**“SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE NIGERIAN POLITY: THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY IN PERSPECTIVE”**

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**DEFINITION OF SOME TERMS**

1. Sustainable Development­= “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.
2. Nigerian Polity= Nigerian Government/Governance
3. 21st Century Nigerian University =A university established or to be established in the period 2001-3000
4. Perspective=the relative position or importance of a thing
5. Rhetoric= “A speech or writing that is intended to influence people, but is not completely honest or sincere”.

**PREAMBLE**

This submission is predicated on the view that there is no “Sustainable Development” in Nigeria. So, to talk of “ Sustainable Development and the Nigerian Polity” is to engage in political rhetoric.

**POLITICAL PARTIES, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE NIGERIAN POLITY**

In Nigeria, political parties are established by the political elites. Political parties are organizations which are meant to secure and retain political offices for the leaders who in turn share the income of the parties. The masses participate in the affairs of the parties from a very weak position. This explains the squabbles within the parties where the few elites compete for the support of the masses for selfish reasons.

Most political parties are narrow, personal and ethnic oriented. So they do not reflect society. This explains why they (parties) are not institutionalized and are very weak policy-wise. They cannot therefore be stable. Cross-carpeting among the political parties is one of the commonest events in the country. This occurs on an individual or collective basis. This is to be expected in view of the fact that becoming a member of a party is not determined by an ideology. Political parties are active only during election time and become dormant after the poles. Even where a party is in the majority either in the House of Representative or Senate, togetherness among the majority members is far from strong. A variety of social conflicts arise among them and the greater part of their time is spent trying to resolve such conflicts instead of facing the business of enacting laws which would enhance development. Therefore development is hard to come by in any sector, not to talk of higher Education

If within the party cohesiveness hardly exists, then, between parties, is something to be imagined. Hate speech between one party and another is a common scene. The other major factor militating against Development initiated by political parties, is the sheer number of parties in the country. To say that there are presently more than ninety (90) registered political parties in the country, confirms the above statement. If there are gross deficiencies within the political parties, then there can be no meaningful development in the “Nigerian Polity” not to talk about sustaining same weightier in Education or any other sector.

The failure of the Parliamentary System of Government in Nigeria was not due to the system but it was caused by the operators. Either the operators did not understand the system or they twisted it to suit their selfish desires. A system which is influenced by selfish desires is bound to fail. The Parliamentary System of Government has worked for the United Kingdom and it is still working for them because the operators are patriotic and not self centered. The Presidential System is working for the United States of America but is failing in Nigeria because the Nigerians operating it are self centered in the mode of operation. In other words, until Nigerians decide to put the interest of the country first in the affairs of government, whichever system of government they adopt in the “Nigerian Polity”, it will fail to yield the desired positive results.

In Nigeria, when a man wakes up in the morning with a vision, he articulates the vision to ensure that he has individual benefits from the said vision. He then canvasses support for the vision and insists that the powers that be, endorse the vision. An institution or organization is established to practicalise the vision even if there are one or more other institutions or organizations already in place with the same or similar mandate. Sound familiar? So the country ends up duplicating authority, resources and energy to the extent that not much is achieved by way of development not to talk of sustaining it. The Federal Road Safety Corps, and Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps which are carrying out the responsibilities of the Nigerian Police Force, both came into being through, the process described above. The work force of the Nigerian Police Force should have just been increased by the number of staff of the two new organizations, then only one third of resources released to the organizations would be given to the Nigerian Police Force, thereby increasing their effectiveness. What happens instead, is creation of conflict among the three organizations (Police, Road Safety, and Civil Defense).

The challenges arising from the conflict among the three organizations are almost impossible to resolve, to the detriment of development in the area of improving the services of the Nigerian Police Force. So, consistently, instead of taking measures to improve progressively, the services of existing structures and consequently enhancing development, the contrary is what prevails.

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**THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY IN PERSPECTIVE**

I see no tangible prospect in “the 21st Century Nigerian University”. I see but a gloomy perspective. While increasing the number of universities, the Federal Government does not increase budgetary allocation to education. The result is the watering down of the quality of education. The situation is worst in the state universities. Government is only paying lip service to the educational advancement of the Nigerian pupils and students. Most if not all Nigerian governing policies, are only on paper and never see the light of the day by way of implementation.

In 2003, two officials of the South African Ministry of Higher Education who were on a delegation from South Africa holding Bilateral talks with the Nigerian Government, took time off to visit the University of Abuja. I was Registrar of the University of Abuja then. One of the two officials made a statement which revealed a major cause of Nigeria’s downward trend in development. He said that the quality of any nation is determined by the quality of the nation’s higher education. Higher education in Nigeria started going down towards the end of the 19th century. This downward trend reached its climax in 1982 when the academic staff of Nigerian Universities went on a prolonged strike. Government withheld their salaries based on the policy of no work no salary. Even though the salaries were eventually paid when the strike was called off, two groups of academic staff returned to the universities. One group which comprised the majority of staff resumed their academic responsibilities without any commitment. This was because this group of staff and their families suffered untold hardship during the period their salaries were withheld. The second group of staff who were in the minority also came back to duty with even less commitment than the first group. This second group had during the period their salaries were withheld, engaged in executing various contract jobs and made a lot of money. They lived a lifestyle which was much higher than that which they experienced prior to the period of the prolonged strike. This group continued to seek contract jobs and made more money at the expense of their academic responsibilities in the universities. In other words, both groups (almost all academic staff) withdrew their commitment to their responsibilities. The obvious consequence was the drastic lowering of quality of higher education in Nigeria. As if this was not enough, government signed an agreement with the striking staff but failed to honor the agreement. So, the lowering down of quality of higher education in Nigerian universities has continued. Since then, the quality of life (development) in Nigeria has continued the downward trend. Very little teaching and learning is going on in the Federal and State universities. Majority of students who enter the universities in Nigeria are not interested in gaining quality education. Most students are only interested in obtaining paper qualification. Many 200level students will readily accept a degree certificate and leave the university without any feelings of guilt. This attitude is being encouraged by the corrupt practice of employment being secured on the basis of favor and paper qualification. Examination malpractice itself is a product of emphasis being given to paper qualification.

There is a dim light coming from private universities as far as quality of higher education is concerned. It is hoped that the private universities will not soon become commercial centers and begin to exploit the populace. Do any of our institutions look like these on the right hand side??.

**CONCLUSION**

To talk of “Sustainable Development and the Nigerian Polity”, is a mirage as far as this writer is concerned. However, as a Christian who believes that nothing is impossible to God, there is hope for “Sustainable Development and the Nigerian Polity”. It is only from this point of view, that a bright prospect for “The 21st Century Nigerian University”, is possible.

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