



A SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE 1ST ANNUAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND ECONOMIC SUMMIT HELD ON FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 2008

Protocols

It is my great honour and pleasure to be part of this august gathering and I thank the organisers of the event for giving me the opportunity to speak on one of the most critical issues facing the country's development process: ***"Passion for Service: the Currency of the Future"***. Although, many people may feel that issues bordering on service have been extensively discussed and studied both globally and nationally, I believe that there is still a need to continue the discussions, until the aims and objectives for a stronger socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria have been achieved, since I consider the issue of service a vital plank in the realisation of that objective.

2. Nelson Mandela, Lee Kuan Yew, Emeka Anyaoku, Gamaliel Onosode, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Bill Clinton. What ran through all of them include – passion, integrity, focus and humility. They are dedicated, determined and capable. How do we make that positive difference where ordinary Nigerians will be able to live out their dreams than ever before? We



must create possibility and opportunity. As the leaders for today and tomorrow, your first task is to define reality as the field of possibility and your final task is to lead people to their own possibilities. When we shout food crisis, energy crisis, political dilemma, what we really mean is “leadership challenge” in Nigeria and the rest of the world.

3. The world is changing faster than our thoughts can fathom, we need leaders with capability as well as “cope-ability”. We need to see reality with greater clarity, if a country such as Singapore without a barrel of crude oil or 1000scf of gas can become a petrochemical centre, then we need the “Okelangbodo story”. Three farmers were walking across a field, the youngest one noticed a flag tied to a pole, he drew the attention of others and said “look how the flag moves”. The next in age pats him on the back and says “My boy, can’t you see it is not the flag that moves, it is the wind that moves. The oldest farmer then says “if you have enough attention you will see that it is neither the flag nor the wind that moves, it is the mind that moves”.



4. You are the edge-walkers, the leaders of the future. You are the ambassadorial shamans who will bring wisdom and guidance for this world leader country called Nigeria. You need to sharpen your visionary consciousness, intuitive sensitivity and risk taking capability. You are in service of a sense of mission about something greater than yourselves.

5. The business of building and maintaining superior service to society rests on the fundamental pillar of passion with purpose. Passion is an extraordinarily powerful spring. Without it, religion, history, and culture are useless. Likewise, service to mankind, institutions and society becomes completely deflated without the essential ingredient of passion. It demonstrates avowed belief, everlasting appeal and steadfast loyalty. Passion is the basic ingredient for success in all fields of human endeavours. But passion in leadership is much more important in the service of a nation, and for this reason I would like to concentrate more on it in this paper.

6. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, you will agree with me that one area we have fared poorly as a nation is



leadership. Over the years, our Nation has been bedevilled with poor leadership at all levels, and sometimes one wonders where we got it wrong. The passion for service in leadership, which implies selfless service to mankind, institutions as well as to a Nation has been lacking. A passionate and visionary leader who gives to others, shares his or her talents and skills and mentors by providing the tools for others to be successful, and for society to succeed, has been scarce in our land. Indeed, true leadership goes with passion for service. Without passion, a person will have very little influence as a leader. I believe passion provides an individual with the light of leadership and creates an undeniable drive to make a difference.

7. Undeniably, passion for service in leadership is a critical quality necessary for the successful management of a society, its institutions and resources. Many scholars have contended that, in so far as the developing nations continue to elect, allow, select or appoint leaders without passion for service, the issue of bad governance and its associated problems of political instability, social malaise, corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, and disrespect for the rule of law will persist in the developing nations. Undoubtedly, the issue of leadership, especially political leadership, and the desire to produce men and women with the command of



national legitimacy, vision and passion for service, have been major global issues in recent times - and this dilemma is probably more critical in the developing nations.

8. Basically, leaders who have passion for service do three things effectively:

- Act as tool givers and facilitators for the success of others and their nation;
- Work to identify ways to service their people and their society; and
- Understand that productivity and effectiveness are enhanced when a person uses individual gifts and talents in the service of others and that of the society.

9. Undoubtedly, exceptional leaders are known to have given generously of their talents, energy and time to turn around the lives of not just their people but including that of their country. These individuals share passion and commitment to causes they find meaningful and essential. It is really a great feeling to help and service your country well. I firmly believe that if we cannot help one another and push for the betterment of our country, then we have not accomplished



much of anything in this life. Service for mankind, our institutions and for our Nation should be fun, pure joy. If anyone fails to enjoy what he or she is doing, it is hard to do it well. We must all learn to render selfless service to our Nation and mankind. This is the only way we can move our Nation forward for the benefit of the present and future generations. We all must provide our services in our various fields with passion. And there is no better time that such passion is needed, from all of us, in our country more than now.

10. For our youths, this is a wake-up call for you to confront the challenges of the moment with passion for a secured future. You need roots in the reality of the tremendous challenges that our Nation faces and wings to seek imaginative solutions to these challenges. You also need to mobilise future generation in support of the various initiatives and programmes of the present Administration in an effort to move the country to an enviable height that all of us will be proud of. As youths, you have the opportunity now to shape your future and the future of Nigeria. It is heart-warming to know the quality and capabilities of our youths in spite of the challenges in our environment. I am convinced that the average Nigerian youth, when challenged, has all it takes to



bring about a new way of addressing our current challenges. Our youths must up-scale their critical thinking and capabilities to convert the current challenges into opportunities for a better future. They must channel their efforts, energies and time into productive activities and entrepreneurship. We must realise that we are all leaders and champions in our various fields, and we must synergize our efforts, change our attitude, and work in concert with passion, purpose and shared vision for the common good of our society. I have no doubt in my mind that the future is bright for Nigeria and Nigerians. We will surely achieve the Nigeria of our dreams with deep and continuous HOPE for change, without which there cannot be PASSION! We must adopt this simple philosophy which has been demonstrated several times worldwide and more recently by the US Democratic Presidential ticket holder, Senator Barack Obama by shattering the glass ceiling in a society such as that of the United States. Therefore, HOPE, just like PASSION remains a strong currency of the future and must be combined to achieve the desired objectives.

11. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted that the Yar'Adua's Administration is irrevocably committed to fast-



tracking the growth of the economy, and in ensuring improved welfare of our people. As you may be aware, the Administration also continues to give us Hope by being firmly committed to lead by example and entrench the culture and virtues of selfless service, good governance, rule of law, transparency, accountability, passion for the common good, and the pursuit of excellence in the execution of policies and programmes. These are the major hallmarks of good leadership and passion for service. Our vision is of a greater Nigeria, built on democracy, the rule of law and zero tolerance for corruption. Government will continue to strive towards creating an environment that will sufficiently and efficiently stimulate the creativity, ingenuity and inventiveness of the people for the emergence and sustenance of leadership with passion for service.

12. As we look to the future, this Administration is also poised to strengthen our democratic institutions and leadership culture, give our people (both young and old, men and women) the freedom and the opportunity to explore their full potentials and participate in the development of our country, build public institutions that are high performance bodies, and develop legal and judicial systems that preserve the rights,



and service the needs of all citizens. Success will depend to a large extent on how effective we are in reforming our value system, attitude and cementing an ethos of integrity, respect for each other, human life and rule of law, as well as pride in Nigeria.

13. Our hope for change as a nation is very high! In fact, our country should not strive to be developed only in the economic sense. Rather, it must strive to be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity, selfless service and social cohesion; in terms of social justice, political stability, quality of life; and in terms of social values, national pride and confidence. In this regard, I want to challenge you all at this Conference to evolve a mechanism that will enable us fast track our growth and transformation in all spheres to achieve our vision of becoming one of the 20 largest economies by 2020 powered by Nigerian youths.



14. I thank you for your time and patience and pray that God will help us to realize our dreams for our nation filled with Passion and Hope.

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