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We may now summarise the most prominent problems of Nigerian state and its bureaucratic structures. First, it is too formally centralized for the society and existing social institutions in which it exist. By way of illustration, Table 2 shows that the federal government *spends more* than the state and local governments combined. On the other hand, Table 3 demonstrates that in most of the industrialized and industrializing nations of the world, the reverse is the case with sub-national institutions spending more and employing more personnel than the national government. Indeed, in many of these countries local governments are responsible for between 15% to almost 60% of total public sector expenditure (Heller & Tait 1982, UNDP 1993). The centralized nature of the Nigerian state is also illustrated by the absence of a separation of governmental powers, the stultification of the legislative and judicial branches and the repression and or cooptation of social institutions such as political parties, trade unions, the major traditional chieftaincy institutions and the religious organizations. The long tenure of the military branch of the bureaucracy is largely responsible for this extreme form of centralization in a country that is theoretically federally governed (See Olowu 1990, Publius 1991).

Secondly, the Nigerian public administration system has little or no linkages with the country's cultural roots. There is a sharp discontinuity between the pre-colonial and colonial periods. On the other hand, there is a high level of continuity rather than change between the colonial and post-colonial periods. I have argued that the pre-colonial institutions

were more people-oriented, small-scale and arose from a distillation of the peoples' experiences whereas the colonial institutions were imposed and have minimal linkages to the people. The crisis in Nigerian public administration of which we are all witnesses today - the systemic corruption, waste, inefficiency and irrelevance - is a clear demonstration of the lack of fit between a people and the institutions that are expected to serve them. The time is ripe to begin to experiment with a different set of institutions.

One suggestion is that we may return to the principles of social organization that informed the institutions which worked well for centuries before the colonial encounter. We shall definitely modify them to suit modern circumstances but the logic of that public administration system is the exact opposite of the one we are currently operating. In any case, this is exactly what the majority of Nigerians have done: confronted by the failure of formal state institutions, they have turned to the informal institutions for credit, welfare and a range of social services. The remarkable success of the Community Bank is a clear indication of what is possible, if we begin to build from institutions which with people are familiar (see Olowu *et. al.* 1991, AJID 1995, Mabogunje 1995).

Thirdly, the Nigerian public administration system has very few direct or even indirect linkages to the people. It could continue to operate even if there were no Nigerians. It is as if the people of Nigeria are not really essential to its operations. This principle can be illustrated in several ways: Budgets are announced every year by all levels of governments. The people have no inputs into these budgets but then at the end of the year the governments tell them they have overspent the budget by several billions of naira without any sense of remorse. For the next year, an even larger amount of budget is proposed with an even larger budget deficit. All that the people are called to bear are the worst effects of the public administration system - increased inflationary pressures, external indebtedness, debt servicing etc.

Furthermore, in an economy dominated by oil-earnings, the fiduciary contract between citizens and those who govern them hardly exists: most institutions, especially at the state and local government levels generate only very little revenue. Even at the federal level, non-oil revenue was significantly less than 25% from 1989 to 1993. At the

state and local government levels, independent revenues constitute only 15% and 6% of total budgets respectively. Dependence on oil earnings strengthens the hands of the state against the people but the dangers of a monocultural public finance system has taken its toll already - the wide swings in international oil pricing, the possibility of a Nigerian oil boycott and a dependency syndrome is also responsible for the reckless demands for more states and local governments when the current ones are not able to pay the salaries of their own staff. It also weakens accountability and makes it difficult for our subnational organs to collaborate with the people through using co-production strategies to improve and sustain higher levels of social infrastructure as they did in the 1950s and early 1960s. (Guyer ;1991, Philips 1991, Ostrom, E. 1995). A recent study of comparative urban local government finance in the Third World shows that Nigeria's two largest urban municipalities (Lagos and Kano) had per capita revenues of less than US\$1 whereas their counterparts in India, Zimbabwe and South Africa had per capita revenues ranging from US\$35 to US\$300, most of which were derived from locally generated revenue sources (Olowu 1995c).

This brings us to the fourth major weakness of our public administration system - its complete lack of accountability. Accountability means holding individuals and organisations responsible for performance. It has three important elements: responsibility, a system of disclosure and liability and exists various forms (macro, micro; upward, downward, lateral, legal, financial, administrative etc. The objective of accountability is to ensure congruence between public policy and public actions and services. Public accountability is a surrogate for market incentive in non-market circumstance

Of the three interrelated stakeholders in any public service provision (public/customers; political leaders and bureaucratic supervisors and the service providers), Nigeria's bureaucratic state structures, fostered both by civilian and military authorities in the post-colonial era have further undermined all mechanisms and institutions for promoting accountability. There are few *exit* or *voice* options for the mass of people with respect to services provided by the public sector. There is a stiff opposition to increasing either the exit option (privatization/commercialisation or competition) or the voice option (dissent, public-based control). The result is rampant rent-seeking on the part of service-providers (at times including private sector operators)

and political/bureaucratic supervisors.

The above enables us to appreciate the rampant corruption that has become systemic in the Nigerian public services today. The Report of the Political Bureau (Nigeria 1986: 13) noted that corruption has become pandemic and characterised some of its multifarious manifestations: 'the inflation of government contracts in return for kick-backs; frauds and falsification of accounts in the public service; examination malpractices in our educational institutions including universities; the taking of bribes and perversion of justice among the police; the judicial and other organs for administering justice' etc.

However, the bane of Nigerian state and its bureaucratic institutions is more than systemic corruption. Ineptitude, inefficiency, low morale and ineffectiveness and a pariah state status attracting international condemnation for drug dealing, anti-democratic status, international fraud and poor quality of our infrastructures have also added to our injury as a nation.

A similar assessment is portrayed when public schools, including universities, can no longer manufacture knowledge, water authorities do not provide water, hospitals cannot attend to the peoples' health needs, the judiciary has lost its sense of mission as defenders of citizens rights and policemen work in collusion with armed robbers. A recent assessment of roads conditions shows that only 15% and 60% of state and federal roads are in good condition (Ogundare 1995:9).

In the next and final section, I shall highlight what I believe constitutes a way out of our present dilemma. We must rebuild public institutions which will help to reverse our current economic misfortunes and start us on the path to economic recovery and relevance. For instance, a recent major study by the World Bank on *The East Asian Miracle* (1993: 167) concluded that the role of public institutions were crucial in several respects to the stupendous and sustained growth of these countries in South-East Asia. If these countries which were just as poor as Nigeria in 1965 could be regarded as economic miracles today, the chances that Nigeria can also break the gridlock of grinding poverty are high if, and only if, people-based and peoples' welfare-welfare-seeking institutions are created and sustained.

## **The Way Forward: Towards a Nigerian State and Bureaucracy for the 21st Century**

The next century is only four years away from us. Several nations, even within the developing world are already plotting and envisioning how they will become modern and fully industrialised nations (the most notable being Malaysia and Ghana) in the first quarter of the next century. But in order to confront the national emergency which has enveloped us as a nation, there is a need to approach nation-building with a different strategy other than the one we have used since colonial times to-date. The non-democratic and bureaucratic-centred approach has failed us. Besides, the global community demands that all nations abide by a modicum of international code of morality in governing their own people. We cannot continue to resist the growing international pressure to improve the quality of governance in our country for much longer.

The alternative mode of governance that I have recommended in this address and in my work over the years with several colleagues is the democratic or polycentric option. This model not only recognises pluralistic power centres but it makes a definite effort to involve all the stakeholders in the process of governance rather than a reliance on bureaucratic institutions. Some of the following will be regarded as essentials in any genuine effort to recreate social and political order in Nigeria:

1. State and society institutions **must be recognised** as equal actors in the process of governance **and as partners** in progress. In addition, every effort must be made to **foster genuine** cooperation between these institutions in the **task of national** development. Even competition and conflict **must be regarded** as having beneficial outcomes so long as there **are independent** agencies in place to handle conflict resolution. All of these require a higher sanctity for the principle of rule of law than has been the case in Nigeria.
2. State and society institutions **must work together** to produce a vision of Nigeria by the end of the first quarter of the next century. What type of Nigeria do we want to see at this time and what are the steps that must be taken in order to bring about the desired outcomes? I develop this subject a little further in my concluding section.

3. Forms of democracy may and do differ from one country to another but its essential norms do not. We must commit ourselves as a nation not simply to the notion of good governance but to its practice. And, if we are genuinely interested in transiting to democracy, the place to put this into practice is now. Democratic or good governance norms include four critical components:

- open and accountable government;
- free and fair elections and electoral processes;
- guaranteed civil and political rights backed by the principle of rule of law and a genuinely independent judiciary; and
- an informed civil and responsible civil society.

To this end a completely new approach to democratic transition is advocated. The South African experience is particularly instructive from this point of view. **The process of transition itself must be democratic if its outcome is to be democratic.** It must not be dominated by one of the interested parties - in this case the military bureaucracy. Otherwise, there can be no improvement on the extraordinary efforts that were put in place under the Babangida transition process that has lasted now for about a decade.

4. A deliberate and sustained effort must be made to restructure the governmental system using two critical principles - those of non-centralization and decentralization. Under the principle of *non-centralization*, the economy must operate *outside the public service*. The task of our public sector agencies must be to facilitate production of goods and services by a growing private sector rather than take over the production of these goods directly as in the past. Also trade unions, universities, political parties, the media, religious institutions must operate as public agencies without being brought under the control of civil service organs. In the political realm, we must return to the essential principle of

non-centralization in the operation and practice of our federal system of government. States and local governments should no longer operate as minions of the federal government. They must have access to independent resources and there must be a balancing of responsibilities and resources, at all levels of governance.

5. In order to further enhance the principle of non-centralization, institutions for promoting accountability *at all levels* of government must be strengthened and accorded the absolute autonomy, including the capability for self-financing. These include the state institutions (e.g. legislative, judicial, internal regulatory mechanisms and quasi-judicial institutions such as the Ombudsman and the Code of Conduct Tribunal) and non-state institutions (e.g. the media, citizen watch-groups etc). As much as possible, even state institutions must be made answerable to societal groups/institutions through appropriate mechanisms.

Accountability may however be impossible to assert if there is no improvement in the transparency of governmental institutions and operations. For instance, audits will be impossible if governments continue to treat their budgets as classified information to which the public has no access as of right. Several government agencies have not produced audited statements of account for up to a decade. This itself is a clear indication that the new audit systems put in place as part of the 1988 Civil Service Reforms are not working as they should.

6. Within the public administration system, at all levels, there will be a need to *decentralise* operations in two directions. First, through the field administrations, more resources in men, money and materials must be deployed and expended outside of the capitals of our various governments. Officials of our governments must be compelled to live and work closer to the people they serve. In addition, there will be the need to give ordinary people greater role in determining and evaluating the work of public officials.

Secondly, to the extent that enduring structures can only be built from the base up, it will be necessary to democratise local

make them more homogenous community-based self-governing entities. Instead of the less than 600 local government units, each community should be constituted into self-governing organs such that instead of less than 600 we could have up to 50,000 - 190,000 local government units in Nigeria. The important thing is that each unit be self-governing and required to generate up to a half of its revenue requirements. (See Table 7). At this and other levels, citizens' perception of the effectiveness of the various agencies should be part of the annual evaluation of these agencies.

7. One important complement to the above recommendation is the need to review the allocation of responsibilities among the various tiers of government so that as much as possible, the subsidiarity principle whereby services are delivered by the closest unit of government to the people to the extent that there are no spill-overs is utilised while leaving the most inclusive and technically demanding aspects of various services to higher levels of government. The result is a more complex set of institutions which can cooperate, contract with one another or even compete and bring synergy between local community efforts and the state.

In turn, there will be a need to review the pattern of allocation of taxing powers and resources among the various units of government to ensure that each has adequate level of resources to finance responsibilities allocated to it. As much as possible, local governments should have access to more resources than any other levels of government but their capacity must also be substantially improved by giving them greater control over their personnel, harmonising service conditions at the local level while leaving the Local Government Service Commissions to set policy, monitor that these policies are complied with and serve as appeal boards.

8. In order to rationalise government, state governments should be restructured into much larger economic units into about six or at most eight. Local governments and community institutions should become the major political structures. The advantage of this arrangement is that it will enable the state governments to concentrate mainly on economic functions of constructing and

maintaining strategic public utilities - including the distribution and reticulation of electricity, water and gas - while they leave basic community services to local government units and community structures.

In addition, it will be necessary to review the compensation system to ensure that our governments can attract and retain the best personnel in their employment. With the onset of economic austerity, the massive devaluation of the naira and consequent inflationary pressures, public service salaries/wages have been eroded. The problem of motivation on the basis of wages that are not capable of keeping officials and their families above starvation levels has become one of the most serious challenges confronting the Nigerian public services. This is the justification that is usually made for institutionalised forms of corruption and moonlighting. On the other hand, there are several public service departments/units that simply pay salaries and have no resources to undertake any other operations. But salaries must be tied to performance evaluation by members of the community and efficiency units within the public service.

All of the above underscore the need for a radical shake-up of the Nigerian public services.

9. It is a shame that in spite of our massive human and natural resources, large numbers of our people still live below the poverty level. Indeed, it is disheartening to read in appraisals of Nigerian poverty that *more* people are living in poverty today than in 1965! This is the case because of our perennial need to service our growing external indebtedness, the fact that oil revenues have not been put to the most productive uses - they have been expended on massive projects which have not benefitted our people and transition programmes that lead us nowhere at a time when our major infrastructures in the health, education and transportation sectors have steadily declined.

To tackle this problem, I am restating a suggestion that I made at a National Conference organized by the Revenue Mobilization and Allocation Commission some years ago that **all oil moneys should be used to address the three major issues highlighted above - debt payment, infrastructure renewal and institutional**

**restructuring within the next three years.** We are able to repay all our debts within three years and thus ensure that we enter the next century debt-free. Subsequently, all mineral revenues should be made to accrue to the state and local governments of origin with the federal government receiving only 30% for revenue sharing to all the levels of government.

10. Finally, in order to prepare the country to a genuine democratic governance, there is a need for a Transition Government comprising representatives of the present government and those that are presently regarded as in the opposition, most of whom are currently in jail or detention - June 12 campaigners, human and democratic rights activists of all shades of opinion etc. This Transition Government which should be charged with full governing powers, will be given four major responsibilities.

First, it will work out a vision for Nigeria up to the first quarter of the next century. It will not carry out this responsibility alone by itself but galvanise the social forces in the society working upwards from the grassroots. To this end, this Transition Government will establish a **Nigerian National Commission for Futures Development (NNCFD)** comprising a maximum of 7 distinguished Nigerians of integrity to aggregate ideas from the public and private sectors, labour, students, women, the media and the intellectual community. The product of this exercise will constitute the strategic agenda for all subsequent civilian governments in Nigeria for a long time to come - at least up to the first quarter of the next century. And every government in Nigeria at all levels will be judged, by the people of Nigeria on the basis of its performance along the lines of this vision.

Secondly, it will undertake the reorganization of governmental units as advocated above - consolidating the states into economic units and creating community governments as basic units of governance, with each unit required to generate a substantial part of its revenue requirements.

Thirdly, it will be responsible for implementing the moratorium on oil revenues to pay debts and rehabilitate the dilapidated infrastructure.

Finally, the Transition Government will carry out the necessary

electoral reforms to ensure that political parties are independent and aggregative rather than dependent and divisive and replace the winner-takes-all method in preference for proportional representation which is regarded as ideal for ethnically divided societies such as ours. It will also ensure that the Election Commission is completely independent of the government of the day. It will then organise a free and fair election at all levels of governance. It is my considered opinion that all of these can be undertaken within a three year period, thus ensuring that we enter the next century with confidence and positioned to reassume our pre-eminent posture as a major African power that is ready to compete economically and politically in an increasingly competitive world.

One implication of the above submission is that the current Transition Programme be abandoned. I proffer the following reasons for this position. First, the on-going Transition Programme does not contain any safeguards against failure. There are no particular differences between the on-going transition programme and the one that failed us before. Even if it succeeds in producing 'winners' to various political offices, the issues that brought in the military to power will persist, thus leading most probably to another round of military incursion into politics. Yet, we cannot even begin to tackle the burning challenges that confront us except we resolve the fundamental problem of governance. In particular, the current Transition Programme, like the one that preceded it, has failed to address the two most important issues critical for its success: incentives to make civilian politicians serve public rather than private or sectional interests and disincentives to make the military bureaucracy accept the divine and democratic axiom that a servant cannot be above his lord. Secondly, because of the foregoing and other circumstantial evidence, the programme has little or no credibility either nationally or internationally. Thirdly, and finally, as I have argued above, the process of democratisation itself must be democratic (that is inclusive of all the social forces in society) if its outcome is to be genuinely democratic.

I have therefore advocated an alternative transition plan that will increase our chances of reaching our desired haven of unity, progress

and democratic self-governance. Fortunately, we can borrow from the experiences of nations within the Africa region that have successfully transitioned to democracy. One such country is South Africa. The divide between civil and society actors was more embattled than it is currently the case in Nigeria. If this suggestion is accepted, the New Transition Government should be chaired by a committed and visionary Nigerian nationalist who must be a civilian. One name that readily comes to my head is Chief Anthony Enahoro. The Chairman would be assisted by two Deputies and my suggestion of who should fill these two positions are General Sanni Abacha, the current Head of State as a representative of the current military administration and Chief Abiola, the presumed winner of the 1993 Presidential elections, as a representative of the opposition forces. Finally, my choice of a possible Chairman of the NNCFD is Chief Pius Okigbo, a world renowned economist and Nigerian economic historian. Most of these persons are likely to resist these appointments but they must be prevailed upon to accept them in the nation's interest. All members of the Transition Government will automatically be disqualified from seeking office in the immediate successor civilian administration.

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that many of my listeners will deride me as deluded and overly idealistic. But then, academics are men and women of ideas. And indeed the holy book says that where there is no vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18). I believe that actors in our civil and military bureaucracies still harbour the type of idealism that originally brought the military unto the centre-stage of politics thirty-years ago. The current administration can return to this idealism and cease the initiative to take us to the promised land through several of the suggestions contained in this address. It is also the responsibility of all the Nigerian people, and most especially the leadership - those who wield considerable influence in the public and private sectors, in academia, political, religious, traditional and community organisations - to put aside all forms of pettiness and imaginary divisions and encourage, cajole and pray our military rulers to pursue the path of peace, reconciliation and national renewal and progress along the lines advocated in this address. I do not have any illusions that this is going to be an easy choice to pursue. But the ultimate alternative: increasing widespread anomie, the complete breakdown of law and order, the ultimate disgrace of the civil and military bureaucracies and possible

dismemberment of the Nigerian state are too terrible to be imagined.

As black Africa's most populous and possibly most endowed nation, all eyes are on the Nigerian people to see whether we shall lead our continent into greater misery and misrule in the 21st century or whether we are able to chart the way to economic recovery and the rejuvenation of our political and administrative institutions. Definitely, the good Lord has given us all that we require to attain greatness.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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**Table 1: An Appraisal of Nigerian Local Government Reforms  
1976-1995**

	<b>Reform Goal</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1.	Responsiveness/ Accountability of Services Administration	1	Basic Health and Education Service devolved but not responsive to the public
2.	Participation	0	Minimal involvement of the Public in pol./adm matters
3.	Dev. of Leadership Potential	1	Pol. leaders appointed and changed at will by state/fed govt.
4.	Resource Mobilization for Economic Growth	1	LGs highly dependent
5.	Communication b/w govts.	5	High intergovt comm.
6.	Equity in basic services	3	Reform encouraged regional equity up to 1981.
7.	Administrative Efficiency funds or discretion.	2	LGs have more resp. than they used to have but less reqd.

**Source:** Nigeria (1976) *Guidelines for Local Government Reforms in Nigeria.*

**Table 2**  
**Share of each Level of Government in Total Public Sector**  
**Expenditure for Selected Years, Nigeria 1955-1991 (in**  
**percentages %)**

YEAR	FEDERAL	STATE	LOCAL
1955	44.1	43.0	13.0
1965	44.5	44.7	10.0
1976	57.3	40.7	2.0
1985	64.8	29.8	5.4
1991	67.6	23.1	9.3

**Source:** Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Statement of Accounts; D. Olowu, *The Nigerian Conception of Local Level Governance*, Ibadan, NISER, 1990.

**Table 3**  
**Importance of Local Government in Some Selected Countries**

Countries	Local Expenditure as % of Public Spending (1982)	Local Employees as Proportion of Public Employees (1984)	GNP per Capital (1982)
Canada	59.3	N.A.	12,310
Japan	47.1	79.2	10,120
United States of America	46.5	72	14,020
West Germany	46.1	41	11,430
Denmark	45.0	57	10,470
Sweden	44.0	73	10,470
Australia	40.3	N.A.	11,490
Netherlands	33	N.A.	9,898
Norway	38.7	64	14,020
United Kingdom	26	35	9,110
Korea	23.9	28.3	2,010
Italy	17.5	12	6,000
France	16.9	11	10,500
Spain	9.7	25	4,780
Nigeria (1985)	5.4	14	870
Zimbabwe	22	17.2	520
Kenya	5.0	N.A.	420
Ghana	2.0	N.A.	400
Kote-D'Ivoire	2.0	N.A.	1200

**Note:** Figures for a few countries are for 1988.

**Sources:** D. Olowu, *African Local Governments as Instruments of Economic and Social Development* The Hague, International Union of Local Authorities, 1988.

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**Table 4**  
**The Size of African Local Governments 1982 Population**

<b>Country</b>	<b>No. of Basic Units</b>	<b>Average Population Size</b>
Zimbabwe	126	6,000
Central African Republic	68	35,294
Mauritania	43	37,209
Burundi	114	37,719
Ivory Coast	153	54,501
Botswana	14	64,286
Uganda	204	66,177
Guinea	79	81,428
Gambia	8	87,500
Zambia	56	107,143
Mauritius	8	112,500
Kenya	113	136,090
Lesotho	10	140,000
Liberia	13	153,846
Tanzania	119	166,386
Niger	35	168,386
Ghana	65	187,692
Malawi	31	209,677
Cameroon	34	273,529
Nigeria	301	300,997
Mali	19	373,687
<b>Other Countries</b>		
France	37,708	1,320
West Germany	22,510	1,694
U.S.A.	79,913	2,756
Italy	8,059	6,717
Netherlands	841	16,170
Sweden	278	29,527
England and Wales	401	122,740